

Craft Culture & Tourism: *Scopes of improvement and promotion*

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Abstract: Handloom and handicrafts are among the most striking things of the state of Assam, which is a part of the north eastern region of India. Its technique and style have hardly seen any change since its evolution. Different type of crafts includes bamboo crafts, silk textiles, traditional bell metal products, masks, toys, traditional jewelries etc.

Tourism industry of Assam can prove to be a very good platform, where the promotion and marketing of craft culture can be experienced. Assam has rich natural beauty and bio-diversity which attracts tourists not only from various part of India, but also from other nations. These tourists often prove to be very good consumers of the craft sector. There is a requirement of improvement in this sector in order to create more consumers. Hence there is a requirement to understand the loop holes and find out the areas where improvement is required, so as to improve this sector which in a way will be directly benefiting the local craftsmen and artisans.

Keywords: *Craft, handlooms, marketing, promotion, tourism, artisans*

1. Introduction

Handicraft has a strong influence in the Indian history tracing back to 19th and 20th century, when social reformers started promoting village based crafts for cultural and economic regeneration of India. Handicraft products are mostly traditional and handmade. It has been kept alive by the local artisans or the craftsmen of a particular locality. The perfection of the handmade work is observed in case of handicrafts. Assam, a state that is situated in the northeastern part of India is rich in its craft culture.

There is a strong connection between the craft market and the tourism industry. This paper is about the understanding of the limitations in the tourism sector in order to improve the craft tourism of this state. It also aims in finding out the area of improvements in the touristic development, which can lead to the promotion of the craft sector. Development in tourist industry is directly proportional to the up gradation of the craft industry and it is also one of the modes, which can keep the craft culture alive.

2. Background Study

The development of the tourism sector is not up to the mark and hence Assam is not successful in reaching the expected amount of tourist visit, which ultimately results in unavailability of one of the major platform for Art and Craft of this region. Awareness is

also missing among people. Proper heritage villages are not available which could have been a source of better understanding of the craft sector for the tourists. Promotion and publicity of this sector is properly not executed.

The craft sector is facing problem in terms of economic development because of lack of proper market, promotion and a platform. Tourism sector, which can provide a very good platform for craft promotion is also not up to the mark. Improvement is required and before that a proper study is necessary to understand the areas of improvement. This paper aims to discover the scope of improvement in Assam tourism sector in order to promote craft culture of this region.

Many tourists like to travel around the world with a target of visiting those regions where craft culture dominates the social activity of an area. They want to explore the creativity and the skill that runs in the blood of the craftsmen and also understand how the culture is passed on from one generation to the other. They want to experience their lifestyle, culture and their connection with the particular craft, which is the major source of income for them. This kind of touristic activity is also termed as **CRAFT TOURISM**.

Assam, the frontier of entire North East India, is a myriad of mixed culture. This land of cultural diversity, ethnicity, skills etc. is also diverse in various craft traditions, which is responsible for the diversity in the tradition and social life of this place. These mixtures of tradition and culture have given rise to different creative elements like various language and dialects, music and dance forms, songs and most importantly craft culture. These varied elements were nourished by the surroundings since ages in order to propagate and promote the expanded discrepancies of this state. Hence Assam can be considered as a home of multi cultural treasure in the name of craft culture.

History of Assamese craft is very rich in terms of skill, intricacy, creativity, skill and also achievements. For the outside world, the culture of Assam has always been a matter of curiosity, and it intern attracts outsiders to explore this piece of land in all aspects. In the state of Assam, craft tradition is so rich that, almost 1.46 lakhs of craftsmen are involved in this sector. It is really sad to know that, most of them belong to the weaker section of the society and out of which many of them have been awarded with certificate of merits and various national level awards. A lot of government as well as non-government organizations have taken initiatives to provide good platforms for the marketing and promotion of these crafts so that it benefits the crafts person. Cane and bamboo are abundantly available in Assam. Cane furniture is largely produced in Assam. Cane furniture has got established market in the country. Due to increasing demand for this furniture by foreign tourists, a major share of the total production in Assam is exported. Exports are made through organizations like North Eastern Handicrafts and Handloom Development Corporation Ltd. (NEHHDC), Assam Government Marketing Corporation Ltd. (AGMC) and some private export houses. If manufacturers are able to supply in time and in adequate quantities, the export prospects of cane furniture are excellent. Hence, the potential for cane and bamboo products is considerable and the industry can grow at 15% per year.

The above information is about the marketing of cane furniture, which got its recognition at a wide range because of a tourist. Similarly the other craft sector like the handloom, bell metal craft, bamboo craft etc. can also get much better platform if the tourism sector can prove to be more potential.

