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“Artisanal Clusters of Jharkhand”- Scope of Vocal for Local Intervention

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Summary

India owes a lot of cultural identity to its rich handicraft heritage. No land on earth has such a long cultural continuity and a glorious heritage as India. Indian handicrafts are rich in diversity and spread all over the country. Handicraft symbolising man's executive desire to present beauty in its varied forms, craft through the centuries has played and continue to play an important role in the economic life of community as a major source of providing means of livelihood too many people and help in in sustaining our rural economy.

Jharkhand has inherited traditional arts and crafts, many of which have come to find favour with art lovers not only in India, but in many parts of the world. This paper focuses on the specific tradition of **black terracotta handicraft** of Jharkhand and also advocate for the requirement of private capital intervention through community owned Company model.

Key words: Artisanal clusters, Black terracotta, skill development, livelihood, capital intervention.

Introduction

The government of India's vision for Atmanirbhar Bharat that surpasses across industries and institutions is very inspiring. By putting India first – there is scope for so much work, and with all the advancements in technology and support today, doors have opened for tremendous innovation, allowing everybody in this country to dream big, driving an inclusive growth.

To prevent the local skills and provide products in India, we need to stand together to proudly promote the “Make in India” campaign followed by Vocal for Local. The present article will revisit present condition and self-sufficiency of skills of artisans of Jharkhand for livelihood promotion.

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Artisan Clusters

As per studies in 2018, only 50% of population participated in the labour force, 81% of which was employed in the informal sectors, also known as the unorganised sector. Therefore, handicraft sectors are not only employment intensive, being second only to agriculture, but also have huge social importance, in view of the fact that they cater to the economically as well as socially weaker sections. Almost the entire handicraft sector is situated in geographic concentration, called clusters. Such clusters are at times centuries-old consisting of mostly household units utilising both homes based as also wage earners. Each cluster is situated within a nearby geographical area spanning over a few villages and /or a town and /or a city and its surrounding areas. India is estimated to have around 2682 handicraft clusters. Each cluster faces common opportunities and threats.

Location of black Terracotta cluster in Jharkhand

Deogarh and Dumka are two major black terracotta clusters in Jharkhand state which lies in the eastern part of India. The district of Deoghar was formed after the reorganization of the Santhal Parganas. The total area covered by Deoghar in Jharkhand is 2479 square kilometre. Dumka, which is the adjoining district to Deoghar and lies at a distance of 25 km from Deoghar is another black terracotta cluster. Deoghar is easily accessible from the rest of the state and as well as the rest of India. The economy of Deoghar and Dumka is mainly dependent on its industries and agriculture. The major industrial development in this district includes the growth of a factory at Jasidih producing wagons used in railways and another factory located at Madhapur, which is putting silicate to industrial use.

The black terracotta which created by Kumbhars in Jharkhand, has long lost its glory as a craft The utility of black Terracotta products is now restricted to household articles, used by the local tribal, that is, Santhals, or they are sold in the local fairs and markets as decorative pieces. The utilitarian household products includes pots, pitchers, kullhars or tea cups, diyas, incense burner and water filters among other things, whereas the artistic articles includes jewellery sets, bangles, mask, toys, candle stands, vases, etc.

The black terracotta crafts practised in the Jharkhand region is unique and different from that practiced in the other regions in terms of its characteristic black shine, which indicates its potential in the market. The availability of raw materials, which are sourced locally, makes it sustainable and commercially viable in terms of its production capacity. However, despite these favourable factors, the number of artisans working with black pottery has gone down over the year as the potters have shifted to production of plain terracotta roof tiles used in the villages. According to the Potters, the primary reason for this shift is the increasing cost of production for black terracotta as compared to the usual red terracotta which is much more economical.

