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Atmanirbhar Bharat and the Development Perspective of 'Seetal Pati' Weavers of Karimganj District: Revisiting in terms of Gandhian vision of Self-contained Community

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Abstract: The main purpose of this paper is to examine the development perspective of an indigenous rural crafts that being practiced from generation to generation with inherited skill in a very much remote and agriculturally backward area of Karimganj district, Assam. Even today, for a large section of villagers in the study area, 'Seetal Pati' crafts is the only source of livelihood. It has been observed that the socio-economic conditions of the weavers associated in the profession of seetal pati crafts continues to plague in the absence of proper agricultural and industrial development. Against this backdrop, an attempt has been made to examine the present status of the weavers of seetal pati crafts in one hand and the possible way forward for its development on the other hand. Besides, revisiting the Gandhian concept of Self-contained community and the recent initiative of Atmanirbhar Bharat under the leadership of Hon'ble Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the study finds that this indigenous rural crafts industry has a tremendous scope for its development. The study uses both primary and secondary data sources and the descriptive statistics have been used for data analysis wherever necessary.

Keywords: Atmanirbhar Bharat, Seetal Pati, Rural Crafts, Self-contained Community, Development.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The main purpose of this paper is to examine the development perspective of an indigenous rural crafts that being practiced from generation to generation with inherited skill in a very much remote and agriculturally backward area of Karimganj district, Assam. Even today, for a large section of villagers in the study area, 'Seetal Pati' crafts is the only source of livelihood. Literally the scientific name of Seetal Pati (cool mat) is 'Schumannianthus dichotomus' and it was firstly described by William Roxburgh which is typically found in riparian areas. It is a rhizomatous plant with an erect and glossy green stem attaining a height of 3–5 meter and a diameter of up to 20 mili meter. The stems are leafy and dichotomously branched from which seetal pati are made by the artisans. In other words, traditional artisans make strips from the outer portion of the stem including the epidermal part. After processing the split strips of Mutra plants are plaited into mats and other useful products like prayer mats, baskets, bags, etc. The strips from the pith portion are used as binding materials, and thus a section of rural people are exclusively depends on this profession for their livelihood. However, over the years it has been observed that the socio-economic conditions of the weavers associated in the profession of seetal pati crafts continues to plague in the absence of proper agricultural and industrial development. The seetal pati / cool mat weaving practices thus can become a potential enterprises

for sustainable livelihood for the rural generation (Maity, et. al 2020). The artisans associated with Seetal pati is found to make this craft as their major source of livelihood. Apart of livelihood it is also an indicator of strong identity in terms of particular craftsmanship and also making cluster in the society as family based craft. It may also lead to make a strong bonding in the family members (Ehmer 2001), as well as a sense of harmony among the seetal pati weaver clusters in the society. Moreover, rural artisans can make a better living and accumulate wealth on the basis of craft production (Rutten, 1990). Many evidences are there through out the practices of handicrafts, the small artisans groups and cluster becoming micro enterprises, which also significantly contribute to their standard of living. Support from the Government and different rural development nationalized banks it is found that small SHGs became the primary stakeholders of the collaborative group enterprise and all the family associated with the group behaving as microenterprise (Chatrapathy, 2005). Against this backdrop, an attempt has been made to examine the present status of the weavers of seetal pati crafts in one hand and the possible way forward for its development on the other hand. Besides, revisiting the Gandhian concept of Self-contained community and the recent initiative of Atmanirbhar Bharat under the leadership of Hon'ble Prime Minister Modi, the study has focused on the possible development of this rural crafts in coming days to come. The conceptual framework of the policy of Atmanirbhar Bharat has been incorporated in the subsequent section of the paper.

RATIONAL E OF THE STUDY

Existence of unemployment, low education and extreme poverty among the seetal pati weavers leading to the emergence of erratic disturbances among the labourers in terms of labor fighting etc. makes the study of the paper a most substantial one. The paper attempts to make a deep study on the issues like the rising frustration among the seetal pati weavers arising out of step motherly treatment of the Government and the migratory nature of the people associated with this profession. It is significant to make the study because, since time immemorial the seetal pati craft is the main occupations in the study area, but now this crafts are slowly disappearing from our society. With the increase in plastic made products or other similar type products, which are cheap in price, more friendly in use and decorative in its look as the substitutes of the crafts, the market of seetal pati products are likely to fall. As a result the real income of the seetal pati workers are decreasing day by day and thus, makes it necessary to have a comprehensive and scientific study of the deteriorating economic conditions of these seetal pati artisans. The seetal pati workers are characterized by low capital, lack of modern tools and technology, poor education, mostly unorganized, low level of institutional framework etc. leads to poor turnover and thus the contribution of these craft industries towards the national income of the State is also poor. Against this backdrop, an attempt has been made to examine the present status of the weavers of seetal pati crafts in one hand and the possible way forward for its development on the other hand in the light of recent campaign of Atmanirbhar Bharat.

OBJECTIVES

The objective of the study are-

- i) To examine the present status of the weavers of seetal pati crafts in Kaliganj area of Karimganj district; and
- ii) To know about the possible way forward for the development of this crafts in the light of recent campaign of Atmanirbhar Bharat.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- 1. What is the present status of seetal pati weavers in Kaliganj area of Karimganj District?
- 2. Is there any scope for the development of seetal pati industry under the campaign of Atmanirbhar Bharat?

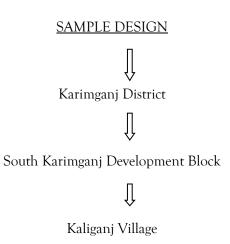
MATERIALS AND METHODS

STUDY SITE

The study is confined within the Kaliganj village of Karimganj district. It is situated under the south Karimganj development block. The area of the block is 234.94 sq. kms. It is connected with the main road and railways. There are 2,44,471 population in the block out of which 1,24,092 are male and remaining 1,20,379 are female. The average family size in the block is 4.96. Likewise, the village Kaliganj is located in the south eastern part of the Karimganj district which is about 13 kms away for the head quarter of the district. There are 246 households in the village and the total population is 1319 as per 2011 population census. The average household size in the village is 5.36. With respect to economic status, most of the households are earning their livelihood from agricultural and non-agricultural activities. At present the Kaliganj area is popularly known as micro educational hub of Karimganj district as a number of good educational institutions have been growing up in recent years.

METHOD

With respect to methodology is concerned, the present study is based on both primary and secondary data sources. As there are 246 households in the village so 27 percent households were surveyed to get the required information. Thus the sample size is 67 in the present study. The author is pleased to record here that in February 2020 the field survey was conducted in the Kaliganj village under South Karimganj Development block to examine the scope and challenges of seetal pati workers. In this way, using structured questionnaire, different information were collected from the respondents using purposive random sampling techniques. Besides, secondary sources like-book, newspapers and internet have alsobeen used wherever necessary. Likewise, in the process of analysis, statistical measures like mean and percentage were used wherever requirement arises.



As the focus of the study is also to understand the economic status of the weavers, so it is necessary to determine the poverty lines. Poverty line, in India, is interpreted in terms of income/expenditure required to access a pre-defined basket of goods which are considered necessary for sustenance. Thus,

households that fails to meet the daily requirements based on their income (MPCI) are defined as poor (BPL) and who can meet the requirements is termed as non-poor (APL) in the present study. The poverty lines are periodically revised by the government agencies (formerly Planning Commission of India and now NITI Ayog i.e., National Institution for Transforming India) for all the states in the Indian Union on the basis of nationwide surveys on Consumption Expenditure conducted by the National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO). Given the differences in cost of living between rural and urban areas in each state, the last official estimate of poverty lines for Indian states based on the recommendations of the Expert Group was announced by the Planning Commission in 2011-12. It is important to note here that the consumer price index (CPI) for Assam in 2011-12 was given at INR 116.28 and for the year 2020 it was INR 151.3 (as per provisional estimate, GOI). But, the survey for the present study was conducted in 2020, and therefore, the poverty line of INR 1066.66 per capita for rural Assam in 2011-12 was revised using the CPI for rural areas as follows:

Revised Income Poverty Line=
$$\frac{Income\ Poverty\ Line for\ 2011-12}{CPI\ for\ Rural\ Assam\ 2011-12}*CPI\ for\ Rural\ Assam\ 2020$$

=INR 1388

In this way, in our study area a rural household was defined as Below the Poverty Line (BPL) if the Monthly Per-capita Income (MPCI) is less than INR 1388. Thus, based on the results obtained from the above analysis, the rural households in the Kaliganj Village are grouped into the following two categories:

- a) BPL Household, MPCI is more than zero but less than INR 1388
- b) APL Household, MPCI is more than or equal to INR 1388.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

1. Based on the survey data it has been found that seetal pati is a very much traditional rural crafts that being practiced in Kaliganj area. It is evident from Table-1 that almost 91 percent responded agreed that their forefather or father were associated with the profession of this crafts and thus since time immemorial it has been considered it as one of the major sources of livelihood for these households. Also it is found that about 73.1 percent seet pati workers are working since more than thirty years which highly signifies about the importance of this rural crafts. Regarding the art of making seetal pati it has been observed that they have learnt the technique either from their forefather or father and thus generation wise some of the households are involved in this profession for so many years. Besides, it is also found that although they have collected the raw material from the local areas but 15 percent of the responded agreed that the availability of the raw materials has been declining over the years. Moreover, all the respondents agreed that traditional equipment is sufficient tool for producing seetal pati and about 52.2 percent are agreed to continue this profession in future too.

Table-1: General Profile of the Sample Households

Attributes and Classification		Percent	Frequencies
Was your forefather/father associated with weaving	Yes	91.0	61
of seetal pati	No	09.0	06
	0-10	09.0	06
For how many years associated with this	10-20	10.5	07
crafts/profession	20-30	7.4	05
	30 and above	73.1	49
	Grand Father/Grand	61.1	41
	mother		
From where you learnt the art of weaving seetal	Parents	27.1	18
pati	Self	7.4	05
	Any other	4.4	03
From where you collect the raw materials	Local site	94.0	63
	Outside	06.0	04
Is raw materials are easily available	Yes	85.0	57
	No	15.0	10
What type of equipments you used in making pati	Traditional	100	67
	Non-traditional	0.0	00
	Yes	52.2	35
Would you like to continue this profession	No	13.4	09
	No comment	34.4	23

Source: Field Survey.

2. With respect to economic status of the sample household it is found that 46.3 percent households (Table-2) are in below the poverty line while 53.73 percent are above the poverty line as defined in the study. So, it is evident that the incidence of poverty among the seetal pati weavers is high as compared to the national average (27 percent as per 2011 census). Non-existence of own agricultural land lack of opportunity in diversification of occupation could be the reason behind the more poverty across the sample households in the study area.

Table-2: Economic Status of Sample Household

Condition	Economic Status	Percent	Frequencies
MPCI is more than zero but less than INR 1388	BPL	46.3	31
MPCI is more than or equal to INR 1388	APL	53.73	36

Source: Field Survey.

3.The general demographic profile of the sample household is outlined in Table-3. Regarding composition of population across the sample households it is found that 178 (49.1 percent) are female and remaining 184 (50.9 percent) are male. The average age of the population is 37.82 which signify about the status of workforce within the study area. Besides, the average education across the sample households is only 8.64 which is a matter of serious concerned and this issue needs to be address properly. Religion wise it is found that the area is mostly dominated by muslim community. With respect to composition of population in caste wise it is found that 52 percent surveyed households belongs to general caste category followed by 43 percent OBC and hardly 5 percent are MOBC. Surprisingly, social groups like SC, ST or Tea Tribe's are completely non existence within the study area. Again, with respect to distribution of household by income status it is found that 37.3 percent

household monthly per-capita income is in between INR 1388 to INR 2000 while only 16.4 percent has INR 2001 and more in the study area. Thus, about 53.7 percent households are above the poverty line (INR 1388 or more).

