



THE BELL METAL INDUSTRY OF SARTHEBARI : AN ANALYTICAL STUDY

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Abstract: Sarthebari is a town located in the Barpeta district of north eastern state of Assam, India. It is home to the bell metal industry of Assam. The bell metal industry of Sarthebari is a very old cottage industry of Assam. This industry was started in Sarthebari in the days of Kumar Bhaskar Varma, a great monarch of Assam in 7th century. The product of the industry like 'Barkah' (a musical instrument used in religious functions, govt. institutes like courts, schools, colleges etc.), 'Sarai' (a traditional Assamese stand used to keep holy books and offerings), 'Kahi' (dish), 'Lota' (water pot with a long neck) etc. were popular among the Ahom kings. At present time the industry is facing lots of problems. The research paper is an attempt to analyse about the challenges that the industry is facing.

Key words: Bell metal, Raw materials, Cinder, Kahar, Rang and Tam.

1. INTRODUCTION:

The Bell Metal of Sarthebari is a very old cottage industry of Assam after bamboo craft. For the first time it was started at Raha in Morigaon district, at Titabar in Jorhat district and at Sarthebari in Barpeta district but the industry is extinct in two places other than Sarthebari. In Sarthebari, the industry was started during the reign of Kumar Bhaskar Varma. The products of the industry were popular among the Ahom Kings, the Aristocracy families. The products of bell metal like Bhortal, Khutital, Barkah, Ghannta, Bata, Sarai, Kahi Bati, Lota, Gasha are the symbol of Assamese Culture. This industry can play an important role in the economy of Assam.

2. OBJECTIVES OF STUDY :

The main objectives of the research study are

- To highlight the problems faced by the bell metal industry
- To highlight the contribution of the industry towards the Assamese Culture
- To present its role towards the socio- economic development
- To highlight the economic status of the workers involved in the industry

3. METHODOLOGY:

The research paper is prepared using analytical method. It is primarily based on field data collected from the villagers of Sarthebari, businessmen, members of 'Asom Samabay Kahar Samiti', related with this industry with the help of a series of questionnaires prepared for the purpose. However the secondary data viz. news papers, ancient books etc are also used for the purpose.



4. DISCUSSION:

Sarthebari is a famous historical place of Assam. The surroundings of Sarthebari are - in the east the village Helacha, in the west the village Bamunddi, in the north the village Rampur and river Buradiya and in the south the village Baniakuchi. All the neighboring towns and villages are directly or indirectly involved with this industry. But the villages like Gamura, Kamarkuchi, Namchala, Batiya are directly involved with the bell metal industry of Sarthebari.

The popular villagers like Late Haricharan Talukdar, Late Kahiram Deka were trying hard to develop this industry from the beginning. In 1933, Kahiram Deka gathered the villagers and collected Rs.10 share among them and established a 'Samabay' (Co-operative Society) and it was named as 'Assam Samabay Kahar Samiti'. After the establishment of local 'Samabay' the villagers encouraged so much and worked with lots of happiness. Now, the total capital of this industry is more than 90lacs. There are about 3000 members and different branches of this Samabay in different towns of country. More than 75 percent people of Sarthebari are directly involved with this industry. The graduates and post graduates persons are also employed in the industry, which is hopeful for the future generations because it decreases the unemployment problem of this area to some extent. The daily income of an employee is more than Rs.500.00.

For the production of the bell metal things two types of metals are necessary. They are Rang (Tin) and Tam (copper) where 22 percent are Rang and 78 percent are Tam for the products. These materials are not found in Sarthebari. Most of these materials are imported from other markets like Siliguri (West Bengal).

For the production, the different raw materials needed for the industry are like Kah, Cinder, La, Shetu etc. The most necessary metals for the products are Cinder and Broken bell. Kahars (who produce things) form 'Gots' (groups) with 4 to 5 members.

These Gots are known as "Kaharshal" or "Garashal". The instruments used by the Kahars are 'Niyari' (anvil), 'O' (a rasp), 'Reti', 'Sana' (a chisel used for cutting metal), 'Khannta', 'Kati', 'Sharah', 'Aafar', 'Mathoni' (a small hammer), 'Aake' (anvil), 'Chatli' (an implement of an bell metal worker), 'Kharika Chena' (small chisel), 'Haturi' (a hammer) etc.

In international market there is a good name of bell metal things like old bells bati (bowl). This is known as 'singing'. These types of baties are exported to Germany. The 'Cement Verital' is also exported to Germany. The other countries and states where bell metal products are exported are – England, Bhutan, Nepal, Arunachal Pradesh, Bangladesh etc. So, this industry is able to earn foreign money also. It also gives inspiration to other cottage industry to develop their business and export their products to different places of the world.

5. FINDINGS :

Obstacles faced by bell metal industry are -

- The people involved with this industry are facing the scarcity of raw materials. The needed broken bells (Kaha) for the industry are not available in this area. So, the kahars (who make utensils from bell) don't get these materials in proper time. Moreover due to higher carrying charge, the cost of raw materials is too high.
- Though science & technology are advancing rapidly, yet the bell metal industry of Sarthebari is running with old traditional methods. As a result development of the industry is not rapid and unable to produce more products in less time.
- The necessary 'Cinder' is not received by the 'Kahars' in proper time. So, it creates crisis among the Kahars and also results in significant losses in business.
- The employees are not rich. The productive things go to the main honours (Mahajan) and the employees are given very little wages comparatively. As a result the industry is not following the standard processes.
- The 'Gots' (Groups) in this industry are not given proper attention. In the case of Rang(Tin) and Tan(Copper) ,corruption prevails.



6. CONCLUSION :

The bell metal industry of Sarthebari has been successful in earning foreign currency. It is able to solve unemployment problem to some extent. By looking the educated people involved with the industry we can expect the glorious future of the industry. More than five thousand families are directly or indirectly involved with it for their livelihood. Among the masses in their culture, economy and daily life it has been playing an important role. Still there are many things to do for the improvement of the industry. With the great consciousness of the masses and with the help of the govt, the bell metal industry of Sarthebari can achieve more progress competing with other similar cottage industries.

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