Pottery Industry In Majuli District Of Assam: It’s Problems And Prospects

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Abstract: The development of the rural economy is concerned with the growth of various small-scale units and growth of various factors relating to these industries. Amongst the various small-scale industries, the growth of handicrafts has immense importance for the development of rural economy. Amongst the various crafts, pottery work is one the important activities that contributed to the development of rural economy of Majuli. However, this age-old industry has enough potential of growing at large scale but due to certain hurdles, it has been signified as a sick industry in the state. There is very little research work has been carried out on the study of problems and prospects of pottery industry in the state. This paper is an attempt to study the pros and cons of this particular industry in the River Island Majuli, Assam.

Index-terms: Pottery, Rural-Development, Self-Employment, Income Generation, Rural-Economy, Sustainable Development, marginalized section etc.

1. INTRODUCTION
Assam, also known as the gateway of North-Eastern region, has a unique geographical entity and land of cultural varieties. The state has been well-known for its rich natural resource and different types of handicrafts units which are grown by taking the advantage of factor endowment in the state. Since time immemorial the handicrafts units are growing in the state and the craft has acquired the cultural value in Assamese society. The artisans have experimented their traditional crafts and increased not only their skill from generation to generation but also provide a huge contribution towards the socio-economic development of the state. The handicrafts units are providing income and employment opportunity to the uneducated labours of the rural and semi-urban areas and also bring subsidiary source of income to a large section of people. Apart from a large range of common handicrafts activities practicing in the rural areas throughout the state, there are some localized cluster of specialized handicrafts which have immense socio-economic and environmental importance. One of such cluster that has survived throughout time is the pottery of the river island Majuli. In Majuli, pottery industry is primarily confined to the MOBC community locally known as kumars in salmora and chinatoli village on the bank of the Brahmaputra River in the upper part of the island. It is a purely a river-based small-scale industry particularly in the Island. The important feature of pottery industry craft in Majuli is that in this industry, the artisans do not use wheel as normally seen with other such artisans. Instead, they use some special instruments of their own made of wood, cane and bamboo, and run the industry manually. There altogether 700 families that practicing this craft provide livelihood to about 6000 people. This is an industry which needs operatively less capital. All the members of pottery- making family keep themselves engaged in making and marketing potteries of different kinds made in this industry. It has been reported that this industry alone provides around 34 percent of its requirements in Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland. The pottery-makers use to market thrice in a year, i.e., from May to August, from November to April and March to April. The main means of transportation of these products are the country-boats of bigger size carrying the different pottery items. The social fabric of the pottery making is primarily dependent on various stage of production and marketing of these products. Both male and female are engaged in this industry. Basically, the female people are engaged in the process of production, while the males are engaged in the marketing.

2. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY:
The specific objectives of the study have been formulated as the following:
1. To identify the constraints and difficulties faced by the pottery units in Majuli.
2. To evaluate the prospects of pottery industry in Majuli.
3. To suggest strategies/policy measures for the development of pottery industry in competitive market.

3 METHODOLOGY
The study is basically based on primary data; however the secondary data also collected for better look into the study. The required primary data are collected from the sample households through personal interview with the well scheduled questionnaire. The total sample size of the present study is 81 individual potters and the samples are drowning purposively from the two village i.e., salmora and chinatoli for research purpose. Secondary data were collected from both published and unpublished books. The published reports are like, Statistical Hand Book, Assam, Directorate of Economics & Statistics, Govt. of Assam; Economic Survey, Assam; Census of India; National Sample Survey reports etc. The unpublished secondary sources are E&D Office, Kamalabari; D.O. (Agri.) Office, Garamur; B.D.O. Office, Kamalabari etc.