Table-3: Demographic Profile of the Sample Household

Component	Classification	Percent	Frequencies
	Male	49.1	178
	Female	50.9	184
Population Feature	Total	100	362
	Average Age	37.82	362
	Average Education	8.64	362
	Household Size	5.4	67
	Hindu	0.0	00
Religion	Muslim	100	67
	Others	0.0	00
	General	52.0	35
Caste	MOBC	5.0	03
	OBC	43.0	29
	ST/SC/Others (Tea Tribes)	00	00
Distribution of household	0-INR 1387 (BPL)	46.3	31
by income status	INR 1388- INR 2000 (APL)	37.3	25
	INR 2001 & above (APL)	16.4	11
	Total APL Household	53.7	36

Source: Field Survey.

4. Accessibility of asset and other social amenities has both positive and significant influence on rural households as reflected in the various studies that have been done so far in different parts of the country and across the globe. In fact, assets and other amenities are the resources with a use or productive value on which households depend and choose their livelihood. Table-4illustrated the ownership pattern of a dozen selected assets across the different sample households in the study area. A perusal of the figures presented in the table enables us to make two succinct observations. First, significant variations exist in the ownership of assets among the sample households. Second, inequality in asset ownership is more pronounced in case of certain assets while they appear less glaring for others. The Table-4 also analyses the ownership of agricultural land by the sample households. The study has found that the ownership of agricultural land across the sample household is relatively widespread and unequal. The extent of agricultural land having size of more than 2.0 hectare is almost nil for all the sample households. It is obvious from the table that about 10.4 percent of the marginal sized agricultural land (1.0-2.0 Ha.) is owned by the sample households. Similarly 43.2 percent household owned less than 1.0 Ha. sized of agricultural land while 42 percent are landless. This is indicative that households that do not own agricultural lands are forced to seek wage employments involving laborious occupations like agricultural and non-agricultural wage employments. It is also evident from the table that about 86.6 percent sample household has their own bank account/post office savings account and this may be attributed to the Jan Dhan Yojana, a programme of financial inclusion implemented by the Government of India on a mission mode since 2015. A reverse picture has been observed in terms of access to insurance facilities across the respondents. It is found that about 91 percent rural household in the surveyed area does not have insurance policy. It may be attributed due to the ignorance of insurance or unable to access insurance policy because of their poor economic conditions. Besides, regarding participation in community organization programme or membership in SHGs or NGOs

including access to different social welfare scheme sponsored by the government (social asset) it is found that 83.6 percent sample households do not have the social membership. Moreover, about 32.9 percent surveyed household reported that they have BPL card issued by the government. Livestock is one of the important components of natural assets hold by a household.

Livestock is considered an important source of income for the farmers/rural craftsman. It is the source of draught power and gives the manure for crop production and fuel for domestic use, and thus, makes a positive contribution to the economic development. It has been observed that the stock of livestock within the study area is skewed in a higher proportion. From the field survey it is found that only 19.4 rural household has the livestock. In addition to that the Table-4 also shows the access to safe-drinking water, sanitation facilities, and housing facilities of the households in the study area. These are important as they reflect the standard of well-being of the people. It shows that the access capacity of different asset and amenities in the study area is very low. Housing is an important asset as well as an indicator of well-being of the rural household. It is found that 71.6 percent houses are just in livable condition within the study area. Likewise, hardly 12 percent surveyed household has the safe drinking water facilities and about 55.2 percent has access to sanitation facilities within the premises.

