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Study on the perceived problems of the *Shital pati* weavers in Cooch Behar district of West Bengal

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Abstract

The study on *Shital pati* weaver was conducted in the Cooch Behar district of West Bengal. A total of 100 respondents from Ghugumari area of Cooch Behar Block-I and Dhanmatia village of Tufanganj block-II were selected purposively for this study and interviewed through personal interview method with the help of well-structured schedule. *Shital pati*, is one of the most popular handicrafts of Cooch Behar district, is special kind of mat which is mainly used for sitting or to hang on doors or windows during summer. It is a durable, decorated and biodegradable mat having a unique feature of imparting coolness which suits warm and humid climate of West Bengal and is prevalent in rural areas. In Cooch Behar, manufacture of this comparatively expensive renowned mat is mainly centered at Ghugumari, Barokodali, and Nakkati-Pushnadanga. UNESCO already recognized this traditional art of Cooch Behar district as an 'Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity'. But, now a day, this handicraft industry is facing many difficulties in quality parameter, in distribution and marketing system. The middlemen were also taking a large share of the profit. As a result, the growers and weavers of this *pati* are facing major problem in variety selection with the mean score of 3.72.

Keywords: Handicrafts, shital pati, biodegradable, entrepreneurship

1. Introduction

Incredible India! Diverse art and culture are the soul and heart of our country. We have art and culture form in each corner. Here in India, handicraft is an exemplary assimilation between our traditional designs and modern techniques. India is one of the major exporter and supplier of handicrafts products to the world market. This sector is considered as the second largest employment-generating sector after agriculture. Harikrishnan and Surya Krishna (2015) ^[3] reported that India has rich source of traditional industries the natural product of traditional industries not only have great potential for growth both in production and export and also direct to make bigger generation of employment opportunities in the rural areas of the country and the understand the tribal artisans and handicraft and its relation with the culture and living condition of the tribal handicraft and artisan. *Shital pati*, is one of the most popular handicrafts of Cooch Behar district. Cooch Behar which was ruled by the 'Koch (*Rajbongshi* tribes indigenous to this region for many centuries)' dynasty is a home to *Shital pati*. The word '*Shital*' means cold and '*pati*' means mat, when both the word come together '*Shital pati*' can be named as 'cold mats'. It is special kind of mat which is mainly used for sitting or to hang on doors or windows during summer *Shital pati* is a durable, decorated and biodegradable mat. Unlike other kinds of mat available in Bengal, *Shital pati* is more expensive. These *Shital Patis* were made of weaved green cane slips of Murta plants (*Maranta Dichotoma*) which are indigenous to this region. The green cane is submerged in water for 10-15 days before it is sliced into thin strips, then the fine strips were woven by skilfully joining and interlacing to shape into beautiful mats. On average, a good quality mat requires seven to ten days to weave. The work requires a high degree of skill, concentration and perseverance. Handicrafts of Cooch Behar District of West Bengal, are famous all over the country and beyond for their exquisiteness. A number of artefacts are made with different materials like cane, jute, bamboo etc. Basak and Chowdhury (2019) ^[1] reported that *shital-pati* as a main component which enables an area for further studies to develop different strategies in the field of handicraft for students to recognize the importance of the handicraft value in items of

cultural and economic and method of production and take advantage of it to increase the income of the individual product. This place is attracting a good numbers of tourists from all over the world which is not only making these craft popular but also is aggravating the tourism sector of the state. Shah and Patel (2018)^[2] reported that Indian handicraft sector represents a rich cultural heritage of nation majority of communities and regions possess some unique characteristics which can be shaped into small scale and cottage industries, problem and challenges as well as the strength and prospects for artisans engaged in handicraft sector. Apart of its importance and cultivation weavers are facing many problems related to *shital-pati*. To know the perceived problems of the weavers the study was conducted.

2. Materials and Methods

Considering the economic importance of the area, Cooch Behar Block-I and Tufanganj-II selected purposively for this study. Random sampling was followed for the selection of respondents. Cooch Behar-I No. Block Pati Shilpa Samabay Samity consulted for making an exhaustive list of respondent who are attached with *Shital pati* for last 10 years and form the list, 100 respondents were selected. The respondents were interviewed through personal interview method with the help of structured schedule, which was developed for the study. A list of problem was enlisted after discussion with the experts and measured as perceived by the *Shital pati* weaver of the Cooch Behar district. Different problem situation was exposed with a well-structured interview schedule with a 4-point scale for response as: 4 = Strongly Agree, 3 = Agree, 2 = Disagree, 1 = strongly disagree. For each individual grower

and problem situation, a mean score and frequency was calculated. Problems were ranked according to the number of respondents perceiving the problem in *Shital pati* was done.

3. Results and Discussion

Data from the Table No. 1 shows the different problems facing by the *Shital pati* weavers in Cooch Behar district of West Bengal. From the results it was found that majority of the respondents (81%) strongly agreed that they don't know the other variety of murta plant and also not available locally. Lack of knowledge also ranked first among all the problems related to variety selected with a mean value of 3.81, followed by non-availability of improved varieties with a mean value of 3.72 and high price of improved varieties.

In case of facing problems in selecting best propagating material, it was observed that majority of the respondents (73%) strongly agreed that they don't have knowledge about selecting the best and it ranked first with a mean value of 3.73 among all the listed problems. Lack of technical guidance, lack of financial support, non-availability of seeds/rhizomes/branch cuttings in time ranked second, third and fourth respectively with a mean score of 3.60, 3.55 and 2.58.

In case of treatment of planting material, labour and time consuming process in treating the planting material is perceived as the most problematic area and ranked first with a mean value of 3.52. The second important point of concern is lack of proper technical guidance followed by lack of information, not found any good result and non-availability chemicals with a mean value of 3.45, 3.02, 2.40 and 1.73 respectively.

Table 1: Problems of problems of the *Shital pati* weavers in Cooch Behar District of West Bengal.

Sl. No	Attributes	Strongly Agree (4)	Agree (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly disagree (1)	Mean	Rank	Overall mean score	Overall Rank
I	Variety selection								
1.	Non availability of improved varieties	78	19	0	3	3.72	II	3.72	I
2.	Lack of knowledge	81	19	0	0	3.81	I		
3.	High price of improved variety	73	19	5	3	3.62	III		
II	Selecting propagating materials								
1.	Lack of knowledge	73	27	0	0	3.73	I	3.67	II
2.	Lack of financial support	55	45	0	0	3.55	III		
3.	Lack of technical guidance	60	40	0	0	3.60	II		
4.	Non-availability of seeds/Rhizomes/Branch Cuttings in time	24	27	32	17	2.58	IV		
III	Treatment of planting material								
1.	Lack of information	32	47	12	9	3.02	III	2.82	IX
2.	Non availability chemicals	0	13	47	40	1.73	V		
3.	Not found any good result	22	21	32	25	2.40	IV		
4.	Labour and time consuming Process	52	48	0	0	3.52	I		
5.	Lack of technical guidance	50	45	5	0	3.45	II		
IV	Land preparation								
1.	Lack of information	35	53	9	3	3.20	I	2.64	XII
2.	Lack of man power	20	19	32	29	2.30	III		
3.	Tedious operation	19	29	26	26	2.41	II		
V	Planting season								
1.	Lack of Information	46	37	11	6	3.23	I	2.66	XI
2.	Non availability of Planting material on time	7	25	38	30	2.09	II		
VI	Planting operation								
1.	Lack of information	41	45	11	3	3.24	I	2.86	VIII
2.	Lack of skill	17	35	27	21	2.48	II		
VII	Intercultural operations								
1.	Lack of technical guidance	32	48	8	12	3.00	II	2.52	XIII
2.	Lack of knowledge	26	43	20	11	2.84	IV		
3.	Tedious task	28	34	17	21	2.69	V		
4.	Non-availability of labour	25	40	13	22	2.68	VI		
5.	Hand weeding is costly	39	29	18	14	2.93	III		
6.	Irrigation is costly	0	0	45	55	1.45	VIII		

7.	Labour cost is high	38	38	13	11	3.03	I		
8.	Non availability of fertilizer	0	0	53	47	1.53	VII		
VIII	Pest, disease and other physiological disorder control								
1.	Lack of knowledge	44	34	11	11	3.11	III	2.77	X
2.	Lack of technical guidance	51	45	0	4	3.43	II		
3.	Non-availability of chemicals	0	0	50	50	1.53	VI		
4.	Lack of plant protection apparatus	6	19	50	25	2.06	V		
5.	Complicated task	43	33	9	15	3.04	IV		
6.	Lack of finance	45	55	0	0	3.45	I		
IX	Harvesting								
1.	Unfavourable weather conditions	35	37	12	16	2.91	II	2.91	VII
2.	Lack of knowledge	45	43	12	0	3.33	I		
3.	Lack of man power	14	21	33	32	2.17	IV		
4.	Lack of skill	28	37	23	12	2.81	III		
5.	High Labour cost	43	47	10	0	3.33	I		
X	Preparing the cane strips								
1.	Following traditional way	26	38	26	10	2.80	V	3.03	IV
2.	Difficult process	33	35	22	10	2.91	IV		
3.	Lack of man power	13	26	34	27	2.25	VI		
4.	Tedious process	51	40	5	4	3.38	II		
5.	Lack of improved technique	53	47	0	0	3.53	I		
6.	Labour cost is high	44	46	10	0	3.34	III		
XI	Dyeing								
1.	Lack of knowledge	13	26	39	22	2.30	IV	2.98	V
2.	Soaking and sun- drying depends on the weather Condition	46	54	0	0	3.46	II		
3.	Lack of skill	26	30	26	18	2.46	III		
4.	Numbers of stages involved	52	48	0	0	3.52	I		
XII	Weaving								
1.	Following traditional way	27	33	26	14	2.73	III	2.94	VI
2.	Lack of designing skill	37	26	18	19	2.81	II		
3.	Health issue	50	39	11	0	3.39	I		
4.	Labour problem	34	32	15	19	2.81	II		
XIII	Packaging and marketing								
1.	Lack of business skill	27	23	32	18	2.59	IX	3.05	III
2.	Labour problem	32	28	27	13	2.79	VII		
3.	No established market place	38	40	15	7	3.09	V		
4.	Lack of information about market	34	29	18	19	2.78	VIII		
5.	Influence of middleman	39	37	15	9	3.06	VI		
6.	Transport cost is high	54	39	3	4	3.43	II		
7.	Price fluctuation	51	45	4	0	3.47	I		
8.	Lack of digitalization	43	36	10	11	3.11	IV		
9.	Market Competition	36	42	22	0	3.14	III		

For land preparation for respondents expressed that they don't have proper information about scientific way cultivation, they are doing it traditionally. As a result, lack of information received first rank followed by tedious operation and lack of man power with a mean score of 3.20, 2.41 and 2.30 respectively.

In case of problems related to planting season majority of the respondents (46%) of the study area strongly agreed that they are having lack of information reading the planting season, they are continuing traditionally.

In case of planting operation problems 41% of the *Shital pati* weavers of the Cooch Behar district perceived that they are not having the proper scientific information about the planting operation and ranked it as the most problematic area.

In case of problems related to intercultural operations, high labour cost in intercultural operation ranked first among all the problems with a mean score of 3.03 followed by lack of technical guidance, hand weeding is costly, lack of knowledge, tedious task, non-availability of labour, non-availability of fertilizer and irrigation is costly with a mean value of 3.00, 2.93, 2.84, 2.69, 2.64, 1.53 and 1.45 respectively.

In pest, disease and other physiological disorder control the respondents raised that lack of finance was the main constraint to them with a mean value of 3.45. 51% of them

strongly agreed that they don't have proper technical guidance. 44% of the respondents strongly agreed that they don't have proper knowledge about scientific management of pest, disease and other physiological disorder of murta plant and ranked it as third constraint with a mean value of 3.11. 43% of them strongly agreed that management of pest and disease is complicated task to them. 50% of them expressed that there is no issue in availability of chemicals and plant protection apparatus in the study area.

In case of perceived problems in harvesting the murta plant, lack of proper scientific knowledge and high labour cost ranked first with a mean value of 3.33. Many of them (35%) raised the issue of unfavorable humid weather condition and ranked it as second problems with a mean score of 2.91, followed by lack of skill, and lack of man power respectively. In case of problems faced by the *Shital pati* weavers of the Cooch Behar district in preparing the cane strips. 53% of the weavers expressed that lack of improved technique is the most felt problems with mean of 3.53. 51% weavers strongly agreed that preparing the can strip is one of the tedious job, hence ranked it as second problems. 44% of the respondents strongly agreed that labour cost is very high. 35% of them considered as one of the difficult process and gave fourth rank to it. 38% of the weavers also agreed that till date they are following the traditional way only. Only few of them (13%)

expressed strongly that sometimes lack of man power also creates problems to them.

In case of problems related to dyeing the cane strips faced by the *Shital pati* weavers, 52% of respondents strongly agreed that the dyeing process involved number of stages and ranked it as their first felt problems with a mean score of 3.52. 54% of them agreed that soaking and sun-drying as the second ranked problems as it mainly depends on the weather condition, followed by lack of skill and lack of knowledge with a mean value of 3.46, 2.46 and 2.30 respectively. (Deka R 2019) [4].

Health issues felt as one of the major problems in case of weaving. Mainly female member of the family involved in the weaving process, and many of them suffering from back pain, spondylitis due to the bad posture of sitting while weaving the mat and also causing eye problem. 37% of the respondents strongly agreed that they don't have modern designing skill; as a result they are not getting the higher profit. 33% of the weaver mentioned that they don't have any modern tools for weaving the mat; they are just following the traditional hand technique.

In case of packaging and marketing problems, the major problem respondents are facing is price fluctuation in the market. 54% of them strongly highlighted that transport cost is also another major issues in marketing their product. 42% of them mentioned that now a day different cheap, attractive, durable plastic made mats were available in the market, due to which they were facing huge market competition. Lack of digitalization in the designing was another issues raised by 43% of the weavers. 40% of them expressed there is no established market. Influence of middle men ranked sixth with a mean value of 3.06 followed by labour problem, lack of information about market and lack of business skill.

In case of practice wise overall problems faced by the *Shital pati* weavers of Cooch Behar district, respondents are aware of only about one variety of murta plant, which available locally. So they ranked it as their first constraint with a mean value of 3.72. The second ranked problems as perceived by the weavers are the selecting best planting material to get quality product. They have never undergone any kind of training on the method of selecting the planting material, they are doing in traditionally. Packaging and marketing sector in another problematic area and got 3rd rank with a mean value of 3.05. They are facing several issues regarding the marketing of their product like, price fluctuation in the market, market competition, influence of middle men and also lack of proper business skill. Preparing the cane strip got 4th rank followed by dyeing, weaving, harvesting, planting operation, treatment of planting material, pest, disease and other physiological disorder control, planting season, land preparation and intercultural operations with a mean value of 3.03, 2.98, 2.94, 2.91, 2.86, 2.82, 2.77, 2.66 and 2.64 respectively. (Padmanabhan SK, 2022) [5].

4. Conclusion

The basic required skill to start a career in this *Shital pati* are like, the artisan must be well-practised in their respective art-form, well versed in business and marketing skill, having good taste in artistic and little bit mechanical knowledge of using machines and tools for designing purpose if any. Very few of the weavers are practicing 3D designing, so there is a vast opportunity to enter in the global market and using skills to the virtual dimension by working in the field of 3D designing, which are getting more and more attention and attraction in the age of virtual design. There is an opportunity

to develop entrepreneurial skills among the rural youth by giving proper training. Mainly women members of the family engaged in weaving, so women empowerment is another prospects of *Shital pati* in the study region. Those who are having less land, or lost interest in agriculture they can take this worldwide opportunities to make themselves 'atmanirbhar' or self-reliant to live better livelihood. From the practice wise constraint analysis, it is clear that lack of knowledge, proper skill and technical guidance were the major issues in case of variety selection, selecting propagating materials, land preparation, planting season, planting operation and in harvesting. Whereas, lack of financial support like high transport cost, labour cost also considered as the constraints in scientific management of pest, disease and other physiological disorder, intercultural operations, harvesting, packaging and marketing. The overall constraints analysis shows that selecting the variety ranked as first perceived constraint followed by selecting best planting material, packaging and marketing, preparing the cane strip, dyeing, weaving, harvesting, planting operation, treatment of planting material, pest, disease and other physiological disorder control, planting season, land preparation and intercultural operations respectively.

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