Issues in Terracotta value chain

The products made are of low value and low quality, and hardly any production is done for commercial sales except the high production of roof tiles that are sold locally. The profit margin of the producers is very small in these tiles though the volume of production is high. Most of the people involved in the terracotta craft are live below the poverty line and have very little money for any kind of capital inputs, that is why they do not want to take risk in diversifying the products with new designs, which may not sell. Thus, hardly any design development has taken place in terracotta cluster. Most of the crafts persons are making the same products or using the same designs that have been in vogue over the years. Consequently, there is a lot of competition among the artisans as all of them are producing similar kind of products and selling them in the same market. During Diwali, the production is centred around making of diyas, lamps and deities used for the religious ceremony. Many of the products have exclusive uses as for instance, the Santhal tribe use terracotta products during various tribal ceremonies such as animal figurines, pots used during wedding ceremonies, jewellery, masks and pots for storing the Mahua liquor. Thus, the artisans do get large orders but these are seasonal during the festival period and weddings.

One of the main obstacles faced by this craft cluster is the shrinking market. The target segment at which the terracotta products are aimed has, over the last few years shifted to using plastic articles such as plastic cups instead of kullahrs, plastic pots instead of Matkas and plastic toys instead of clay toys as plastic articles are considered to be cheaper and long lasting.

One of the main issues at the primary level is the fact that the craft is limited to very few families and restricted to Jasidih town in Dumka. Since the only difference between black and red terracotta products lies in the firing technique and potter skills and prevalent among a large number of people in the area more artisans should be taught the specific art of black terracotta. The quality of the product should also be enhanced in order to sell them in more upmarket stores or in metros where they can fetch a better price. Even in Ranchi and shops that sell terracotta products in Deoghar and Dumka, the product range limited and of poor quality. The making of roof tiles is the only viable business that is fetching returns for the artisans.

The Department of Industries government of Jharkhand, has set up Jharcraft or Corporation for the development of handicraft and handloom silk. The main objective of Jharkhand is to revive languishing craft and promote the rural artisans and their products. Although this technique is unique to the area, there is an absence of linkages with technical institutions, design schools and marketing bodies which could promote the development of this craft.

Need and Challenges

Artisanal clusters face a variety of challenges. The potters who are still practicing black terracotta craft and making products for the local market and for seasonal fairs.

- The black terracotta product range being produced currently is very restricted and skill level of the artisans has gone down over the years. There are hardly any exclusive products that can be marketed in the high- end segment.
- Many of the potters who are familiar with the black terracotta technique do not practice this art as they face problems when it comes to selling the product in the market.
- Most customers are unfamiliar with black terracotta and believe that the products are half backed (as terracotta is darker when half -baked and then takes on the familiar red colour). Also the cost of production of black terracotta is slightly more than that of red terracotta, which discourages the craft persons from producing black terracotta products unless there is an order for the later from the local trader.
- The sector has suffered due to its being an organised with the additional constraints of lack of education, low capital, poor exposure to new technologies, absence of market intelligence and poor institutional framework. The majority of clusters perform in a market- based value chain.
- There is no one to one relationship among the buyers and artisans. Mechanization also thinned and nearly eroded the local market of the artisans.
- The changing market needs at the far away urban market made the existing market knowledge of the artisans irrelevant. Thus slowly the artisans who have already lost their rural roots having lost their comparative advantage Dash the market intelligence slowly became supplier of low cost labour of artisan products.

In the present globalisation scenario local livelihood which are traditionally connected closely to local markets are fast disappearing. The emergence of new sectors resulted in successfully creating plenty of employment opportunities to young generation mainly in urban areas. Now the question arises where will be

the skill artisans who can create wonderful handmade products with minimum equipment and working capital. Can we create an alternative employment which would offer social and economic security?

The focus should be on creating social responsibility among the public by encouraging the use of locally made products. It is imperative to preserve the livelihood of large number of rural families as generating alternative employment is a big question. If employment generation is given major importance than a systematic approach and development of efficient support system can make a big niche for them in the mainstream market.