Table-4: Status of Assets and Amenities of the Weavers

Component	Classification	Percent	Frequencies
Agricultural land Owned	Landless household	42.0	28
	Less than marginal (0-1.0 Ha.)	43.2	29
	Marginal (1.0-2.0 Ha.)	10.4	07
	Small (2.0-4.0 Ha.)	4.4	03
	Medium (10.0-20.0 Ha.)	0.0	00
	Large (20.0 & above Ha.)	0.0	00
Bank Account	Yes	86.6	58
	No	13.4	09
Insurance Policy	Yes	9.0	06
	No	91.0	61
Social Membership	Yes	16.4	11
	No	83.6	56
Government Assistance	Yes	12.0	08
	No	88.0	59
BPL Card	Yes	32.9	22
	No	67.1	45
Livestock (at least any one)	Yes	19.4	13
·	No	80.6	54
Sanitation	Yes	55.2	37
	No	44.8	30
House Type	Kaccha	71.6	48
	Pacca/Semi Pacca	28.4	19
Safe Drinking Water	Yes	12.0	08
	No	88.0	59
Electricity	Yes	73.1	49
	No	26.9	18

Source: Field Survey.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF THE CAMPAIGN ATMANIRBHAR BHARAT

The concept of 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' or 'Self-reliant India' is the recent campaign initiated by the Hon'ble Prime Minister of India on May, 12, 2020. The thrust focus area of this campaign is to make India self-reliant in all aspects in true sense. In other words, the important vision of the mission is to make Indian economy completely independent and self-reliant and accordingly one special economic and comprehensive package has been declared by Modi amounting INR 20 lakh crore (it is same to the 10 percent of India's GDP) on the same day to fight Covid-19 pandemic. However, to kick start the campaign of atmanirbhar bharat positively and effectively he has also initiated the slogan 'vocal for local', 'local for global' and 'make for world'. The significance of this mantra is that all products should be 'made in India' and at the same time these products should be available to everyone irrespective of community, class and creed, region etc in efficient and competitive ways. In other words, the significance message of this slogan is that India should be able to satisfy the needs of its people in one hand and should have world appeal and reach on the other hand. Moreover, in his address to the nation on the occasion of Independence Day 2020, he appealed to the common people of India to use and produce local items to strengthen the economy, and thus, by introducing this campaign he tried to encourage and motivate the local young Indian to contribute in the process of nation building.

It should be noted that the entire framework of the campaign of atmanirbhar bharat is based on five important key pillars as identified by Hon'ble Modi and these are:

- 1. **Economy**: It is the first pillar of the new policy of which main objective is to bring a quantum positive jump of Indian economy instead of focusing on natural or incremental change of the growth of the economy.
- 2. **Infrastructure**: The second pillar of the campaign as identified by Hon'ble Prime Minister Modi is that infrastructure. Since a sound infrastructural facilities is the prerequisite of the development of any economy so he urged on the development of world class infrastructural facilities within the country and reckoned that it would be the identity of the modern India.
- 3. System: It is the third pillar of the atmanirbhar bharat policy. Here the concept 'system' implies a technology-driven modern system instead of traditional one which can fulfil the dreams of modern India.
- 4. Demography: The demographic characteristic of the country has been termed as the fourth pillar of the initiative of atmanirbhar bharat campaign. Hon'ble Modi has recognized the demographic dividends as one of the vibrant strength of the country as majority of the population belongs to the working age group. It is also said that the prevailing human resource energy can contribute a lot for a self-reliant of the country.
- 5. Demand: Creation of effective demand and supply chain within the economy with its full potential has been called as the fifth and last pillar of the initiative of self-reliant society. The message of this strategy is that the demand and supply chain system of the country should be strengthen in order to increase the demand for goods in the country and to fulfil this growing demand. For this purposes efforts will be given to set up more avenues that suit the local needs based on locally available natural and human resources.