4 Finding and discussion: The pottery industry belongs to small scale industry and which plays an important role in economic development. The state of North-East India is industrially backward. The numbers of large scale is very low and growing slowly. In this regards the importance of cottage industries is always unavoidable. Depending on this cottage industries a large section of the rural people has enhanced
their economic conditions. Small scale industries are always conventional for geographically isolated state like North-Eastern India. To establish such as industrial unit, there is no need of large amount of capital including modern machinery or higher educated entrepreneur as well as educated or highly skillful labour force. No doubt that the minimum technical skill is acquired the artisan from their seniors and parent. Although this industry has a glorious reputation and heritage, has been facing lots of problems. These industries are unorganized in nature, so it has confronted big problems regarding the process of production to sell to the ultimate consumer. Majuli being a flood prone and erosion affected area; the pottery industry has been facing innumerable problems in spite of having potentiality of growing this particular industry. Although the pottery industries of Majuli have economics and cultural value, however this industry has been facing lots of problems. On the basis of analyze on sample potters, the following problems are found in the study area.

HIGH PRODUCTION COST: It is observed that the due to high cost of production, the actual earning in the pottery industry is very low. The potters earn only lump sum money although the whole family members have participated the process of production. The high cost of production is influenced by various factors such as non-availability of raw materials, lack of proper transportation and outmoded techniques of production etc.

TRANSPORT AND COMMUNICATION PROBLEMS: The river island Majuli has witnessed the poor transportation and communication facilities and as a result the rural artisans of Majuli have been facing various challenges when they go to sell their product in the outside market. Absence of better transport and communication facility has fallen severe impact on the pottery of Majuli. It is observed that in Majuli, the mode of transport and communication of these products are by-cycle, thela (hand curt) and boat. Theses modes of transportation are not ideal for carrying a smooth functioning of business.

SCARCITY OF RAW MATERIALS: Scarcity of raw material is another deteriorating factor for growth and development of pottery in Majuli. The most important raw material that needs to produce the different types of pottery is a particular type of soil, locally known as kumar mati. This particular soil is basically found near the river bank. But due to recurrence flood and erosion in every year, the collection of this type of soil is summarily banned.

INCREASING COST OF PRODUCTION: High cost of production is fuelled by various factors such as, scarcity of raw materials, absence of perfect market, fluctuation in the supply of raw material and high cost of transportation and communications etc. The pottery unit of Majuli is unorganized and working at subsistence stage. Increasing in the cost of production is not only fallen impact on the profit margin of the entrepreneurs, but also causes severe economic problem to the potter of the state.

LACK OF ENCOURAGEMENT: Pottery industry has been neglected by the concerned department of the government. The government of India has undertaken various programmes to encourage the traditional industries, but the handicrafts remains stagnant due to improper implementation and planning. As a result, these industrial units are experiencing problems of sickness and the artisans are fall under the vicious circle of poverty.

IGNORANCE OF THE POTTER: The important problem exists among the potters of Majuli is that majority of the potters are ignorant about many aspects of this industries. This is because of their high rate of illiteracy. The literacy rate is only 47% amongst the male and 36% for female. They are ignorant about the quality of the products as well as about the future market of their product.

STIFF COMPETITION WITH OTHER PRODUCTS: The pottery industry of Assam has been experiencing stiff competition with the product of modern industry. The modern products particularly made of plastic, aluminum and steel is the main competitor to the pottery industrial products.

ABSENCE OF MARKET FACILITIES: The improvement of the small scale industrial units basically depends on the stimulate market and the welfare of the entrepreneurs. In case of pottery, there is lack of proper market channels in the state. This will create hurdle to the expansion and the growth of this traditional industry. The entrepreneurs are deprived of getting remunerative price, in spite of producing quality product.

5 PROSPECTS OF POTTERY INDUSTRY:
From the above analysis, it is clear that the pottery industry of Majuli has been facing certain problems. However, adequate and time-oriented strategy will bring great potential to the growth of this industry and can contribute to the economic development of the state. Based on the observation, the study has postulated following prospects:

GENERATING INCOME: The pottery products are income-oriented products and low capital intensive, no needs of huge capital so; it is suitable for the growth of economy in state. The industry is basically labour-intensive and associated with the agriculture sector. So, it provides subsidiary income to the rural people of the state. Thus, these industries have great potentiality about bringing up the per capita income and standard of living of the artisan.

