

Bamboo and Cane Craft Industry: Challenges and Opportunities in North-East India

*Nasrin Begum
PhD Research Scholar
Department of Economics
Gauhati University
Guwahat, Assam, India*

Abstract

Bamboo and cane craft industry in India has been considered as a significant sunrise industry with huge potentialities. Bamboo and cane are used as raw materials for finished furniture products and decorative items. The products made from these are light weight and eco-friendly and have their own style and elegance. There is a tremendous demand for these handicraft products both in domestic market and international market. The craft making from bamboo and cane forms an essential part of the economy in the North-Eastern states. The procedure of producing these crafts require very little or no investment and be pursued by anybody and everybody of a household as a subsidiary occupation. Thus the industry has a considerable scope for development and various new products suited to modern tastes and preferences can be manufactured out of bamboo and cane. The present study is an attempt to highlight the potentialities of bamboo and cane craft in marketization in the North-Eastern region of India with strategies for development. The problems and challenges that are facing by the industry will also be studied in this study.

Key words: *bamboo and cane, marketization, potentialities, challenges*

1. Introduction:

In the North Eastern region of India the unexplored paradise of art and craft with bamboo and cane form its culture. With seven states viz., Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Mizoram, Meghalaya, Nagaland and Tripura together called Seven-Sisters, geographically isolated from the mainland India, but blessed by the Nature with dense forest, abundant of flora and fauna, various species of wild animals and plants and most importantly with flourishing handlooms and handicrafts. The present study is an attempt to highlight the problems and challenges faced by the industry of bamboo and cane craft in the North Eastern region of India. Again the study will also stress on prospects and opportunities of this industry in the region. Various species of

bamboo and canes are plenteous in the forest areas of this region. Both bamboo and cane are used as raw material of great versatility and forms an integral part of the lifestyle and economy of this region.

The reasons behind huge contribution to the economy and lifestyle of the people of NE region by this Bamboo and Cane industry are availability of huge amount with various species of bamboo and cane in the hills and forests of this region, the natives being the excellent craftsmen as well as having the knowledge of uses and purpose of uses with wide range of products in everyday life. The bamboo and cane raw materials are used to produce different types of products under different small and cottage industries also. There is a great trade export potentiality of handicraft market of this region. The following are some products which are produced with bamboo and cane craft.

Various uses of bamboo and cane are classified in the following heads:

Wood substitute: Due to its physical and mechanical properties, bamboo is regarded as substitute for wood. The woody material in bamboos has vascular bundles which remain separate in long internodes, giving bamboo an easy splitting characteristics and flexibility too. Bamboo and cane are used as substitute for wood in various industrial products like bamboo basket, cane mat, chalani, kula, tukuri, dala, duli/tali, dhol, bamboo mat, umbrella handle, japi(headgear), pencil, match box, match sticks; bamboo musical instruments like: do-tara, gogona; fishing equipment like: polo, jakai, khalai, dori, cheap, paran, jhuti, hogra etc.

Handicrafts: For the production of handicrafts bamboo and cane are used. The crafts sector generates about 250 million days of employment mainly to women from rural and tribal areas, generating income of about ₹15 billion a year. Some examples of craft products are- bags, tea packaging, different kinds of furniture, floor tiles, purses, general household products, utensils, etc.

Pulps and paper: the general consumption of bamboo indicates that 35% of bamboo is being consumed by pulp and paper industries while the rest 65% is used by the native people under cottage, construction, furniture implement industries etc.

Cottage industries: millions of tons of bamboos are utilized in different types of cottage industries such as agarbatti, kite and cracker industries, ice cream industry, match industries.

Charcoal production: recently, various studies shows that bamboo are also a source of quality activated carbon giving minimum fifteen times value addition depending on cost of transportation of raw material.

Medicinal products: bamboo plant has usually high levels of acetylcholine which acts as a neurotransmitter in animals and humans. The sap of *Bambusa vulgaris* is given as a remedy for phthisis (a disease) in the Philippines. The leaf bud of another bamboo species *Bambusa Spinosa* is used in leprosy, fever and hemoptysis.

Food production: bamboo is used for food production also. Bamboo shoots are famous in all states of North East India. Trade of bamboo pickle in Nongpoh (Meghalaya) is estimated to be 1170 kg to 2210 kg annually.

2. Objectives:

- i. To highlight the market potentialities of bamboo and cane crafts of NER and strategies for its development.
- ii. To study the problems and prospects of marketization of bamboo and cane crafts of north east region.

3. Methodology:

The present study is mainly based on secondary data. The secondary data will be collected from various department of government, journals, magazines, newspaper, articles, bamboo and rattan policy etc. The study is descriptive in nature.

4. Discussion:

4.1 Market Potentialities of Bamboo and Cane Craft in North Eastern Region of India:

Various studies provide that Northeast India has 34.5 percent area under bamboo cultivation and 45 percent of country's bamboo stocks. Bamboo is also known as "Green Gold" in the mountainous North-East India. The cane and bamboo products like basket ware, cane furniture, mat and mating, decorative items, etc. are exported to the countries like China, USA, Japan, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, U.K., Australia, Switzerland etc. the products are traded in a very negligible amount and that's why there is no record with the government. Among the all North East states, Assam, Tripura and Arunachal Pradesh contribute share about ₹15 crores to ₹20 crores of cane and bamboo furniture at present and ₹2 crores are exported.

However, there is limited consciousness regarding the latent prospects of bamboo and cane as well as associated products amid the users and even other stake holders including the government. Although people in this region use these products for day to day uses, but not aware

of the economic and commercial value along with industrial applications of bamboo and cane. The database available with the Indian Council of Forestry Research and Education (ICFRE) reveals that 18 million hectares of world is covered by bamboo while in India, approximately 10 million ha of area is covered by bamboo out of which 28% is in NER. There are more than 125 species belonging to 23 genre of bamboos found in India. Out of this only 30 species are commercially important. They grow naturally up to 3500m above mean sea level. 66% India's bamboo resources exist in NER and hence, the potentialities. The current market of bamboo products in India is estimated to be around ₹4500 crores which is expected to increase up to ₹20000 crores in 2015 with major contribution from wood substitute, processed bamboo shoots, industrial products (activated charcoal) and structural applications segments. The estimated bamboo resources of the world are about 20 million hectares and estimated current bamboo market is US \$10 billion that was expected to increase to US \$20 billion by 2015.

In the present market situation, some of the bamboo and cane products have great potentiality for export. According to market-demand circumstances, these products are namely, rice spoon, tooth picks, ice cream spoon, seat cushions, fruit forks, party picks, skewers, weaved bamboo blind and screen, bamboo brooms, knife handle, barbeque sticks, walking sticks, folding fans, bamboo handbags, bamboo curtains, wall hanging, flower vases, ash trays etc.

The North Eastern region has the comparative advantage of production and export of bamboo and cane products. This is due to the fistful of the raw materials for production of such products. India's Look East Policy and its agreement with ASEAN countries will help to create a common market for trading bamboo and cane crafts. The only challenge is the China's growing market for bamboo products. Despite the availability of bamboo and cane products, their export from this region to the neighboring countries has been remaining meager because of China's leading export policy and improper and non-implementation of Look East Policy. Products from North East could acquire the potentiality by reinventing and redesigning these products. This can be done through up-gradation in production techniques, diversification, use of new designs etc. While price is a significant determining factor, aesthetic appeal, finishing, quality and presentation, and timely delivery are also other major decisive criteria that may be kept in mind while marketization of such products. Exports from NER of India usually suffer due to lack of these features for the international market. A highly integrated approach is required by the stakeholders to remove these bottlenecks for promotion of exports from this region.

A bamboo park at Chaygaon in Kamrup (Rural) is under construction. The proposed park is being developed in PPP model with the assistance from Ministry of Commerce & Industry, GOI; State Govt. and private promoters. The cost of the Project is Rs.62.28 crores out of which the Central Govt. contribution is Rs.52.63 crores and the State Govt. share is 3.90 crores and term loan is 5.75 crores. The objective of park is to create integrated infrastructure for promotion of bamboo based industries in the State. The project is under implementation and in the final stage of completion.

4.2 Prospects and Challenges Faced by the Market for Bamboo and Cane Crafts of NER:

The raw bamboo and cane as well as finished product made from bamboo and cane are used in our day-to-day life, especially in the rural economy of North-East India. There are tremendous prospective for the market of bamboo and cane products in this region. Some of them are discussed as follows-

Employment opportunity: The employment potential of bamboo is very high and the major work force constitutes of the rural poor, especially women and 432 million work days per annum are provided by the bamboo sector in India.

Rapid increase in demand for industrial use: The total demand for various bamboos consuming sector in India is estimated at 26.9 million tonnes while the supply is only 13.47 million tonnes. The pulp and paper industry, construction, cottage industry and handloom, food, fuel, fodder and medicine annually consumes amounting to ₹2042 crores. Demand of bamboo for industrial use is met from state owned forests, while for non-industrial purpose it comes from private and state owned resources.