However, it is argued that the campaign of atmanirbhar bharat is more or less carbon copy to the concept of self-reliant village economy initiated by the father of nation M.K. Gandhi. Because, if we revisit the Gandhian concept of self-contained community it is found that Gandhi was also in favor of local or self-reliant village economy. The ideal economic condition according to M.K. Gandhi is selfsufficiency of the rural/village economy and it is completely depends upon the harmony with the resources of the economy in one hand and the production technique that suit the country's requirements on the other hand. Likewise, the concept of Gandhian principle of self-contained community is nothing but it is the goal of Gandhian production scheme. The idea behind this scheme was that each community should be able to satisfy the needs of its people and urged that a radius of five miles as the basic of a unit which is to be self-contained. According to Gandhi the natural consumption requirements of a basic unit based on factors like-geological situation, psychological and temperamental condition of the people, traditions and customs of the community and occupational pattern and cultural attainments of the people. So, Gandhijis idea of self-contained community talks not only about the consumption requirements of the masses but also it must be synchronized with the availability of natural resources and human potentialities with climatic conditions. In this way, he considered selfsufficient village economy as an alternative solution to the problems of poverty and unemployment as large scale production is not ideal in a country like India due to obvious reasons.

FINANCIAL PACKAGES SO FAR FOR ATMANIRBHAR BHARAT

In order to attain the self sufficiency of Indian economy altogether three Atmanirbhar Bharat packages have been announced so far and the phase wise announcement of financial assistance by the government has shown as under:

Table-5: Resource allocation for Atmanirbhar Bharat Campaign

Phase	Date and Year	Amount (INR)	Amount in US\$
First Phase	May 12, 2020	20 Lakh Core	US\$280 Billion
Second Phase	October 12, 2020	73000 Crore	US\$10 Billion
Third Phase	November, 12, 2020	2.65 Lakh Crore	US\$ 37 Billion

Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Atmanirbhar_Bharat#Definition

The above table-5 simply talks about the allocation of fund for different initiative which would be utilized in course of time for the attainment of self sufficiency and the data are self explanatory. However, it should be noted that apart from such efforts, a number of other government decisions have already been taken place in last couple of months which includes changing and revising the definition of MSME (Micro, Small and Medium Enterprise) in Indian perspective, encouraging participation of private sectors in different segments of the economy, allowing more FDI (Foreign Direct Investment) in Indian defence system, more importance on solar manufacturing sector are some of the notable examples in this context.

ATMANIRBHAR BHARAT AND THE SEETAL PATI CRAFTS: A WAY FORWARD

In the precious section the concept of atmanirbhar bharat campaign has been outlined including the financial allocation under this scheme which would be utilized in a strategic way to attain a self-reliant economy. Considering government initiative under this framework it is reckoned that the socio-economic conditions of the seetal pati weavers can be improved to a large extent by creating more

avenues of this beautiful rural crafts. The following possible steps may be undertaken by th egovernment under atmanirbhar bharat campaign for the development of the seetal pati weavers:

Firstly, Government may rethink about the marketing of seetal pati by creating a conducive environment that is favourable especially to local artisans and rural handicrafts manufacturers;

Secondly, Local area development in terms of app and web based business system may also be introduced in such area through startups. It can be said that the provision of ecommerce at the grassroots level will create more job opportunity and can also keep the atmosphere of manufacturing alive within the state and country;

Thirdly, Government may also increase the investment of capital for the development of indigenous rural crafts like seetal pati to make it financially strong and vocalizing local goods. Besides, local entrepreneurs or investors may also start their business with large companies which benefit the local manufacturers;

Fourthly, Diversification of the product may also be considered in this regard. It has been observed that the use of biodegradable and reusable items is increasing day by day and hence there is good scope of development of such rural crafts industry. The weavers can make different items like bag, mat etc by using such golden fibre;

Fifthly, Government may also give much more importance in the application of innovation and technology in rural crafts industry in the production and distribution process. At present rural craftspeople also realize that technology is the only way to survive and develop such crafts; and

Sixthly, Last but not the least, government may adopt proper strategy on the expansion of women entrepreneurs in the study area. Since art and crafts profession are more attractive venture for women entrepreneurs so with a minimum investment it can provide more employment opportunity to the women workers.

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