ECO-FRIENDLY PRODUCT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: The pottery utensils are considered as eco-friendly product and hence it can help in sustainable development. Sustainability is important issue pertaining to development and environmental preservation. Economic development cannot be sustained without preservation of the environment. The pottery units will play a significant role for sustainable development of the state. In this context, the artisans should use the resources in such a manner that it should not lead to the loss of bio-diversity in the state. Employment Opportunity: Pottery industry can provide huge employment opportunity and the highly skilled craftsmen can get full-employment opportunity through producing highly demanded products on large scale basis. The specialization and modernization of this industry will raise the demand of its products, and consequently production of pottery industry will get enlarged and this sort of enlargement will widen the scope of market and entrepreneur’s quality and skill. With the growth of this industry, the migration of labour force from the rural areas can also be checked. Uniqueness and Cultural Importance: The pottery of state is unique as it is manually produced with the mode of traditional method. With the minimum capital and locally available raw materials, the potter can easily produce the product to fulfill the needs of household demand. The industry has cultural importance in the state and will survive as long as the existence of Assamese culture. The various product of pottery is associated with the religious utility of Assamese society. So, as it has spiritual importance of the
society, the modern large scale products has no chance to occupy the market of this pottery product. Development of Entrepreneurship in the State: The process of development of a country highly depends on the industrial development and the industrialization is partially depending on the growth of entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurship development has made significant contribution in providing income and employment opportunity to a large number of persons. Depending on the local resources availability, there is huge potentiality of entrepreneurship developments in the state. It is observed that the pottery industry has good prospect for development through diversification of the product and process modernization. Future prospect of pottery craft with respect to employment generation depends upon certain considerations regarding its modernization keeping in view its demand and use of potteries. In fact, the local artisans need what is called market professionals; require education, investment, research and development, modern technology, design and product development, credit facilities, proper work places, market access and most importantly social acceptance, and thereafter, we can expect a favorable effect on this industry.

6 SUGGESTION:
For revival of the pottery industry of Majuli, the study offers following suggestions:

1. Specialization and Classification: A little bit modernization of pottery industry is necessary step towards the better market access. The specialization and modernization of this industry will raise the demand of its products, and consequently production of pottery industry will get enlarged and this sort of enlargement will widen the scope of market and entrepreneur’s quality and skill.

2. Providing Credit facility: From the study it is found that the craftsmen hardly got any credit facility from Government as well as non-Government organization. They are running their activities through own investment and individual efforts. Government and concerned authority should give priority in the matter of financial allotment to these marginalized sections of the society. Interest free credit or concession on credit should be provided to them in case of lending loan and complicated loan procedure should also be removed.

3. For Entrepreneurship development and encouragement state as well as central government should take proper initiatives. Basically, preference should be given to the local entrepreneurs, for development of their managerial quality.

4. The problems of marketing, raw materials and financial can be solved through the formation of co-operative societies. The establishment of co-operative societies is essential for changing socio-economic conditions of this marginalized section.

5. For the development of pottery industry and as well as the conditions of potters, systematic training facility is necessary. In order to produce quality product, government as well as non-government organizations should initiate various programmes for the artisans.

6. Development of market system is another important measure of pottery industry. For this better transport and communication facilities to link villages and other market places of Assam is essential.

CONCLUSION:
The entire North-Eastern region is very much backward in respect of industrial development. The main reasons behind such industrial backwardness of the region include absence of large investment in industry during the preceding plans and geographical isolation. The establishment of large-scale industry is very much reasonable in context of employment and income generation as well as regional economic development but as it has various shortcoming, such as inadequate capital formation, geographical isolation of the region, natural calamities and the disturbance of low and order of the region etc, which are the great hurdle on industrialization. In this context, the development of the small scale organized and unorganized cottage industry is very much important. From the sustainable economic development point of view, small scale industry is always desirable. The significant aspects of the traditional industry are that the industry can be sustained without environmental degradation. This type of small-scale industry is beautiful and suitable for our society and economy in the time of environmental degradation. Sustainable product of the industry is largely eco-friendly. The development of the hereditary cottage unit is very essential for the development of a geographically isolated and industrially backward place like, Majuli. As it provides substantial employment with less investment, so, the government should extent the basic infrastructure facilities and entrepreneurial motivation among the new generations. This particular industry is not only providing employment but also has huge social significance in the state. The appropriate and time-oriented initiatives to the pottery can turn it into a gainful occupation to a large number of people.

REFERENCE: