

## **Bamboo an Agro Based Industry: History of Bamboo Crafts and Its Importance in Our Day To Day Life**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Assam is inarguably the state in North East of India mostly known for its variety of craftworks across its two Valleys: the Brahmaputra valley and the Barak Valley. Bamboo based Handicrafts section is predominant in the Indian Handicrafts and there are millions of people who depend on it as their source of livelihood. In Assam Bamboo craft carried out traditionally in almost every household in the rural areas has been playing an important role in the rural economy. Bamboo has more than 1500 documented uses. 1000 million people live in houses made of Bamboo. In which Bamboo is the key structural material used for cladding on roofing element. Bamboo is a renewable source of Agro forestry products. Bamboo is high yield renewable natural resources. Instead of plywood, ply Bamboo is now being used for wall panelling, floor tiles; bamboo pulp for making paper, briquettes for fuel. It can be used to produce items of daily use that are currently made out of plastic that are less eco-friendly materials. Bamboo is also used in manufacturing wood substitutes, composites, utility products including Agarbatti. Goldsmith prefers Bamboo charcoal in making jewels. The main Bamboo growing areas of Assam are the districts of Cachar, KarbiAnglong, North Cachar Hills, Nowgong and Lakhimpur. The extent of Bamboo bearing area in the Forest of the state is 7283 kilometre as per the state of forest report 2011. The richness of tradition and excellence of artisanship is well reflected through the Bamboo crafts of North East India and these aspects definitely enrich the overall Indian craft traditions most fabulously.

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### **I. INTRODUCTION:**

Assam has been blended with very rich important tropical resources including Cane and Bamboo. It may be noted that Cane and Bamboo and now considered as most important natural and renewable vegetable resources in the world. Bamboo works are recognised for sustainable development in the economy of Assam. The wide range of utility of Cane and Bamboo products has the sanction of Production and culture in the state. The potentiality of making Cane and Bamboo articles on commercial scale is quite considerable for good demand in the state. As many as 51 species of Bamboo grow in Assam and they are being used for diverse purpose, mainly for buildings, furniture and diverse contraptions. The important species of Bamboo of economic value are the Muli (*Malocanna Bambusiodes*),

Dalu (*Teinostachyum Dalloa*), Khang (*Dendrocalmus Longis Patnus*), Kaligoda (*Oxytes Anthara Nignociliat a*) and Pecha (*Dendrocalamus Hamiton-II*). The Muli and Dalu have great commercial importance. The former is used for pulping, constructional and fencing purpose and the later for mat and basket industry.

The term Handicrafts encompasses a wide range of artefacts. One of the best definition of Handicrafts is that adopted by UNESCO-UNCTAD/WTO (ITC) at Manila, 6-8 October 1997 during a symposium on crafts, which is "Artisanal's products are those produced by artisans, either completely by hand, or with the help of hand tools or even mechanical means, as long as the direct manual contributions of the artisans remains the most substantial component of the finished product". The special nature of artisanal products derives from their distinctive features, which can be utilitarian, aesthetic, creative, culturally attached, decorative, functional, traditional, religiously and socially symbolic and significant.

The important feature of the handicraft in Assam is that these works not only provide income and personal employment opportunities to large number of rural families and full employment to many rural artisans but also exhibit an essential key to understanding of cultural, social and religious heritage in the state. The professionalism still emerges in this sector of the state in spite of the fact that Cane and Bamboo are easily available raw materials for the crafts.

### **IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY:**

The importance of Cane and Bamboo works as remunerative economic activity, is yet to be realised in Assam. As Cane and Bamboo products started to occupy diverse markets, the value of these resources tends to grow in the state. Cane and Bamboo based craft is now mainly a household industry and occupies an important place among the handicrafts of the State. It provides a subsidiary occupation to the cultivators and full-time occupation to the highly skilled artisans who produce only fine decorative baskets, furniture and mats, etc. on commercial scale. Additional benefits may be derived from Cane and Bamboo works, systematised resource use, management, marketing and processing in the state. In Assam, handicrafts study have been shown by some writers, departments, organisations etc. but very few systematic studies on the potentiality of the Cane and Bamboo work have been made in Assam. Only recently, some scholars and the very few organisations have shown their interest in assessing the present status and potentiality of Cane and Bamboo works in the state. The scope of our study covers problems and prospects of Handicrafts in Assam, particularly Cane and Bamboo works. It is hoped that such research study will also enrich knowledge, especially in the field of Handicrafts in the state. We also hoped that such knowledge will lead to overcome the different social economic barriers in the handicraft's sector in Assam.

### **HISTORY OF HANDICRAFTS PRODUCED BY BAMBOO:**

No definite records are available to establish the antiquity, history and origin of this craft in Assam. However, it can be safely assumed that the crafts were practiced since the misty past with the very dawn of Civilization. In the early period in Assam, Bamboo was held with special reference and is forbidden to cut in "auspicious days". It is a general belief that Bamboo possesses auspicious character and is of religious significance. An idea about the flourishing state of Cane and Bamboo products of Assam was found even during the time of Bhaskara Varman (early part of 7th century A.D), the king of Assam, may be had from the following extract. (An extract from "The History of Civilization of the People of Assam" by Dr P.C. Choudhury.)-

"Early literature refers to the well-decorated and coloured sitalpatis (cool mats) used by the rich people. Mats were usually made of cane. The classical writers testify the abundance of cane in the forests of Assam. Ptolemy, for instance, states that to the east of Serica, which we have identified with Assam, there were hills and marshes where canes were grown and used as bridges. Evidence of the production of other cane articles is also supplied by the 'Harshacharita', which mentions stools of cane. The cultivation of bamboo and its use for various purposes are well known. Banabhatta again testifies to this highly developed craft. He states that Bhaskara Varman sent to Harsha 'baskets of variously coloured reeds', 'thick bamboo tubes' and various birds in 'bamboo cages'. All these prove that various industrial arts were developed in Assam at an early period and were continued to be practiced till recent times, based on that traditions like those of the craftsmen of other parts of India..."

After the 13<sup>th</sup> century, Handicrafts had reached a very high point of perfection under the Ahom kings in Assam. The different professional classes like weavers, spinners, dyers, smith, workers in ivory, metal, wood, jewellery and pottery enjoyed state patronage and the villages were developed on the basis of these classes. Most of the artisans follow their hereditary pursuits and they had local and traditional Technology. Crafts production was on local consumption level. The artisan made Handicrafts products for men the home consumption, but occasionally some surplus products were supplied to the king's household and some products were exchanged particularly for goods. In the mediaeval period, besides the professional craftsman, some villages started making a variety of Bamboo Baskets, fishing appliances and containers which were locally bartering, oil, areca nuts, and rice in such other necessities of life. There were no guilds of craftsmen in Assam but the king made *Khel* system, specifying a particular profession. In the early seventeenth century, the Ahom king Pratap Singha, brought artisans from Koch Behar to teach new techniques and designs to the local artisans. In the mediaeval period, the Satra institution had played an important role for the development of various indigenous Crafts in Assam. In the Hills of Assam the tribal Handicrafts were interwoven with the social life of the family. Among the various crafts, the Cane and Bamboo works gained its popularity during the mediaeval period of Assam. The Ahoms, Kacharis, Kochs, Bodos, Mikirs, Miris and other ethnic groups have their own traditions on Cane and Bamboo handicrafts. The villagers made all sort of articles using Bamboo and Cane like roof of furnished kitchen using reed, fishing, farming as well as other utilitarian requirements of the households as well as the kingdom. These were used in the daily life of the Assamese people in the mediaeval period.

In the mediaeval period, the Satra institution also contributed to the development of Cane and Bamboo Crafts in Assam. Training in Cane and Bamboo works were also provided by the Satras. The famous *bichani* made from Cane in Aunati Satra signifies the skills obtained by the craftsmen in the Satra institution. The artistic Cane and Bamboo works in the Satras bore the witness of high order of craftsmanship in Assam. Generally, Cane and Bamboo items were made for home consumption, but with the change of economic situations

occasionally items were sold in the market. Bamboo is also used in making of mask since medieval time in satra institutions.

Most of the Sonowal Kacharis has engaged themselves in Bamboo field. They use it for their own purpose and also make some utensils for domestic use as well as for marketing. The Sonowal Kacharis know how to prepare Bamboo products like *Pasi*, *Kharahi*, *Duli*, *Dala*, *Salani*, *Kula* and tools for fishing, weaving, agriculture, food making and decorative products. They also use Bamboo shoots as food included in different recipes.

#### DIFFERENT BAMBOO BASED CARFTS:

Some important utensils used in our day to day life made from Bamboo are discussed below-

#### Household Equipments-

**Chalani(sieve):-**It is woven with live Bamboo slips in a criss-cross way, keeping some open spaces between in different slips as required for different purposes. The '*chalani*' is a round shaped disc-like object and its diameter varies from one foot to three foot. It is used in sieving rice, paddy, tea-leaves, etc. and also for washing fish.

**Kula(winnowing fan):-**It is prepared out of flat Bamboo slips for winnowing purpose indifferent sizes and shapes. Twilled design is used for a *kula*. The edge of the *Kula* is made strong by fixing of two sets of one-inch wide Bamboo pieces wrapped up in flexible cane strips.

**Khorahi(Small basket):-**'*Khorahi*' is made of fine Bamboo splits for washing rice, vegetables, fish, etc. It is a small basket-like thing with provision to allow water and dirt to pass out. The '*Khorahi*' is woven in plain and square form but is gradually bent in a round form at the time of final stitching by flexible cane slips.

**Dukula/Tukuri(Big basket):-** The shape of '*Dukula*' is exactly the same as that of the '*Khorahi*', but the size and process of preparation is a bit different. The required shape of a '*tukuri*' is made by bending the Bamboo splits forming the wrap gradually when the process of weaving with the weft is in operation. Fixing two or four flat bamboo strips strengthens the edge. The last stage is to stitch the edge along with those flat bamboo strips with some flexible cane slips. The size of a '*dukula*' or a '*tukuri*' is much bigger than that of the '*Khorahi*' and is used for carrying as well as keeping paddy, rice, etc

**Dala(Bamboo tray)-**'*Dala*' is prepared out of flexible bamboo slips in twilled design. The shape of a '*dala*' is exactly like a disc with various sizes for different purposes. The edge around the '*dala*' is stitched in the same way as that of the edge of a '*tukuri*' or '*dukula*', but the bamboo rims used in the edge of the '*dala*' is about 1 inch. The '*dala*' is used specially for rearing silk worms and for winnowing in addition to other domestic purposes.

**Duli(BigBasket)-** The '*duli*' or '*tali*' are used for preserving paddy. The process of weaving is almost the same as that of '*tukuri*' but size of Bamboo slips used is more flat and flexible. The '*dulis*' are much bigger than the '*tukuri*' and the shape is a bit different too.

**FISHING IMPLEMENTS:** There are various kinds of fishing equipment prepared by Bamboo and wood in different parts of the state .a brief description of some of the fishing implements widely used like *Polo*, *Jakai*, *Khalai*, *Dori*, *Chepa*, *Paran*, *Jhuti*, *Hogra* etc. is given below-

**Polo-**It resembles the shape of a dome with short stem of about 6 inch diameter open at the top. The diameter at the bottom varies from 2-foot to 3-foot and even unto 4-foot.It is used for fishing in Shallow water. It is prepared out of small Bamboo strips for stand with fine and flexible wood slips. The man who uses it hold it by the side of the stem, presses its rim on the mud, then pulls it back and lifts above or up to the level of water and again presses it as before while moving on through water. Whenever any fish is caught, he puts his hand inside through the stem to catch hold of the fish; '*julki*' is a small polo prepared in the same fashion. Juluki is small Polo prepared in the same fashion.

**Jakai:-** The '*Jakai*' is a species of wicker work shovel that is either dragged along the bottom or placed on the water bed to catch the small fishes which take refuge in it when the weed is trampled. It is prepared with Bamboo slips, which are locally known as is '*dai*'. '*Jati*' Bamboo is specially used for making this particular implement.

**Chepa:-**The '*Chepa*' is made of some prepared Bamboo rods according to required size. These are woven in a roundish fashion with jute string or soft cane slips. A bamboo-made valve locally known as 'par' (Bengali) and 'kal' (Assamese) is fitted in the middle of the chepa to allow the fishes to enter inside with no scope for going out.

'*Japi*' is most important another product made by Bamboo. Many varieties of '*Japis*' such as '*HaluaJapi*', '*PithaJapi*', '*SorudoiyaJapi*', '*BordoiyaJapi*', '*Cap Japi*' etc. are produced in districts of Kamrup, Nowgong, Darrang,Sibsagar and Lakhimpur. Nalbari and its neighbouring villages (such as Kamarkuchi,Mughkuchi etc.) of Kamrup district deserve special mention in respect of manufacturing of '*Fulam Japis*'(*decorated Bamboo*

umbrellas). In Olden days, this particular 'Japis' are served as headgears for the females of noble and rich families, but now it has become outdated. This traditional headgear (*japi*) is made of strips of Bamboo and special kind of dried Palm leaves locally known as 'tokow-pat'. A Japi is more advantageous to the cultivators and other open air workers than the conventional umbrella, because the cultivator after putting it on can tie the strings around his chin leaving his hands free to work in any position- standing, squatting or stooping.

It may be recalled that that Cane and Bamboo are used for the construction of houses, bridges, various kinds of household utility items, fishing instruments, musical implements, weaving implements, decorative item, ploughing instruments, hunting implements, umbrella handles, walking sticks, tool handles, fishing rods, tent poles, cordage adders, yokes, basket, toys, hand fans, and various domestic and agricultural implements etc. For the daily uses of Assamese people that Cane and Bamboo articles are *Bahi, Bichani, Bor Chunga, Cheap, Charekee, Dola, Doon, Duli, Gagona, Garaka, Hukuma, Hali, Japi, Jakoi, Juluki, Japa, Kula, Khoraha, Karia, Khuka, Latai, Muhura, Murha, Pachi, Tuna, Thoura, Toka, Ugha, Flower Vase, Fruit Tray, Tea Tray, Candle Stand, Flower Basket, Beer Mug, Jewellery Box, Garden Chair, Ladies Hand Mirror* etc are used extensively for day to day life of the people of Assam.

## II. CONCLUSION:

Crafts are the one of the earliest expressions of human creativity. People have been using crafts for making their daily lives comfortable by producing crafts for utilitarian purposes, and to express their creativity by carving certain exotic and aesthetic materials. Handicraft can be defined as the combination of Art and Craft where local raw materials are used in the process of production. The main stages of production are performed by hand with manual tools and instruments and each product unit reflects its producer's artistic talent and mental creativity in some way. The Cane and Bamboo products used for domestic purpose are prepared in every nook and corner of the state out of split Bamboo and fine flexible Cane strips. Different types of Bamboo and Cane mats (*Dhari and Pati*) are very popular in Assam. Especially in the rural areas thousands of artisans are engaged in producing these. 'Japi' deserves a special mention as this particular handicraft has caught the attention of the country as a whole.

Special effort has also been made for promotion of Bamboo handicrafts and marketing of various Bamboo products that are developed by national Bamboo mission in Assam. A Bamboo Park at Chayagaon is under construction at a cost of 62.28 corers which will create integrated infrastructure for Bamboo based industries. Besides, the Cane and Bamboo technology centre (CBTC), Guwahati is one of the Bamboo technical support group under the National Bamboo Mission of the ministry of agriculture. Another most ambitious project of NMBA (National Mission on Bamboo Applications) is to try and use Bamboo planting as an anti-erosion tool in Majuli Island. NMBA is also focussing on Tissue Culture (TC) for increasing Bamboo productivity in the region.

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