Livelihood alternative among Patachitra artisan communities

Sunil Prasad¹

Abstract

India is a rich country with various traditional practices like handicrafts which are ever glorious. Patachitra artisan community in West Bengal is famous globally for its quality paintings. The present study has examined the livelihood alternative among the Patachitra artisan communities in Bengal in India. Descriptive research design is used in this study, and data were collected using a structured interview schedule and participatory rural appraisal method. The study found that the artisans were entirely dependent upon handcraft and its allied activities for their livelihood. Their income, as well as saving, had been increased after getting an artisan card. The study also found that the artisans were not aware of the government's various welfare schemes and facilities.

Keywords: Livelihood, Artisan Card, Patachitra

Introduction

In India, the State of West Bengal, mainly renowned as home to many talented artisans of Bengal crafts, is well-regarded by art-lovers the entire world. From embroidery to sculpture and sketching to metal crafts, the state has a unique specialization in many forms of craft. The ancient traditional crafts of West Bengal have been so well molded according to the present-day demands that it seems that these artisans, apart from their traditional skills, have

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This research presents the Socio-Economic condition of the Patua community of Naya, West Bengal. Traditionally the Chitarkars are a community of both scroll painters and oral performances, who have been engaged in this profession for many centuries. In the age of popular mass media and, more recently, both the community and their art face many challenges after globalization. With this objective, a research study was conducted to understand their situation and find out some viable solution so that the artist and their art survive in the future.

**Objectives of the study**

- To examine the demographic profile of Patuas / Chitrakars
- To study the occupational patterns of Patachitrakars
- To examine the income and saving status of Patachitrakars
- To understand the current problems of Patachitrakars

**Review of Literature**

The previous literature on artisans was reviewed. In their study, Srivastava and Sasikumar (2003) emphasized a more significant trend of economically and socially deprived groups falling into the most vulnerable occupations. It also shows that men are more engaging in the handicraft industry than females. In another study, Kazungu and Magigi (2012, pp. 1-3) found that it is caused by constraining factors such as women’s reproductive roles, education, entrepreneurial capacity and technical skills. Another study is also supported by Kazungu and Magigi (2012, pp. 1-3) and Njau (2009) that people with a low level of education tend to be
engaged in activities that need minimum academic skills, and this affects the way they manage their businesses and may lead to a weak performance in terms of operations, production, finances, marketing and low-profit earnings.

Moreover, education is considered the pivotal element in determining socio-economic development (UNDP, 2000; Brende, 2015). The Higher educational qualification is related to persons' strength, linked with sound financial and social skills (Butler & Mazur, 2007, p. 615). Scrase (2003) states that artisans often find isolated and dangerous economic conditions due to their livelihoods.

**Methodology**

A small scenic village, Naya is home to around two hundred fifty Patuas or Chitrakaars, a unique community of folk artists who are painters, lyricists, singers and performers all rolled into one. For the study, thirty Patachitrakar's household has been purposively selected from the study area (Naya village in South Bengal), and the data were collected through using administrating Interview Schedule. The participatory rural appraisal method had been used in order to understand the extent of community participation. After the collection of data, it was coded, tabulated and analysed and interpreted through various tables.

**Findings: Socio-Economic Status**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Frequency N=30 (%)</th>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Frequency N=30 (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

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From the study, it is observed that nearly four-fifth of respondents were male, and less than one-fifth of respondents were female. In most of the family, the family's male counterpart has the artisan card though all family members have been engaged in various activities of Patachitra. So the female Patachitra artisan did not have the opportunity to participate in fairs and exhibitions. However, they found that they participated in melas with their husbands or male family members, which did not require any artisan cards.

Most of the artisans fall in the category of age between 40-50 years and age between 30-40 years. The average age group of respondents belongs to 40 years old who were involved in artisans' work. Of course, all the family members were also engaged in this Activity wholly or partially. In the study, most of the respondents (93%) were married, and a few (7%) were unmarried.

**Source:** Field Data
unmarried. More than half (53%) of Chitrakars house was pucca houses made up bricks and cement, whereas forty percent of them lived in mud build houses (Kuchta houses) and it has found that 7% of Chitrakars lived in that shed house. The level of education of the Chitrakars mainly primary level (57%), but 27% of Chitrakars are illiterate. 13 percent of them have completed middle school, and only 3 percent of respondents have completed matriculation. Due to this reason, they could not find any other job instead of being self-employed. So it may be concluded that lack of education is the prime reason for not getting other employment opportunities.

Occupational Status of Respondents

Table 2 – Occupational Status of Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Frequency N=30 (%)</th>
<th>Frequency N=30 (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Earning member of the family</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Husband</td>
<td>10 (33%)</td>
<td>Agriculture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wife</td>
<td>2 (7%)</td>
<td>Business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both</td>
<td>4 (13%)</td>
<td>Animal Husbandry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Family Member</td>
<td>14 (47%)</td>
<td>Others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The number of earning members in the family is an essential parameter for the prosperity of any household. In Chitrakar households, only the male persons or the husband are the only sources of earning. The above table shows that 47 percent of all members are the principal earning members in the families. Women artisans are looking after families, contributing to handicraft work, and selling their products in different artisan fairs. So, naturally, the single earning member of a low-income family faced lots of economic crisis since women remained at home looking after the household activities. From the above findings, women artisans got freedom in order to contribute remuneration to the families. Women were earlier engaged in household jobs, but now they also engage in artisan activity. Other than artisan works, the Chitrakars also engaged in agriculture, business, Animal Husbandry, daily labour, etc.

Income Status of the Chitrakar families before and after getting artisan card

Occupation of a person plays an essential role in determining an individual's social and economic status and family. Distribution of artisans by their monthly income presented in table 3 in which describes a comparative picture of their income before getting artisan cards and after artisan cards and training.

Table 3: Comparison of income before and after getting artisan card

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income</th>
<th>Before getting an artisan card</th>
<th>After getting an artisan card</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

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The above table 3 reveals that more than three fourth (77%) of respondents' families had less than four thousand per month, which is very low to a leading minimum standard of living. They are solely dependent on only one job; therefore, they do not earn much, and the only husband is the principal earning member of the family. However, after getting artisan cards, demand for their product has been increased, and some increase in the family improved their living standards. The table also shows that more than three fourth of (37%) respondent's families earn more than rupees eight thousand per month, and less than half of the respondents' income increased between rupees eight thousand and rupees ten thousand per month. The women who were remaining at home also engaged in artisan work. Self-employment has added some earning to the family. The study's finding shows that the income of the artisans has increased after availing the artisan card.

Saving of the Chitrakar families before and after getting artisan cards.
Saving is significant for any family to overcome unexpected contingencies or to run the family smoothly. Table 4 shows the savings of artisans before and after using artisan cards.

Table 4: Savings of artisan before and after getting artisan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Savings</th>
<th>Before getting an artisan card</th>
<th>After getting an artisan card</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number of the respondent (%)</td>
<td>Number of the respondent (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Savings</td>
<td>21 (70%)</td>
<td>12 (40%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Below Rs 1000</td>
<td>7 (23%)</td>
<td>6 (20%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rs. 1000 to Rs. 2000</td>
<td>2 (7%)</td>
<td>4 (13%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rs. 2000 to Rs. 3000</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>5 (17%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rs. 3000 to Rs. 4000</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>3 (10%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>30 (100%)</td>
<td>30 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field Data

The above table shows that savings of Chitrakars before getting artisan cards, and nearly three fourth (70%) of the respondents reported that their families had no savings earlier. Whatever they used to earn was spent to fulfill their basic needs like food, health, education of children and other household expenses. Only a little less than one-fourth (23%) of respondents reported that they used to save less than one thousand rupees per month. The study shows that they could not save any money for future contingencies due to the family's large size. Even after getting artisan cards and training on handicrafts, artisans cannot save for their future. Forty percent of the artisans viewed that they could not save anything since
there was no sufficient family income.