Therefore, the tourists who are looking for a different kind of experience should be exposed to the huge tradition of craft culture of this area. With the aim of craft tourism in mind, a study was conceived. It is explained in one of the books based on tourism by Mrinmoy K. Sarma from Tezpur University, Assam.

3. Aim and Objectives of The Study

1. To study various steps taken by the tourism to promote the crafts.
2. To understand the kind of benefit the craftsmen get through it.
3. To find the loopholes of this sector.
4. To come out with results which can give proper areas for the designers or related professionals can further work for the improvement.
5. To try to understand the satisfaction level of the craft producers.

4. Methodology

In order to understand the loop holes in the entire system described above, some study needs to be conducted. It includes certain methods like identification of the need and then continuing with some research. It is broadly described in the following points.

4.1 Need Identification

There is a need for enhancing and upgrading the entire system of the Assam tourism sector in terms marketing and management.

Even though the craft sector is connected to this tourism department, it is not well organized and the tourists are not properly aware of the crafts, so there is a need to erase that gap between the tourist and the craft sector through proper promotion.

4.2 Ethnographic Research

This part of research mainly included the field study and interaction with some craftsmen and self-observation.

The field study included following parts:

- Visit to the Assam State museum.
From the observation, it is being understood that the explanation of the local craft of

Assam is properly not mentioned. The beauty and the authenticity of the local craft were missing in the museum.

The finding says that, not only about the explanation of craft but overall architecture and ambience is not tourism friendly. It is not attracting or welcoming for the tourists. It needs certain measures to change the present scenario of overall development tourism.

- Understanding of the different kind of marketing pattern followed locally. Starting from village and small town haat (bazaars), then emporiums, exhibitions on different occasions and seasonal fairs and festivals, etc. all are very useful outlets and show windows for the promotion of handicrafts:
- **Haat/Bazaar:** An informal market place called haat or bazar is the traditional marketing outlets of handicrafts. Each haat/bazar is a display of the products skills and culture of that particular area. These characteristics attracts many tourists to haat/bazaar because they know that they are going to buy is the genuine local product of the artisan. Therefore, Govt. should provide the facilities like market shed and other amenities to display and sale local artisan's handicrafts at the important haats in an around Barujani village.
- **Private shops:** At present private shops and souvenir shops are the major windows of sales of the craft that cater the needs of the locals, visitors and tourists.
- **Emporium:** Emporium is the show window of crafts and handlooms and also presents a cultural picture of the place and the entire state. It displays for sale all sorts of ornaments, artifacts, and decorative and utilitarian articles out of particular regions, communities and cultures from a composite whole of state. With the host of number of crafts and tourist attractions at Guwahati and Hajo, emporiums here will serves the purpose of marketing goods for local craftspeople. It will be recommended place of shopping for tourist because price and quality will be ensured.
- **Fairs and Festivals:** In fairs and festivals rural life comes alive where thousands of people flock here and brink business, colorful entertainment and religious flavor are all part of the festivities. By adding colour to these fairs and festivals more and more tourists can be attracted. Tourism department should published promotional literature highlighting such fairs and festivals along with handicrafts.
- **Shilpgram and Shilp Bazar:** Silpagram is a model of traditional village life, which is to a considerable extent self, contained i.e. interlocking occupational theme. Shilpgram attempts to be an example of a living ethnological museum for tourist and visitors alike, along with an open gallery, a museum, and facility for exhibiting folk and tribal arts and crafts. An important feature of the shilpgram is the Shilp Bazar, organized periodically on the lines of the traditional haat. Craftsmen are invited to demonstrate their silks and sale crafts to visitor at Shilpgram. The under construction craft village at Amingaon by ATDC will serve the purpose.
- **Handicraft fairs and expo:** Handicraft Expos are held at large fair grounds in major cities, towns and are worth looking out for as a countrywide range of handicrafts that are sold usually with a 10% to 20% rebate.

5. Observations and Discussions

After the overall research and observation was done, few points few recommendations were made for improvement as follows:

- Proper Government policy support and programs for skill up gradation for few of the craft.
- A craft village can be designed for tourists to get a proper feel of Assam. For example chokhi dhaani in Jaipur is a best attraction of tourist where exploration of culture as well as craft can be experienced.
- A proper promotion of Art, Culture and Craft needs to be done by developing the website of Assam tourism.
- Videos showcasing the craft culture of various region of Assam might help.

6. Conclusions

Promotion of the craft culture of Assam, as a tourism component can be an efficient tool for the preservation of the craft culture of Assam. It also contributes in educating the tourist about the Assamese crafts. If properly executed and promoted, the various crafts available throughout this land of diverse culture, direct benefits will go to artisans and persons associated with the craft sector. Shopping is a very important activity involved in tourism; it can definitely enhance the economical development of craft industry. The craft culture of Assam has potential in it to attract tourist client if proper guidelines and direction is being provided through various areas explained above.

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