Suggested interventions

Although there has been corresponding correction in the policy leans towards the handicraft sector to encourage private investment and Entrepreneurship, in spite of that, it is caught in a vicious cycle. The sector is seen as being subsidy driven and out of touch with markets and the pool of resources available to them are providing to be inadequate to help revive them and there is no strong policy push to transform the sector and encourage private investment required to make it competitive in the new economy.

However, the policy reforms should also focus on building larger private intermediaries with the aim of promoting private capacity-building investment into the sector and seeking to bring handicraft production into the formal economy. Such investments will be critical in making the craft sector more dynamic and responsive to the market, as it is not efficient or feasible for the government to be the single provider for capacity building investment and services in the long run.

The government need to provide incentives for private capital investments Since, handicraft is a labour - intensive sector with high potential of employment for poor sections of the society in rural areas. The government should designate the handicraft sector as a priority and explore incentive by way of time-bound tax breaks and subsidised credit for projects that invest in research and development, building retail infrastructure, branding and advertising and other such capacity building investments.

Official estimates suggest that India is home to seven million artisans most of whom are in rural and semi-urban areas, however, data from unofficial sources indicates that the number is as high as 200 million. This bracket is huge and the reason for this disparity is the informal and unorganised nature of this sector.

The fundamental reason for these problems lies in nomenclature. "Over the years, it has become clear that we should stop calling the sector handicraft and handloom. We need to call it creative manufacturing,"

This is because this sector has potential to be the biggest job creator for the country. It has the lowest capex investment required. Artisanal production also allows government to do rural development and create

livelihoods for people in rural India instead of getting them to migrate to cities. "It is the pathway to build a more inclusive economy in terms of job creation.

The reason is simple. India is sitting on the world's largest workforce with the most diverse skills available doing sustainable production. The new ministry will focus on solving problems unique to this sector, such as solving for distributed manufacturing at scale. "The government needs to think to scale up this distributed model of workforce and look at the production in this sector in a modern scientific manner to make it globally competitive," she says.

Moving ahead, it is amply clear that the need of the hour necessitates a revisiting of traditional approaches towards income generation and livelihoods. There is a need to redefine the mechanics of work with women artisans and entrepreneurs and look at promoting well-grounded, economically and environmentally sustainable models of social business and enterprise as a way ahead. Here are a few revival measures that will help alleviate the financial as well as marketing difficulties of the sector:

- Individuals and NGOs must come together to take the initiative of raising funds for relief distribution to promote craft businesses and keep the tradition of handicrafts alive.
- Since the crafts sector is slowly losing its grip, steps should be taken to conduct branding and marketing campaigns to promote the distinctiveness of Indian art and craft. We must reposition the sector as crafts and creative enterprises (CCEs) and engage it deeper with e-commerce.
- Reskilling and rebuilding capabilities in the sector will help quicken the recovery and make the sector resilient, especially for smaller artisans.
- Broad financial recommendations include expectations of a stimulus from the government for craft based enterprises, including measures like reduction/deferral in GST across categories, soft loans and interest free working capital loans to aid production and the easing of access to raw material supplies.

Globally, many countries have announced large bailout packages in the form of soft loans or government-backed collateral-free loans, tax holidays, a moratorium on liabilities to protect their small businesses. In India, the Government has announced a special economic package viz. Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyaan with relief and credit support measures for various sectors including MSMEs (Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises).

Endpoint

In the wake of trade liberalization and globalisation, the artisans have to survive in extremely competitive environment where in the ability to fine tune the system and processes and capacity to meet big order play a strong role. To increase the penetration of black terracotta products in the local markets, there is a strong need to develop systems for better integration of both product availability and awareness creation. Simultaneously, now the need of the hour is to make the handicraft producers believe in the product by offering security for sales, which would lead to handicraft product Innovation and market expansion.

With positive policy reforms, global best practices being implemented in production and consumers opting for local, it will become a reality. A holistic India-centric approach, with all stakeholders thinking in unison will make India a global economic powerhouse. The Prime Minister's call, 'Vocal for Local' has laid the foundation for a strong, self-reliant India. It is time for us to contribute meaningfully towards this vision.

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