Participation in Artisan Fairs

Table 5: Participation of artisans in Artisan Fairs/Exhibitions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Number of respondents</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation in Artisan Fairs</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did Not Participate</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field Data

Table 5 shows that less than two-thirds (70%) of respondents participated in various fairs using their Artisan Cards even outside West Bengal. Artisan Card allows them to participate and have their stalls in any fair all over India without charging any fee. The rest of the respondents could not participate even though they were willing but could not get permission from their husbands and family members to go outside due to various household engagements.

Reasons for not taking a loan from banks

Figure 1: Reasons for not taking loans from the bank
Availing loans from banks helps artisans expand their business, take a risk with new services or products, and own startup businesses. Though Artisan Card provides the advantage of getting loans from the government, none of the artisans could use it. More than half (53%) of respondents have not taken any bank loan due to a lack of awareness about bank loan facility services. Only 19% of respondents viewed that due to banks’ lengthy procedures, they were not interested, and 13% of respondents reported that they did not have the requirement of loans from the bank. So the finding of the study reveals that due to ignorance, they could not avail loans from the banks.

Seasonal Diagram of Patachirakars

A seasonal calendar is a visual method of showing the distribution of seasonally varying phenomena (such as economic activities, resources, production activities, problems,
illness/disease, migration, and natural events/phenomena) over time.

In this seasonal study, a diagram has been used to analyse-

- To understand seasonal differences during livelihoods and vulnerability analysis of Patuas of Naya Village.
- To identify cause-and-effect relationships between seasonally varying phenomena of Chitrakars.
- Understanding the time of the year when different social groups are more or less vulnerable.
- Identifying periods when specific groups of people usually suffer particular hardship so that appropriate “safety nets” can be set in place or other remedial actions taken.

Findings from the seasonal calendar

- Most of the Chitrakars involve in craft preparation during the months from April to November. Most of the artisan family members are going for different melas and workshops or exhibitions.
- Few chitrakar families have agricultural land, but due to migration from November onwards to March, they were only involved in agricultural activities from May to September. During this period, they mainly cultivate paddy.
- During another season of the year, artisan families’ agricultural activities are handed over to sharecroppers as they migrate to market their products.
- From April to November, most families and artisans are involved in craft making at
their homes.

• During this period, people who do not have agricultural land are also involved in non-agricultural and daily labour for craftwork and other daily wage activities.

• Women members of the family are also involved in craft making and accompany the family's male counterpart for workshops, fairs, exhibitions in different parts of the country.

Pair-wise ranking for analysing the existing problem of Patachitrakars

Pair-wise comparison compares alternatives in pairs to judge which entity is preferred over others or has a more excellent quantitative property. Pair-wise comparison is one way to determine how to access alternatives by providing an easy way to rate and rank decision-making. It is often used rank criteria in concept evaluation. In this study, pair-wise Ranking or Preference ranking was used to assign priorities to the multiple available socio-economic problems of Chitrakars in Naya village.

Findings from Pair-wise Ranking

From the seasonal calendar of Naya village, it was found that four to five months is a lean season, so if the Chitrakar could have a weekly or daily artisan hut or market, it would be easier for them to market their products. The major problem of the artisan at Naya village drainage problem was ranked first. In the rainy season, the kaccha road became unusable.
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https://doi.org/10.51767/jsw1302

Lack of education, particularly in the English language, was also a significant hindrance in communicating effectively with the outside visitors. Education plays a vital role in the development of any trade or occupation. It was found that they were deprived of getting professional training. Due to a lack of technical and professional training, artisans could not use Information Technology, modern techniques and technological development for the artisanal sector. There is no primary school in Naya village, and it is noted that the Chitrakars and their families had to visit outside to participate in melas, and their children could not attend their exams. The financial problem and lack of awareness have led to such a deteriorating situation for the artisans in this village.