To build up the rural economy: Bamboo development is viewed as an instrument of poverty alleviation and employment generation for skilled and unskilled persons, especially unemployed youth particularly in the rural sector through eco-rehabilitation purposes.

Geographical proximity for international trade: Geographical advantage exists due to proximity countries in South and South-East Asia. Northeast can emerge as a strategic base for foreign or domestic investors to tap markets of South and South-East Asia.

Government initiative: Industrial growth centers in NER have already been converted into tax-free zones for the next 10 years. Moreover, the government also offers incentives on transport, capital investment, and interest subsidy on working capital.

Handicrafts production: Though the NER accounts for over three-fourth of total production of handicrafts in India, its share in the country's export of handicraft is estimated at less than one percent, according to an Export-Import (EXIM) Bank study. The region endowed with rich repository of arts and crafts, like bamboo and cane items, basketry, carving, hand embroidery, textiles, jute craft that are eco-friendly.

Development of entrepreneurial skill: The development of this sector will result in change of attitude of the people of this region. People will develop an entrepreneurial skill, which will help in identifying new areas of investment, which in turn, help in the economic development of this region.

Labour intensive: The small scale industries are labour intensive. They will provide more employment opportunities to the local rural communities. It will also help in solving the unemployment problems in the region.

Low capital investment: Small scale industries can be set up even with lower capital investment as compared to large scale industries. As capital is scarce in this region, small scale industries are the feasible option for this region.

Quick return: In case of small scale industries, there is less time gap between capital investment and production of goods. Thus it brings quick return to the entrepreneur.

Reduction of pressure on land: People of this land excessively depend on agriculture. The development of small scale industries will help in diverting the excess workforce into this sector.

4.3 Challenges:

Although the bamboo and cane industry of NER has a huge prospective and a lot of market potentialities, it has been facing various challenges even in the present context. Some of the challenges of this industry are highlighted as follows:

Lack of good marketing agencies and other distribution channels: The bamboo and cane crafts are mostly sold in the local market and sold by the individual producers. Generally middle-men and private traders pre-dominate the market and trading these products.

Few supplies of raw materials: Although the bamboo and cane have huge market potentiality, the cultivation of bamboo and cane are not yet been realized by the potential cultivators, small land holders in particular.

Effect on environment: With the trend of decrease in production and in growth of population, the between supply and demand is going to be larger stressed that in India the demand for bamboo and cane planting stocks are 90-120 million seedlings per annum. Large scale cultivation is the only way to prevent further depletion of bamboo and cane resources, and to ensure a regular and sustained supply of raw material for growing industrial uses.

Production cost: The production cost of these products is much higher than the machine made products due to non-availability of technology in the production process. As a result it becomes costlier but buyers always prefer products with low price.

Comparatively high price: One of the vital challenges of the marketization of bamboo and cane products is that due to manual process of production its labour cost increases higher and higher which compel to hike the prices of the particular products. But, on the other hand, machine made products are produced in the market with low price which bring challenges in this regard.

Limited customer: Due to unlimited flow of machine made products in the market at a cheaper rate, bamboo and cane products face terrific challenges in respect of customers. Only very limited percentage of customers come forward to buy such products.

Changing lifestyle: People have drastically changed their lifestyle, living standard and accordingly their choices have also been changed. A large section of people do not like to use these products.

Changing attitudes: The new generation people are born and brought up with new attitudes and outlooks. A large section of these groups do not understand the significance of using such products. So they do not like to appreciate people to buy such products which resulting in reduction of buyers significantly.

4.4 A Strategy to Develop the Market for Bamboo and Cane Craft in North East India:

- a) By increasing the degree of commercialization of bamboo and cane cultivation through large scale contract farming along with co-operative and commercial forestry.
- b) By establishing small enterprises for processing of bamboo and cane, and then educating small enterprise owners and workers on best practices for efficiency.
- c) By establishing linkages between these enterprises and manufacturers.

- d) By providing incentives to the manufacturers to add further value and incorporate the informal value chain within them. Ensure adequate attention is provided to the quality of goods.

5. Conclusion:

The bamboo and cane craft of North Eastern India has considerable scope for development and various new products suited to modern tastes can be manufactured out of bamboo and cane which will in turn increase the market value of bamboo and cane crafts of this region. Market intelligence should be developed so that products can be made to cater to the need of the consumer market. It would be very profitable industry for livelihood development. With the help and cooperation of NGOs, SHGs, government and non-government agencies if awareness can be brought in the societies for the skill development programs provide some other conditions intake then this industry will definitely flourish in future.

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