Discussions

The study found that most of the respondents got the opportunity to participate and have exposure to artisan fairs, which has provided them self-confidence and lots of learning for future growth. These leanings have boosted them to increase their income and saving as well. So it would be better than artisans are encouraged to participate in artisan fairs and can be organized at the local level to promote more artisans to join the occupation with the support of the government and other private enterprises. Most artisans' family income very low and depends only on labor and artisan work, but artisans who participated in artisan fairs were benefitted somehow. Most of them saw an increase in their income and profits. During the participation in artisan fairs, their skills, methods and knowledge were enhanced, and they
also got the exposure that how an artisan should do creatively. This helped them to improve their marketing skills also. Compared to the artisans' saving habits before and after getting artisan cards, no significant differences were found since their needs and demand are also increasing. The handicraft sector provides a livelihood for thousands of artisans, but in the present scenario, artisans’ communities are bottom-up aggregations rooted in a territory, sharing material cultural background, and coevolving in line with artisans’ needs (Bettiol & Micelli, 2014, p. 8). It seems that they are not aware of the government's various schemes, and hence they could not get various benefits. They could get loans under the Artisan Credit Card scheme at a low rate of interest, but due to ignorance, they could not take loans from banks; instead, they take loans from their relatives, friends, money lenders etc. Therefore, training is considered an essential variable in poverty reduction, on which development programs should be focused (Butler & Mazur, 2007, p. 615). It was understood that development must be done from the viewpoint of disadvantaged people who understand their perception of what it entails to be wrong and what a good life involves (Narayan et al., 2000, pp. 1–3). Provision of Social Security for the Patachitrakar should be provided because they belong to the unorganized sector. The primary source of livelihood of artisans is handcraft work, and they are yet to find alternative livelihood sources.

Relevance of Social Work Profession

Professional social work practice includes micro- to macro-level activities (Hugman, 2009) that come from the globally recognised definition “Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion,
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and the empowerment and liberation of people" (International Association of Schools of Social Work [IASSW] & International Federation of Social Workers [IFSW], 2014). The roles of professional social workers in helping marginalised communities like artisan are:

i. Social workers who work in advocacy involved in the protection and defense of artisan community.

ii. Social work professionals should strive for livelihood promotion and skills-building measures to alleviate the challenges faced by community members.

iii. Facilitators, social workers help artisan community members to access social needs and social services.

iv. Social work research on mainstreaming, enabling and empowering by adopting 'intersectionality approach' should be conducted in studying individuals, groups, communities of deprived and marginalized sections of society.

Conclusion

In India, there are lots of institutions for promoting modern design, and it has been the career and profession for the modern age of people. It is time for the government to recognize and raise a similar type of technical training to encourage self-employment of artisans involved in surviving and beautifying the world through natural products. The artisan works should receive proper recognition in society. Most of the women artisans belonging to poor backgrounds needed support and training on modern techniques since
they face difficulties in increasing the product quantity and quality in the market. The demand-oriented training would enable them more income to the families. So the state government needs to provide much more supports and efforts to the artisans to sustain the culture through promoting their products in the market. Thus there is a need for strong advocacy with the state government to implement the welfare programs for artisans at the grassroots level for social-economic development.

References


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Annexure: 1
SEASONAL LIVELIHOOD DIAGRAM OF PATACHITRAKAR

Place: Naya Village
Date: 20\textsuperscript{th} January 2020

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl No.</th>
<th>Livelihood Activity</th>
<th>Month</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Craft Making</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Agricultural Activity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Non-Agricultural Activity &amp; daily Labour Work</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Migration for Workshop fairs and Exhibitions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Craft Making:

Agricultural Activity:

Non-Agricultural Activity & daily Labour Work:

Migration for Workshop fairs and Exhibitions