

Traditional Handicraft and Contemporary Problems: A Case Study of Japi-making Artisans of Nalbari District, Assam

A Dissertation Submitted to the Department of Anthropology
University of Hyderabad, In Partial Fulfilment of the Requirement
for the Award of the Degree of

Master of Philosophy

in

ANTHROPOLOGY

Submitted by

NIBEDITA CHOUDHURY
Registration No - 17SAHL05



DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
UNIVERSITY OF HYDERABAD
HYDERABAD-500046
JUNE 2019

Certificate

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled *Traditional Handicraft and Contemporary Problems: A Case Study of Japi-making Artisans of Nalbari District, Assam*, submitted by Miss. Nibedita Choudhury in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the Degree of Master of Philosophy in Anthropology, is a record of bonafide work carried out by her under my supervision and guidance.

This dissertation has not been submitted either in part or in full to any other university or institution of learning for the award of any other degree.

Head of Department,
Department of Anthropology

Supervisor,
Department of Anthropology

Prof. M. Romesh Singh

Dean,

School of Social Sciences
University of Hyderabad

Declaration

I **Nibedita Choudhury** hereby declare that the work presented in the dissertation entitled *Traditional Handicraft and Contemporary Problems: A Case Study of Japi-making Artisans of Nalbari District, Assam* has been carried out by myself under the supervision of Prof. M. Romesh. Singh in the Department of Anthropology, University of Hyderabad. This work has not been submitted for a degree or diploma at any other university. I hereby agree that my dissertation can be deposited in SHODHGANGA/INFLIBNET.

An originality report on plagiarism statistics from University of Hyderabad has been enclosed.

Date:

Hyderabad

Nibedita Choudhury

17SAHL05

Department of Anthropology,

Hyderabad-500046

Acknowledgement

The present study would have not been possible without the help and support that I received from different sources. I am deeply obliged to my research supervisor Prof. M. Romesh Singh sir for his invaluable help and guidance throughout my M. Phil course. He has always been a constant support and moral encouragement. I am very much benefited with his well-timed help and suggestions.

I would like to express my gratitude to my teacher Prof. P Venkata Rao, Prof. N. Sudhakar Rao, Prof. R. Siva Prasad, Prof. B. V. Sharma, Dr. George Tharakan C, Md. Shaikh Abdul Munaf, Dr. Alok Kumar Pandey, Dr. Apparao Thamminaina, Mr. Maria Kumar and Dr. Snigdha Vishnoi for their useful suggestions and comments during my course.

Without the help of Shri. Nripen Tamuli, an artisan of the village Tilana, the present study could have not been successful. Hence, I would like to thank him as well his family members and friends who have rendered their valuable time, immense help and hospitality. I am thankful to the artisans of the study village because of their excellent co-operation during the course of my field work.

I express my thanks to the staff members of University Library (Indira Gandhi Memorial Library), District Library of Guwahati, Directorate of Archives of Assam and Department library of Anthropology, University of Hyderabad.

I sincerely express my heartfelt thanks to my friends specially Reona, Manoj, Avinash, Kuldeep, Bhargavi and Sreenu for their constant support and encouragement during the course of my dissertation and also to my cousin brother Bidyut and my brother Manash for spending their valuable time with me during my fieldwork. Finally, I would like to thank the staff of the Department of Anthropology who have rendered their help towards me whenever need be. I would like to acknowledge my parents, my siblings and also to Usharani madam for their constant support and encouragement in each and every moment of my life.

Place
Hyderabad

Nibedita Choudhury

Glossary

Local Term (Assamese)	English Term
<i>Aatha</i>	Gum
<i>Bari</i>	Forest
<i>Beji</i>	Needle
<i>Bozar</i>	Market
<i>Bhat mukhat diya</i>	Food feeding ceremony
<i>Chumki</i>	Metallic item
<i>Daa</i>	A big knife
<i>Dokan</i>	Village Craft Shop
<i>Dorji</i>	Tailor
<i>Ganani</i>	Name giving ceremony
<i>Gaon</i>	Village

<i>Japi</i>	Traditional Headgear
<i>Jurun</i>	Marriage ritual
<i>Karikor</i>	Artisan
<i>Kath Mistiry</i>	Carpenter
<i>Kessi</i>	Scissor
<i>Khangra</i>	A type of equipment for making <i>Japis</i>
<i>Khasa</i>	A triangle shaped base
<i>Phulam</i>	Floral
<i>Shraddha and Bhoj</i>	Mortuary rites
<i>Suta</i>	Thread
<i>Tokou Paat</i>	A type of palm leaf
<i>Tuloni Biya</i>	Puberty ritual

Contents

Chapter: 1	1
Introduction	1
1.1 Literature review:	4
1.1.1 Studies related to the importance of handicrafts and other small-scale industries:	6
1.1.2 Studies related to various types of handicrafts and its problems and prospects:	7
1.1.3 Studies related to the revival of traditional handicrafts:	9
1.2 Statement of the problem:	10
1.3 Research Questions:	11
1.4 Conceptual Framework:	11
1.5 Objectives of the Study:	12
1.6 Methodology:	12
1.6.1 Sample Size:	12
1.6.2 Tools and Techniques:	13
1.7 Limitations of the Study:	13
1.8 Chapterization:	14
Chapter: 2	17
Ethnographic and Socio-Economic Profile of the Japi Artisans of the Village	17
2.1 General features of Nalbari District:	17
2.2 Tilana, The village under study:	18
2.3 Climatic condition:	20
2.4 Settlement pattern:	20
2.5 Population composition:	20
2.6 Demographic profile of the artisans of the village:	21
2.7 Social Organization:	23
2.7.1 Marriage:	24
2.7.2 Family:	24
2.7.3 Kinship:	25
2.8 Marital status:	27
2.9 Education:	27
2.10 Occupation:	30
2.11 Income (Monthly):	32
2.12 Economic Structure:	33

2.13 Political Organisation:	34
2.14 Religion:	34
2.15 Festivals:	36
2.16 Inter-caste Relationship:	36
2.17 Life-cycle Rituals:	36
2.18 Food and drink:.....	37
2.19 Dress Pattern:.....	38
2.20: Other amenities and facilities	38
2.20.1 Drinking water:	38
2.20.2 Road:	38
2.20.3 Organizations in the Village:	38
Chapter:3	40
Significance of Japi Craft and Its Organisation	40
3.1 Historical background:.....	40
3.2 Significance of the Japi craft:	41
3.3 Categorization of the artisans:.....	42
3.4 Raw material used:	51
3.5 Process of Japi-making:	53
3.5.1 Collection of raw material.....	53
3.5.2 The process	53
3.6 Division of labor:.....	56
3.7 Sources of raw materials:.....	58
3.8 Season:	59
3.9 Technology used:.....	59
3.10 Marketing facilities:.....	60
Chapter: 4	64
Problems Associated with Japi-making Tradition	64
4.1 Problems with raw materials:.....	65
4.2 Nexus of intermediaries:.....	67
4.3 Absence of entrepreneurs and lack of government funds and policies:	68
4.4 Lower social status:.....	69
4.5 Emergence of alternate means:.....	70
4.6 Indigenous technology and lack of innovation:.....	71

4.7 Improper market facilities:	72
4.8 Poor infrastructure:	72
4.9 Lack of training:	74
4.10 Unwillingness of Young Generation to Continue to This Profession:	75
4.11 Impact of globalization:	76
4.12 Impact of Industrialization:	76
4.13 Impact of commercialization on Japi-making:	77
Chapter:5	78
Changes and Adaptation Strategies	78
5.1 History of Japi-making in the village	78
5.2 The decline of indigenous knowledge	80
5.3 Shifting of occupation	81
5.4 Change of this occupation from full time to part time	83
Chapter: 6	84
Summary and Conclusion	84
6.1 Finding and analysis	84

List of Tables:

<i>Table no.</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Page No.</i>
2.1	Distribution of Households Based on Community	21
2.2	Sample Households and their Population	22
2.3	Distribution of Sample Population Based on Age and Sex	22
2.4	Various family types	24
2.5	Kinship terminology	25
2.6	Distribution of Sample Population by Marital Status	27
2.7	Literacy rate of the sample population	28
2.8	Distribution of Sample Population According to the Occupation	31
2.9	Income categories of the artisans on monthly basis	32
3.1	Categorization of Artisans Based on Marketing	43
3.2	Categorization of Artisans Based on Involvement	49

3.3	Division of labor based on sex	57
3.4	Price of Japis and Share among Artisans	61
4.1	Comparison of income earned from Japi making and other activity	75

List of Maps:

<i>Figures</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Page No</i>
Fig 1	Map of India	15
Fig 2	Map of Assam State	16
Fig 3	Map of Nalbari District	18
Fig 4	Map of Tilana Village	19

List of Plates:

<i>Plate No</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Page No</i>
2.1	Tilana Upper Primary School	30
2.2	Tilana Lower Primary School	30

2.3	The <i>Hari Mandir</i>	35
2.4	<i>Namghar</i>	35
3.1	Artisan Photo Identity card	44
3.2	An artisan making frame of Japi	47
3.3	A village craft shop	50
3.4	Bamboo stripes	52
3.5	<i>Tokou Paat</i>	52
3.6	<i>Khasa</i> , a triangular base	54
3.7	<i>Khangra</i>	54
3.8	Diagram of Japi-making process	56
4.1	Houses of the artisans	66
4.2	Storing of Japis	73

Chapter: 1

Introduction

The term “handicrafts” refers to the hand-made products with certain traditional indigenous technical knowledge in a specific society. These products express the needs and nature of the life of people and are of indigenous creation and expression of the rural folk. According to the United Nation’s “Report on the Inter-Governmental Group on Tariff Reclassification”, “The term handmade articles should be taken to cover those produced with or without the use of tools, simple instruments or implements operated directly by the craftsman mainly by hand or by foot... Within the group of handmade goods, some such as Handicraft often have to identify features such as (a) traditional and artistic features deriving from the geographical region or country of production, (b) production by craftsmen generally working on a cottage industry basis”¹. According to Norwegian Craft Development (NHU), “The sum of experience and skill inherited from the previous generation in the form of day-to-day activities, activity patterns and practice insights attained through joint work”²

In certain parts of the world, handicrafts have been considered to be the outcome of skilled work and are items of utility. However, handicrafts can be termed as trade or occupation that requires skill development by using mind and hand. Hence, these handicrafts are an essential part and parcel of the life of people of a culture, which are the source of happiness to humankind. These are the materials which are useful in our day to day activities, and which have aesthetic importance. (Handique, 2010; Chattopadhyay, 1975; Venkatesan, 2009).

In a developing country like India, the handicraft sector has great importance. This sector is one of the prime sectors of the economy and plays a significant role in the export economy. It employs a large number of people along with the avenues for realization of the socio-cultural potential of people. Various expressions of a culture such as mythological, religious, social,

¹ Report of the Task Force on Handicrafts for the VIII Five Year Plan, 1989:6

² <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13527258.2011.589199>

historical, and artistic, etc., are instilled in handicrafts and these symbolize the strengths of the heritage of a country along with both beauty and utility (Khan and Amir, 2013).

India is rich with diverse ethnic traditions and cultures, and it is also a treasure house of versatile handicrafts and crafts traditions. Attractive handicrafts using diverse raw materials are produced in different parts of the country. These include art metalware, woodware, hand-printed textiles and scarves, leather crafts, hand knotted carpets, and embroidered goods, wood design, shawls, stone carvings, cane and bamboo crafts, and other miscellaneous products. One of the unique features of the handicrafts of India is that more than often the same handicraft produced in different regions are different from one another in terms of craftsmanship, style, color, combination and finish by artisan's creativity (ibid.:24). Various handicrafts of India are regarded as significant cultural heritage of the country which is handed down from generation to generation. The flexibility of expression is apparent in such traditional handicraft traditions. The manufacturers usually improve their innovative skills around the locally available media. These handicrafts are the combination of art and utility and delineate the glorious heritage of the country (Rao, 1978).

There are many castes, tribes, and sub-tribes forming diverse population in North-East India. They have a vigorous craft tradition, and every caste and tribe excels in the craftsmanship, and their excellence manifests itself in various products which its members produce. The ambit of crafts includes carpet making, masks, bamboo and cane crafts, weaving, woodcarvings, jewelry, and other miscellaneous crafts such as handmade pottery, brass cutting, silver works, etc. Assam and Meghalaya are well known for their silk handlooms as well. The village Sualkuchi in Assam has been known as "Manchester of the East" as it is the biggest silk production center in the North- East. The most prominent and prestigious silk here is the *Muga* silk, i.e. the golden silk, *Eri* silk, and so on.

Moreover, the tribes of Nagaland such as Ao, Khamniungan, Sangtam, Sema, Phom, etc. are renowned for its shawls which are of various rectangular red designs, six-feet long and four-feet wide. The various tribes of Tripura, Manipur, Mizoram, and Arunachal Pradesh also have a rich and diverse tradition of textile production. The Khamtis of Arunachal Pradesh, the Konyak Nagas of Nagaland, the Phom tribes of Nagaland, etc. are well known for their skill in

woodcarvings. In Manipur, a type of reed *Kauna* usually grows in the wetlands and marshes. Imphal valley is the center for *Kauna* crafts. It is often used for making mats, chairs, cushions, bags, etc. Besides, mask-making, cane crafts, bamboo baskets, textile weaving, etc., are also essential handicrafts of Manipur. Majuli district of Assam is also well known for mask-making crafts which are called as *Mukha* in the local language. Traditional bamboo and cane crafts have also taken a very central place in the entire North East India as the forests of North East India are abundant in the grass-like woody plants such as bamboo plants. Some species of bamboo cover vast tracts of forest lands of Assam and Manipur. These plants are used for making various items such as baskets, furniture, typical bamboo mats, bamboo containers, traditional hats such as Japi, musical instruments, and others (Rajan, 1984; Phukan; 2012, Odyuo; 2013).

Among different states of North-East India, Assam is a beautiful land of various natural resources. One of the essential natural resources of Assam is cane and bamboo. The crafts made from cane and bamboo form a household cottage industry, and it provides subsidiary occupation for the rural people. Moreover, these crafts provide primary occupation to those highly skilled artisans who produce cane and bamboo products on a commercial basis. There is the big potentiality of making cane and bamboo articles on a commercial scale, and these are also quite considerable for the high demand in the state.

One of the notable crafts of Assam is Japi. Assamese society is traditionally an agriculture-based society and its economy run by agriculture. In this case, Japi as a material is used as headgear in order to protect from rain and sun rays since Assam is prone to high rainfall. Headgear is quite comfortable to use while working in the agricultural fields without any support of hands. Besides, it is also used as an honoring item in order to pay tribute to the receiver. Further, Japi is used for decorative purpose as well as in Bihu dance (Assamese folk dance). It has also gained recognition as a great symbol of Assamese culture and society (Baruah, 2002).

Some of the prominent centers known for their Japi-making industry are Nalbari, Kamrup, Nagaon, Darrang, Sivsagar, and Lakhimpur. According to the report of Commissionerate of Industries and Commerce, Government of Assam 2018, some of the villages of Nalbari district

among these centers are known as centers of excellence.³ For a long time, the people of these villages have been engaged with this tradition. They export their products to different places of Assam. It has been the primary occupation of most of the people of these villages.

1.1 Literature review:

Several scholars from different disciplines such as Anthropology, Commerce, Design, Economics, etc. have contributed to extensive studies on traditional crafts and handicrafts. The studies on handicrafts from Anthropological perspective mainly highlight how these ancient handicraft traditions convey the social meanings and symbol of a particular society and culture which links between the material culture and the people. This study and other disciplines also analyzed about handicrafts. In economics, it reflects the production, distribution, and income of such handicraft industries and how these small-scale industries are contributing towards national income and overall economic growth of the society. Commerce brings more on marketing strategies about handicraft, and design studies on handicrafts try to show the traditional designs of such indigenous craft industries, how these designs can be preserved and promoted, etc.

The study of Costin (1998) highlights about craft objects and craftsmanship indicate not only household maintenance but also it signifies collective membership and social roles and become the storehouse of valuable materials and the labor invested in their manufacturing. These craft objects convey the social message underneath the material symbols and meanings as created by the artisans because artisans actively create or capture social meanings and made it explicit in the crafts they create. Carrozzino (2011) et al. in their paper define artistic handicrafts as the indispensable part of cultural heritage. They bring the art of the craft from town Pietrasanta, its artisans who have been handing down ancient practices for ages, especially in the quality of marble and bronze. Mainly focus on the explanation of creating a virtual environment for accessing the cultural heritage of the town Pietrasanta through a virtual platform such as Virtual Museum of Sculpture (VMS).

³ <https://industriescom.assam.gov.in>

The researchers have done ample studies based on handicrafts in terms of economic perspective. Terry (1999) states on the economic, financial, social and cultural significance of the handicraft industry of Botswana. She tried to compare different craft categories and to determine the value of the craft and no-craft sector by using cost-benefit model. The study in Botswana upholds research in other developing countries about the significance of off-farm income and income diversification of the livelihoods of rural and urban dwellers. Her study mainly centered around traditional crafts, contemporary crafts, marketing structures through three levels such as through local villagers in the first level, middlemen in the second level, and retail outlets in the third level. Mir and Uddin (2014) view that the handicraft sector plays a vital role in improving the Indian economy in general and rural economy in particular. It is a labor intensive and eco-friendly sector bearing the vast potential of employment generation and earning foreign exchange. They explain in detail about the various export markets for various handicrafts of India. In this regard, there may be the mention of the markets of Germany, the UK, the USA, Italy, etc. for exporting hand-knotted woolen carpets; the USA, Saudi Arabia, Canada, etc. for art metal wares; and Japan, France, etc. for woodware, etc. They conclude that for optimal exploration of handicrafts, financial government assistance is highly needed. Bano (2016) specifically talks about the role of the carpet industry in economic development in various regions such as Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Kashmir, Punjab, Andhra Pradesh, etc. of India. It shows the increasing growth in terms of the value of export which indicates the high potential of sustainability of this industry in the coming future.

Some scholars have studied handicrafts from a design perspective. Among them, there is Nimkulrat's study of craft practice into design research. The author describes in detail about craft as a way of thinking. The material can be positioned in the design context and facilitate the reflection and articulation of knowledge generated from within the research practitioner's creative practice. Here, the author reveals how craft thinking can be incorporated into a practice-led design research process. Oyekunle and Sirayi (2018) have studied the handicraft sector of South Africa in terms of design and product innovation. The study investigates the role of innovative design towards sustainable development of the handicraft industry and focuses on the possibilities of craft design for sustainable development of handicraft products to aid in the development of the local community.

1.1.1 Studies related to the importance of handicrafts and other small-scale industries:

The importance of handicrafts has been demonstrated by Chattopadhyay (1975), Rao (1978), Hoque (2016) and Roushan (2016) in understanding the social, cultural and economic life of people, promoting new entrepreneurs, and ensuring equitable distribution of national income, increase in employment potential, and faster growth of skills and entrepreneurial talent. Hence, brass metal and cane and bamboo works are important among various crafts, as these provide employment and income opportunities to a large section of people.

Dhamija (1970) stresses on the fact that handicrafts are evolved according to three types of needs of people. Some handicrafts are created as an expression of folk traditions, religious beliefs of people, and so on. For instance, some unique crafts made by craftsmen are used to serve the need for some special occasions such as *Deepawali*, *Bihu*, *Durga Puja*, etc. This type of handicrafts is included in the first type. Secondly, there are some craft traditions which are evolved to answer the need of religious centers. Here, the examples of Puri in Orissa can be mentioned. In Puri, various crafts evolved to cater to the needs of the temples. Some of these crafts are *Patachitra*, painting on cloths, wood carving, and so on. In the third category, crafts meant for commercial purpose can be included. These craftsmen are skilled in their special crafts and also have complete mastery over the technique. The sonars work on precious metals is one of the examples of this type of need of people.

Jaitley (1990) remarks that traditional handicraft is a man-made form of art. It indicates that the skills have spread and taken root through time, through communities, through generations, through music and dance, and through rituals and prayers. In this regard, she mentions the name of Mahatma Gandhi, who tried to treat Indian handicrafts as directly related to the village economy and the concept of freedom. She states that the craftsmen of India bear with themselves a vast reservoir of talent and artistry. Moreover, she mentions about various craftworks such as basket and mat-making of Arunachal Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, etc., stone-carving work of Rajasthan, Orissa, Tamil Nadu, etc., and wood-carving work of Kashmir, Kerala, Uttar Pradesh, etc

Moreover, Handique (2010) and Bhattacharjee (2012) highlight that these handicrafts play a vital role in the economy, and similarly they point out an economic organization which is

treated as a link between the material base to culture and social structure because economic order is a functional prerequisite to societal survival and continuity. With this notion, it is a need to recognize the link between the material culture of a specific society and their economy. The studies also stress on the fact that, for improving the economy of a society, various government policies should also be implemented properly so that the benefits of these policies can be percolated to the ground level. Bakal (1993) and Narasaiah (2001) talk about the importance of small-scale industrial sectors for the development of an economy of a state and also examined various policies and programs for small cottage industrial development, the roles of District Industries Centre (DIC).

Gurubasappa (2008) examines the role and importance of small-scale industries in the development of backward regions and explains about the various roles of incentives and growth performance of small-scale industries. He further focuses on tracing the historical evolution of various incentive programs and on studying the socio-cultural profit of the entrepreneurs who have availed incentives, to find out the assessment of entrepreneurs on the performance of promotional institutions. On the contrary, Datta, and Bhattacharya (2016), in their study, attempt to portray the importance of handicrafts in a predominantly agricultural society and say that these craft industries are focal to make village society self-reliant. According to them, handicrafts may be classified into two types: articles for everyday use and decorative items. The diversity of handicrafts can be seen in various craftworks such as textiles, wood, metalwork, ceramics, stonework, etc.

1.1.2 Studies related to various types of handicrafts and its problems and prospects:

Khadria (1990), in her paper, emphasizes the traditional craft industries of Brahmaputra Valley of Assam during Pre-British era and narrates about the weakening of such industries with the advent of British rule. She also focuses on specific industries of gold smelting, pottery, silk, and metal manufacturing under British rule. Her paper discusses the lack of investment from government and from private capitalists as some other constraints that contribute towards the decay of traditional industries. Pandey and Lamba (1997) observe the problems associated with the folk instrument makers of Punjab and examine the reasons for the failure of this industry. They state the need for the state-sponsored movement to encourage the sustenance of these

makers through various welfare programs. Mukund and Sundari (2001) give a clear picture of handloom weaving in Andhra Pradesh and various problems such as scarcity of raw materials, lack of proper markets, the changing situation of existing markets, emergence of new means, etc. relating to the handloom sector. Lieble and Roy (2004), Saikia (2012) and Ete (2014) reflect the detailed picture of these traditional handicrafts such as terracotta work, woodwork, stonework, textiles, basketry, leather works, cane and bamboo crafts, bell metal products, etc. in the present situation. They have further shown the reasons for the decay of domestic industries due to lack of organization of artisans, traditional methods of manufacturing, and lack of government policies for the promotion of traditional crafts. Thus, they have further added that the social, economic, and cultural development of many societies has been hampered due to these recurring problems related to various traditional handicraft industries.

Phukan (2012) specifically focuses on various problems of handloom industry in Assam such as problems related to their looms, participation of females only, lack of formal training for learning the production process, poor economic condition of weavers, confinement to domestic markets, little amount of export to other parts of India as well as abroad, and so on. Vijayagopalan (1993) remarks that government both at the central and state levels had implemented various policies and schemes for the betterment of the handicraft sector of India including the training of the artisans along with the marketing of the finished products. However, the outcome is not satisfactory. The earning from the export of these handicraft items is still minimal. He shows various reasons beneath this dismal export growth of the handicraft sector and suggests the government to pay required attention towards the production of export-oriented handicrafts.

Khurana and Paliwal (2014) study the handicrafts of Jaipur city, which have gained recognition as an integral part of Jaipur city's culture and tradition. Various craft traditions are block printing, Bandhani, Zari work, stone carving, various sculptures, Zardozi work, Gattapatti work, Patwa crafts, miniature paintings, leather works, etc. However, these major craft works are facing problems in terms of production, marketing, and management. Thus, the glorious tradition of such handicrafts has lost its traditional essence and have become wholly artificial. In this regard, the authors mentioned various problems such as lack of skilled labor, lack of financial support, lack of information, etc. According to Kumar and Rajib (2014), the

handicrafts of India are known all over the world for their uniqueness. However, with the emergence of mechanized products as a substitute for traditional crafts, these not only have made pressure over such indigenous items but also have made these products less critical in the life of people. The authors further talk about the numerous problems of handicraft artisans right from the procurement of raw materials because of non-availability of the required standard of input, lack of skilled labor and awareness about technological support, non-availability of customer awareness towards the crafts products, etc. They also note the problem of information lag and say that the prime responsibility of organizations should be to access the demand and acceptability for their products. Accordingly, industries produce products to meet the need of the customers. However, the Indian handicraft industry, due to inadequate marketing information system, has been suffering in various spheres.

1.1.3 Studies related to the revival of traditional handicrafts:

According to Rao (1978), handicrafts contain creative innovation of artisans with their magical hands. Right from the period of foreign rule and due to the rise of the industrial revolution, the handicraft sector had received a blow as they had to face high competitions from the mill-produced cheap goods. However, after independence with the efforts of central and state governments, the handicraft sector was attempted for reconstruction. He states that the handicraft products are the material symbols of India's cultural ethos and hence, it needs to be preserved. The revitalization of cottage industries is vital as they provide a hint to industrially develop the rural areas and eventually provide for the even development of the country.

Liao (2010) and Sahay (2015) display cultural heritage such as various handicrafts, modernization of heritage preservation through a change in product design, manufacturing process, training of artisans, and so on. There was various community empowerment program for the revival of those handicraft industries and allied activities. Besides, Chetry (2010), Baro (2016) and Harikrishnan and Krishna (2015) show the changing pattern in the skills and the folk technologies and management of traditional skills. However, for the economic development and employment opportunities of the people, these traditional crafts should be revived and developed. They further add that the problems of the crafts and artisans could be solved by revival and re-orientation of traditional crafts.

On the other hand, Ahmad and Amir (2013) discuss the essential marketing aspects under the heads of product, price, place, and promotion. They view that for marketing organization of artisans under a cooperative umbrella, marketing their products is very important which can only be possible through the development of more and more linkages with outside parties, uniformity of prices, awareness creation, the export of handicrafts, more research in handicrafts, and so on.

Harris (2014) mainly focuses on the productivity challenges of handicraft firms in Nairobi, Kenya. He mentions here about a concept “Adverse selection” that refers to the problems of “hidden information” where essential information needed for a transaction is held uneven between the buyer and the seller. This eventually leads to the degradation of the quality of products by hiding information from the buyer. Thus, the industry as a whole will be inclined to produce lower quality and low-cost products because of lack of proper incentive. He further explains the consequences of hyper-competition that prevents firms in achieving market advantage with a favorable price. According to him, the provision of a fair price to manufacturers and curtailing some adverse practices in the firms are the attempts to tackle the problems related to such industries.

The above literature reflect studies on handicrafts from different disciplines. Various studies are looked into different aspects of handicraft traditions such as the importance of handicrafts in the life of people, various types of handicrafts, their problems and prospects, and the process of rejuvenation of these traditional industries. Different scholars have come up with explanations of various types of handicrafts and how these craft industries have been playing a pivotal role in sustaining rural folk.

1.2 Statement of the problem:

Although studies on traditional handicrafts are done in a significant number, there has been a paucity. I think the studies on Japi-making itself is less in general. Japi-making tradition is linked with the socio-cultural life of the people of Assam. It also has some economic importance as it has been practiced for a very long period as a means of livelihood by some section of Assamese society. The changes in this age-old tradition have not only affected the culture of the Assamese society but also has created problems for the people who are related

to this tradition. The present study is an attempt to investigate various problems that have been emerging in this tradition and brings livelihood risk among the artisans. The study further tries to give some suggestion for the betterment of this craft tradition. In this regard, people's perspective was also helpful to understand the present condition of the Japi-making tradition, and the reasons that have forced this tradition to show a decline in its growth.

1.3 Research Questions:

The present study attempt to deal with the following questions:

1. Does Japi-making tradition influence the social structure of the people involved (the artisans)?
2. If yes, how this tradition influences their socio-cultural life?
3. How is a change in Japi-making tradition influencing the agricultural practices or vice versa?

1.4 Conceptual Framework:

In my study, I have used structural-functionalism approach. According to A. R. Radcliffe Brown, structural-functionalism emphasizes the formal ordering of parts and their functional interrelations as contributing to the maintenance need of a structured social system. The function of any institution is the part it plays in the maintenance of the larger structural whole (Vincent:2015). Simultaneously, the social structure of the society of Japi-manufacturing artisans is the arrangement of the owner of the village craft shops, the artisans of the village, and the family members of the artisan's families within the total activity of Japi-making. The various activities confined to Japi-making is the regular arrangement of their social life, which is closely related to each other, and each person has his or her assigned role. Hence, in my study, I have looked into the social structure of the Japi-making artisans in their daily activities, which show the interest of how Japi-making tradition plays a role as a structure in their society, and how it functions along with the other socio-cultural aspects of their society; whether a change in the Japi-making tradition brings changes in the other social aspects of their life.

1.5 Objectives of the Study:

- 1) To examine the historical perspective of the Japi-making tradition.
- 2) To understand the socio-economic condition of the artisans.
- 3) To analyze the organization of Japi-making activity.
- 4) To examine various problems faced by artisans.
- 5) To identify the change and strategies of adaption of artisans in the changing scenario.

1.6 Methodology:

The present study has been carried out in a village named *Tilana* of Nalbari District of Assam. According to the 2011 Census, the total population of the village is 1456, where the total male population accounts for about 775, and the total female population accounts for about 681. The total literate persons in the village are 1159 (Male- 658 and Female- 501). The total geographical area of the village under study is 146.01 hectares. The prime reason behind the selection of this particular village is that it is considered as one of the major Japi-making centers of Nalbari District as well as of the entire Assam. The village is mainly inhabited by people from Kalita, Tamuli, Rajbangshi, Baishya, Nath, and Choudhury community. The village is located 6-7 km away from the main Nalbari town. The tradition of Japi-making is still practiced here. Almost all the households of *Tilana* make Japis with indigenous technology. The Japis from the village is transported to the rest of the states.

1.6.1 Sample Size:

In the selected village named *Tilana*, majority of the households are engaged in the Japi-making activity, and there is little difference in their occupational activities. Thus, the selection of the sample was taken primarily through random sampling technique. In the village; there are altogether 277 households, out of which 80 households are taken as the sample population for the study.

1.6.2 Tools and Techniques:

The study is an ethnographic study, and it used tools and techniques which are typical to the discipline of anthropology such as observation, household schedules, in-depth interviews, case studies, group discussions, etc. The study is based on two months of intensive fieldwork.

In the study, observation method was used to obtain direct views on the village situation and notion of phenomena as they occur concerning cause and effect. This method has helped in cross-checking the validity of data relating to marketing facilities, the supply of raw materials, equipment, etc. Household schedules were used to collect data from the households in order to understand demographic profile as well as to develop a good rapport and understanding of the Japi-making artisans of the village. Hence, these schedules have also become helpful to collect data from each household in respect of general socio-economic features of the Japi-making artisans which include the size of family, age and sex composition, literacy level, occupation, the income of the individual families, and so on.

In-depth interviews, both formal and informal, were conducted among various sections of the Japi makers such as the artisans, the member of village craft shops, older people, women, and so on. This has helped in understanding their various problems during their respective duties. The case study method was used in order to deal with the intensive cases of incidents specific to record personal insights into the situations. This method proved to be useful for exploring and examining the socio-cultural and economic backdrop of Japi makers, owners of village craft shops, village craft shops, etc. in dealing with Japi-making activities. Group discussion was employed to collect detailed information about the feelings, perceptions, impressions, and shared experiences of the artisans in their own words. Secondary data was also collected from related books and journals available in different libraries, archives, and online sources for the study.

1.7 Limitations of the Study:

Different obstacles were encountered during the fieldwork. Though the Japi making artisan of Tilana village are very much skillful in the art of Japi making, most of the artisans have very little knowledge about the origin and history of Japi craft. This has caused a lot of

inconvenience to me in gathering the required information related to the historical origin of Japi-making tradition.

On the other hand, the road connecting Tilana village with Nalbari town is very pathetic. The road is a *kaccha* one, and it becomes very difficult for transportation, especially during rainy days. I conducted my fieldwork during the rainy months of April and May. During that time, I often faced waterlogging incidents, which caused a problem for me.

1.8 Chapterization:

The present study has been divided into six chapters which include summary and conclusion. The first chapter deals with the introduction of the traditional handicraft industries of India, review of literature available on handicraft industries in general, statement of the problem, objectives of the study, the study area, methodology applied for the study, limitations of the study, and characterization of the thesis. The second chapter presents the general features of Nalbari District, the demographic profile of the sample group, marital status, education, occupation, monthly income, family structure, religion and festivals, the social organization of the village, etc.

The third chapter deals with the historical background, significance, and organization of Japi-making tradition and gives an explanation of the importance of Japi in traditional Assamese culture and society. Besides, it also explains the process of Japi making along with the explanation of various raw materials needed for the activity, various types of artisans, technology, and so on. The fourth chapter describes various problems and their impact on Japi-making tradition.

The fifth chapter tries to explain various changes that took place among the artisans due to various issues. This chapter also describes various adaptation strategies to cope with problems faced by the artisans. The last chapter provides a brief summary and conclusion of the present study.

The above chapter provides an overview of the concept of traditional handicraft and the various handicraft traditions of the various parts of India. The related literature reviews give an idea of what is the importance of traditional industries in the culture, society, and economy of people, how

various challenges have been resisting the growth of such traditional handicraft industries and what are the strategies to revive such industries. The conceptual framework shows how the present study is related to the anthropological theory of Structural-functionalism. The research objectives reveal the aim of the present study and the methodology section discusses the selection of the study area and various research methods applied in the study. Therefore, this chapter gives a base for the research work.



(Source: www.mapsofindia.com)

Fig.1 Map of India showing the location of Assam

Chapter: 2

Ethnographic and Socio-Economic Profile of the Japi Artisans of the Village

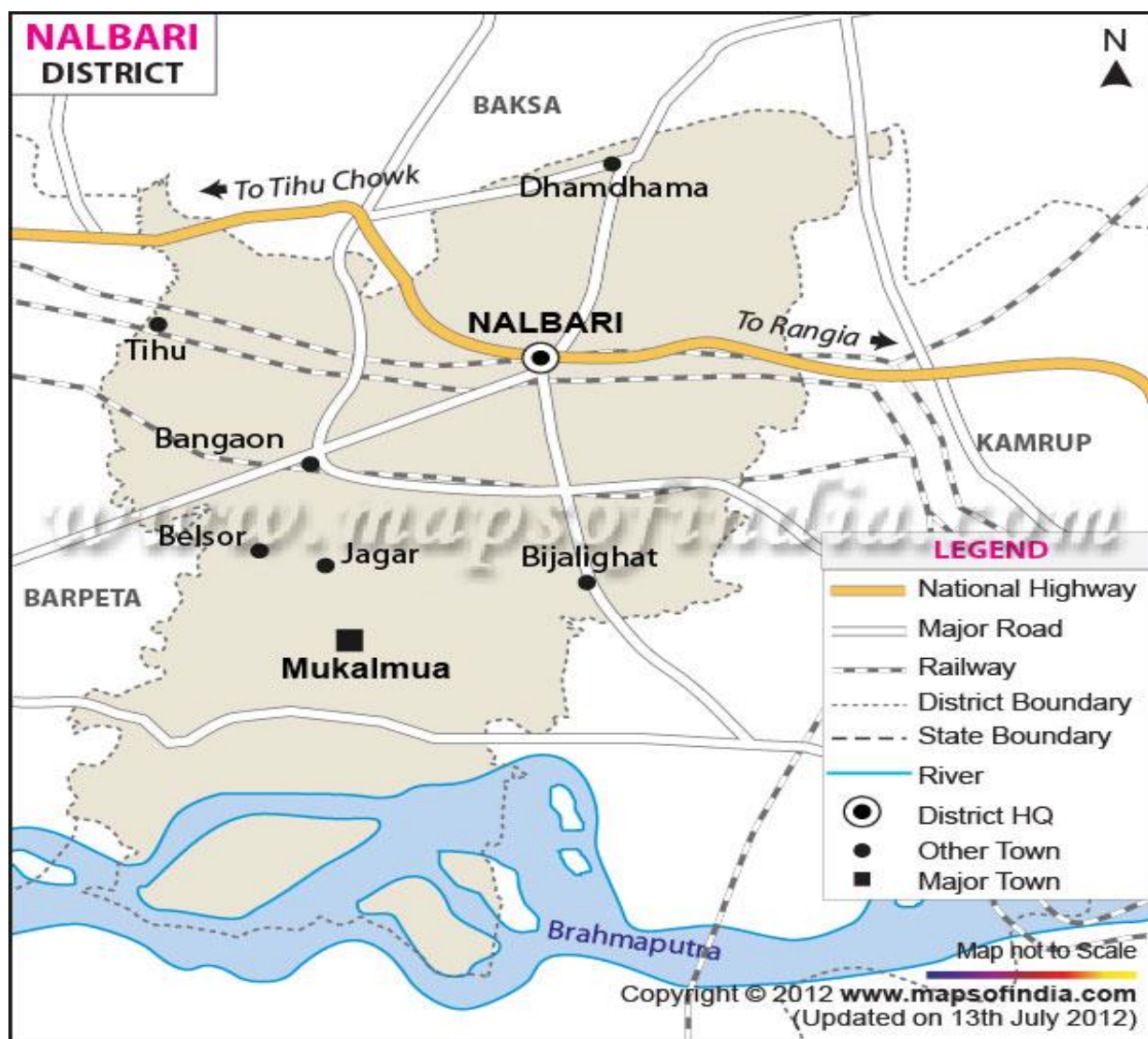
2.1 General features of Nalbari District:

Geographically, Nalbari district is located between 26° and 27° North latitude and between 91° East and 97° East longitude., This district is bounded by Baksa on the Northern side the mighty Brahmaputra on the Southern side, Kamrup on the Eastern side, and Barpeta on the Western side. The total area of the district is 1009.57 sq. km. The District head-quarter of Nalbari district is at Nalbari. The total population of the district is 7,69,919 which includes 3,95,808 males and 3,74,115 females.⁴ It is about 55 km away from Guwahati, the capital city of Assam. The town is well connected by road and rail with most parts of lower Assam (Baruah: 2000).

Earlier, Nalbari district was under the sub-division of Kamrup district. For better administration, the old Kamrup district was divided into three districts. Therefore, on 14th August 1985, the former Nalbari subdivision was declared as a district. There are eight revenue circles under Nalbari district such as Nalbari, Ghograpar, Tihu, Barbhag, Barkhetri, Pachim Nalbari, Banekuchi, and parts of Barama. Development blocks of Nalbari district are nine in number. Besides, the number of Gaon Panchayat are 65, and the number of Anchalik Panchayat are 7. There are 2 towns in the district named Nalbari and Tihu, and the number of villages are 456. There are five police stations in Nalbari district. These are Nalbari, Belsor, Mukalmua, Ghograpar, and Tihu. It is situated at the plains of Brahmaputra valley. The various tributaries of the Brahmaputra River such as Pagaldia, Tihu, Burhadia, Nona, etc. flow through Nalbari District. These tributaries of the Brahmaputra River contribute enormously towards the agrarian economy of the district.⁵

⁴ www.dcmsme.gov.in>Nalbaridistrict:profile.pdf.

⁵ www.dcmsme.gov.in>Nalbaridistrict:profile.pdf



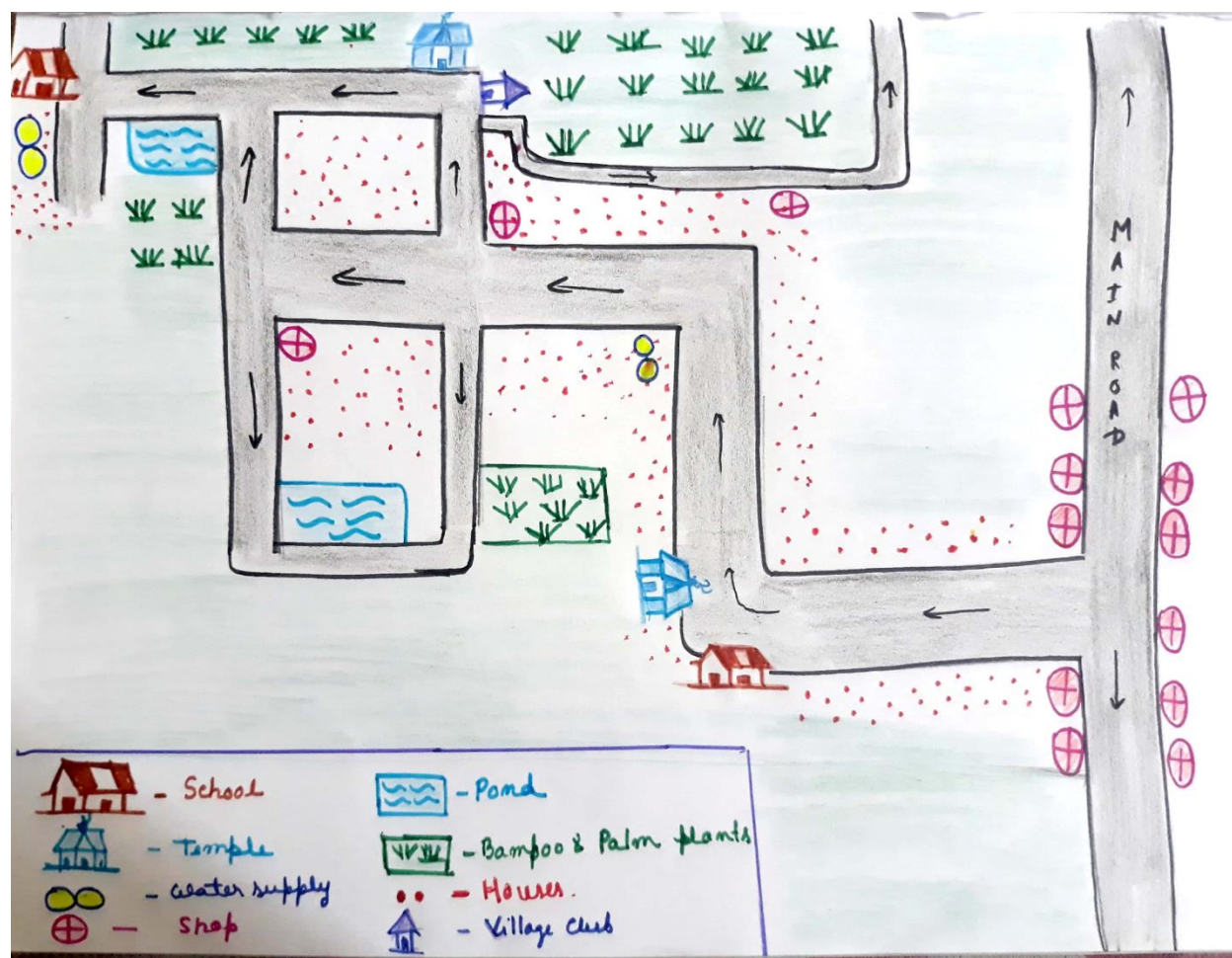
(Source: www.mapsofindia.com)

Fig.3: A Map of Nalbari District

2.2 Tilana, The village under study:

Tilana village is situated under Pub-Bahjani Gram Panchayat of Nalbari district in Assam. It is under Nalbari Block of Nalbari district in Assam. According to the Census of 2011, the village code of Tilana is 303957. The village is situated at a distance of 6-7 km from the main town i.e.

the Nalbari town. The total geographical area of the village Tilana is 146.01 hectares. The village is bounded on the North by Terechia, on the South by Nanda Gaon, on the West by Alengidal, and on the East by Balilecha. The total literate persons in the village account for 1159, out of which 658 people are male, and 501 people are female.⁶



(Map not to scale)

(Source: Field)

Fig.4: A Map of Tilana Village

⁶ Censusindia.gov.in>dchb>DCHB-A

2.3 Climatic condition:

The area under study has a sub-tropical climate with semi-dry hot summer and cold winter season. During the summer season, heavy rainfall occurs due to which the area along with the whole Nalbari district experiences massive flood. The area experiences annual average rainfall of 1500 mm. The summer season starts mostly from March to August. During September and October, the area experiences a moderate climate. Winter starts from November to February, and the climate is cold.

2.4 Settlement pattern:

The people of the village Tilana belong to various castes. The Kalita people from general caste are numerically strong. The Tamuli people from general category are not numerically strong as in the case of the Kalitas. There are also some other people residing in the village, such as Baishyas and the Rajbangshis who are less in number and belong to the category of Other Backward Caste. Hence, some people with surnames such as Choudhury, Nath, etc., are also found in the village though they are very less in number.

The houses of the village are located close to one another. Generally, there are kaccha houses with the roofs covered with aluminum sheets and the walls are made of mud, bamboo, and cane. The posts of the houses are made of bamboo. However, pucca cemented houses can also be seen in the village, which is very less in number. The roofs of such houses are aluminum sheet, and the walls are made of cemented bricks. In some pucca cemented houses, the half part of the wall is made of cemented bricks while the other half is made up of bamboo mat and mud.

2.5 Population composition:

The village Tilana is mainly inhabited by the Kalita, Tamuli, Rajbangshi, and Baishya people. There are also some Nath and Choudhury people though they are very less in number. There are no people from Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in the village. (Census, 2011).

The following table consists of the distribution of households according to the community.

Table 2.1

Distribution of Households Based on Community

Communities	No. of Households	%
Kalita (General)	116	41.87%
Tamuli (General)	48	17.32%
Baishya (OBC)	53	19.13%
Rajbangshi (OBC)	39	14.07%
Nath (OBC)	18	6.49%
Choudhury (General)	3	1.12%
Total	277	100%

Source: Panchayat Office

The above table shows the distribution of the population based on communities. The Kalita people have the highest population i.e. 41.8%, whereas the residence belongs to Tamuli community constitutes about 17.32%. Besides, 19.13% are Baishya people, 14.07% are Rajbangshi people, 6.49% consists of Nath people, and only 1.12% are Choudhury people.

2.6 Demographic profile of the artisans of the village:

Tilana Village is 31st most populous village located under Nalbari sub-district of Nalbari District. The village is under Pub-Nalbari CD Block. Population density of the village is 997 persons per km². The total population of the village is 1456, where the male population accounts for 775 and the females account for 681. The total households in the village are 277⁷, out of which, 80 households are taken into consideration for the study.

The following table shows the sample of total households and their population:

Table 2.2

Sample Households and their Population

Sample of the total households	Total sample population
80	356

Source: Researcher's field data

The above table shows that the total households taken for the study are 80 out of the total households of 277. The total population drawn from the sample is 356.

The following table shows the population of the respondent Japi makers in the sample and they are grouped into different age groups based on age and sex.

Table 2.3

Distribution of Sample Population Based on Age and Sex

AGE GROUPS	MALE	%	FEMALE	%	TOTAL	%

⁷ censusindia.gov.in/population-enumeration.html

0-10	33	17.83	29	16.95	62	17.41
11-20	24	12.97	31	18.12	55	15.44
21-30	42	22.70	48	28.07	90	25.28
31-40	25	13.51	29	16.95	54	15.16
41-50	33	17.83	15	8.77	48	13.48
51-60	19	10.27	8	4.67	27	7.58
61-70	6	3.24	10	5.84	16	4.49
70+	3	1.62	1	0.58	4	1.16
TOTAL	185	100	171	100	356	100

Source: field data

The above table shows that the artisans of Tilana village are grouped under different age groups, wherein the age group of 21-30 years constitute the highest number of people i.e. approximately 26%, and the age group of above 70 years constitute the lowest number of people i.e. approximately 2 %.

2.7 Social Organization:

Social organization refers to the relationship between and among various social groups. These institutions are essential parts of human society.

2.7.1 Marriage:

The general form of marriage among all the communities is monogamy. Polygamy and polyandry are non-existent in the village. Inter-caste marriages are not very rare among the people of the village, though they prefer intra-caste marriage relations. In this particular village, 80% of the males got married at the age of 21 years, and 75% of the females got married at the age of 18 years. In my observation, three forms of marriage found in Tilana. These are arranged marriage, love marriage, and marriage by elopement. The form of love marriage is 30%, and 10 % of marriage happens due to elopement. However, most of the marriages happen through arranged marriage system. It is said that the tradition of giving dowry, bride price, etc. is not prevalent in the village though the parents can willingly offer something to their daughters.

2.7.2 Family:

Family is the smallest primary social group and a functional unit which grows out of biological needs. A family plays a vital role in a society such as child-rearing, socialization process, economic activities, religious performances, development of characters, understanding of morals and values, and so on (Mazumdar:1956). In the village Tilana, households can be categorized into two types: joint family and the nuclear family. The following table reveals the frequency of various types of families.

Table 2.4

Various Family Types

Family Type	No. of Households	Percentage
Joint Family	16	20%
Nuclear Family	64	80%

Total	80	100%
-------	----	------

(Source: Field data)

It is shown in the above table that the majority of the households consist of nuclear families, which accounts for 80% of the total sample size households. Many incidents of separation of sons after marriage are evident in the village owing to various reasons such as dependency on the limited earning members, lack of individualism, etc. However, joint families constitute about 20% of the total households taken as sample i.e. 16 out of 80 households.

2.7.3 Kinship:

The people of the area under study use some kinship terms to address various relatives. Few of the terms are used to designate a group of persons in common. Some of the essential terms are as follows:

Table 2.5

Kinship Terminology

English	Local terms
Father	<i>Deuta / Pita</i>
Mother	<i>Maa</i>
MB	<i>Mama</i>
FB	<i>Khura</i>

FBW	<i>Khurima</i>
MBW	<i>Mami</i>
FM/MM	<i>Abu</i>
FF/MF	<i>Ata</i>
FS	<i>Pehi</i>
FSH	<i>Peha</i>
MS	<i>Mahi</i>
MSH	<i>Moha</i>

(Source: Field data)

In the above table, MB refers to Mother's Brother, FB means Father's Brother, FBW means Father's Brother's Wife, MBW means Mother's Brother's Wife, FM/MM means Father's Mother/ Mother's Mother, FF/MF means Father's Father/Mother's Father, FS means Father's Sister, FSH means Father's Sister's Husband, MS means Mother's Sister and MSH means Mother's Sister's Husband.

Moreover, among the artisan families, the custom of avoidance among some relatives such as between father-in-law and daughter-in-law, between brother-in-law and sister-in-law, etc. are prevalent. They can not have food together and daughter-in-law has to cover her head with *Chadar* (Upper part of the Assamese traditional dress) in front of her father-in-law and brother-in-law. In the family, the daughter-in-law is free with the younger members of her family.

2.8 Marital status:

Table 2.6

Distribution of Sample Population by Marital Status

Marital Status	No. of Persons	%
Married	179	50.28
Unmarried	165	46.34
Widows	7	1.96
Widowers	5	1.42
Divorcee	0	0
Total	356	100

(Source: Field data)

The above table reveals that out of 356 people, the total married people are 179 that constitutes about 50.28 % of the total population which is more than the unmarried population of 165 i.e. 46.34% of the total population. The percentage of the widows is 7 i.e. 1.96 % of the total population, and that of the widowers is 1.42 %. There is no divorced population found in the sample size.

2.9 Education:

In the village Tilana, the proportion of educated people is quite significant. There are two schools in the village: One is Tilana Upper Primary School (*Tilana Madhya Engraji Vidyalaya*) which is situated in the east corner of the village, and the other is Tilana Lower Primary School (No. 656 *Tilana Prathamik Vidyalaya*) which is located in the middle of the village. The upper primary school was established in 1986 and the lower primary school was established in 1936. However, for pursuing higher education, the students need to go out of the village. Nowadays, some families have started sending their children to private schools as well. However, the proportion is low in this regard. A private school named Suprabha Mahanta Shankardev Sishu Niketan is located in the place Amayapur which is also under Pub Bahjani Cluster.

Table 2.7

Literacy Rate of the Sample Population

	Male	%	Female	%	Total	%
Illiterates	11	6.4	20	12.5	31	9.39
Up to Lower Primary	54	31.76	35	21.87	89	26.96
Up to Upper Primary	31	18.23	51	31.87	82	24.84
Up to High School	37	21.76	32	20	69	20.90

Up to Intermediate (+2)	25	14.70	13	8.12	34	10.30
Up to Graduation	10	5.88	8	5	18	5.45
Up to Post Graduation	2	1.17	1	0.6	7	2.12

(Source: Field Survey)

(Note: excluding the children who are not going to school, i.e. boys: 15, Girls:11 as they are below the school attending age)

The above table shows that there is a high percentage of literacy rate found among the artisans of the village Tilana i.e. 90.57 % as compared to 9.39% total illiterate artisans in the village. The literacy rate of Tilana is more than the average literacy rate of the whole Nalbari District. There is a high incidence of illiteracy found among the women (12.5%) as compared to men i.e. 6.4%. It is mainly because there are no High Schools in the village which forces the students to go out of the village to pursue further studies. Thus, the females are reluctant to go out of the village for pursuing studies and generally after finishing the upper primary level of education, the women seem to get engaged in household activities. Among the male artisans, highest literacy level is found in the category of up to lower primary level, which consists of 31.76%. However, the highest literacy rate (31.87%) among the females is found in the category up to upper primary level. At the High School level, there is only a difference of 1.76% between the male and female population. Among the male population, 25(14.70%) and among female population 13 (8.12) have passed in intermediate examination whereas ten males (5.88%) and eight females (5%) are graduates. There are two males and only one female who has completed Post-Graduation.



Plate 2.1

Tilana Upper Primary School



Plate 2.2

Tilana Lower Primary School

2.10 Occupation:

In Tilana, each household is associated with Japi-making tradition and conduct Japi-making activity either on full-time or on part-time basis. The percentage of full-time Japi-makers is

significantly large as compared to the part-time Japi makers. The cause behind this is the lack of agricultural land of the villagers.

Table 2.8

Distribution of Sample Population According to the Occupation

OCCUPATION AL CATEGORIES	MALE	%	FEMALE	%	TOTAL OCCUPATIO N	%
Japi Makers	96	64.8 6	5	22.7 2	101	59.4 1
Wage Labours	18	12.1 6	0	0	18	10.5 8
Service	12	8.10	4	18.1 8	16	9.41
Miscellaneous	22	14.8 6	13	59.0 9	35	20.5 8
Total	14 8	100	22	100	170	100

(Source: Field survey)

Note: students are excluded from the above table)

In the village Tilana, majority of the people are dependent on Japi-making activity, which constitutes about 59.41% of the total workforce. Among them, all the owners of the village craft shops, laborers working in the village craft shops, and the artisans working from home are included. The male Japi-makers account for about 64.86%, whereas only 22.72% are female Japi-makers. The reason beneath this variation is that the female Japi makers who conduct the activity on a commercial basis are less in the village Tilana though the females act as a helper in the Japi-making activity, Only Japi-making as livelihood activity cannot fulfill the necessities of the people, and thus some family members of the artisans also work as wage laborers, which accounts for about 18 male members (12.16%). These wage laborers do various works at other people's households. However, they make Japis on a part-time basis as they do not get permanent employment. There are no women wage laborers in the village. There are 12 males (8.10%) and four females (18.18%) who are engaged in both private and public sector. Besides, 22 males (14.86%) and 13 females (59.09%) are involved in diverse activities such as mechanic, rickshaw puller, cook in schools, weaver, carpenter, tailor, salesman, waiter, poultry farmer, and so on.

2.11 Income (Monthly):

The artisans of the sample belong to various categories of income levels. Thus, they are divided into some categories.

Table 2.9

Income Categories of the Artisans on Monthly Basis

Monthly Amount (Rs)	No. of Families	%
1000-5000	31	38.75
5001-10000	38	47.50

10001-15000	7	8.75
15001-20000	3	3.75
20000+	1	1.25
Total	80	100

(Source: Field data)

The above table shows the monthly income categories of the artisans of the village Tilana. Among them, 38.75% artisans are included under the category whose monthly income Rs. 1000-5000. Under this category, mostly the artisans who work under village craft shops, wage laborers, cook in schools, rickshaw pullers are included. Thirty-eight families out of the sample of 80 households (47.5%) are included under the category whose monthly income is Rs. 5000-10000. In this category, the artisans work from home, mechanic, carpenter, tailor, salesman, waiter, etc. are included. This category accounts for the highest percentage.

The third category consists of the people with a monthly income of Rs. 10000-15000 and the fourth category consists of the people with a monthly income of Rs. 15000-20000. The fourth category includes the owner of the village craft shops, the teachers working in private schools, and companies and account for 8.75% and 3.75% respectively. The household with a monthly income of above Rs. 20000 is only one in number. In this family, most of the members are well settled and engaged in the service sector.

2.12 Economic Structure:

The essential source of economy of the village is Japi-making. However, agriculture, poultry farming, etc. are also some other sources of the economy next to Japi-making. Paddy is the major crop. The females mainly take an active part in poultry farming. They mainly domesticate cows, goats, fowls, etc. However, such a small amount of poultry farming leaves

a minimal surplus for them. Thus, the people of the village mostly depend on Japi-making. Some households of the village also grow palm leaves i.e. *Tokou Paat* which they sell to the artisans of the village as well as to the village craft shops. Thus, the economic condition of the people of the village is moderate. However, the economic condition of some people who are engaged in the service sector is relatively stable.

The current chapter shows the ethnographic profile of the Japi artisans of the Tilana village. The entire chapter includes the climate of the village, forests, settlement pattern, population composition, demographic profile of the village, social organisation of the Japi artisans, marital status, occupational structure, literacy rate, monthly income categories of the sample population, political organisation, economic organization, religions, festivals, life-cycle rituals, food and drink, dress pattern, and amenities and facilities of the village.

2.13 Political Organisation:

In Tilana village, the political organization is akin to other parts of Assam. The village is under Pub Bahjani Number 7 Gram Panchayat. *Gaon Burha* is the elected head of the village. The village panchayat supervises the developmental works of the village, settling disputes in the village, implementation of developmental programs, etc.

2.14 Religion:

The artisans of the village under study are the follower of Hinduism. In Hinduism, there is a practice of worshipping multiple gods and goddesses. In this regard, the Japi makers are also not an exception. They perform various *Pujas* such as *Shiva Puja*, *Laxmi Puja*, *Durga Puja*, etc. by the rules and rituals associated with such *Pujas*. In the village, there are two main public temples. One is *Hari Mandir* devoted to the God *Hari* who is believed to be the incarnation of the Lord Vishnu, while the other temple is devoted to Lord Shiva. On every Thursday, the women folk offers prayer in *Hari Mandir*, and on special occasions such as in *Purnima Tithi* of the Assamese month *Magh*, the villagers perform Yajanas in the temple. *Shivaratri* is celebrated in the Shiva temple of the village. There is a *Namghar* in the village where the people of the village offer prayers. *Namghar* is a type of prayer house associated with the *Ekacharan* sect of Nava Vaishnavite culture propounded by the Assamese saint Mahapurush

Shree Shree Sankardeva. There is no population of Muslim and Christian communities found among the Japi artisans.



Plate 2.3

The Hari Mandir



Plate 2.4

Namghar (Prayer House)

2.15 Festivals:

The Japi artisans of the village Tilana celebrate various fairs and festivals. As the artisans belong to the Assamese community, they celebrate the state festival of Assam i.e. *Bihu* grandly. There are three types of *Bihu*. One *Bihu* is celebrated during the Assamese month *Bohag* to mark the start of Assamese new year. This *Bihu* is termed as *Bohag Bihu* or *Rongali Bihu*. The second *Bihu*, i.e. *Magh Bihu*, is celebrated during the Assamese month *Magh*. This *Bihu* is considered as the “feast-giving festival”, and so this *Bihu* is known as *Bhogali Bihu*. The third type of *Bihu* i.e. *Kati Bihu* is celebrated during the Assamese month *Kati* and is also known as *Kongali Bihu*. Apart from these, *Durga Puja*, *Siva Puja*, *Deepawali*, *Sankardev’s* birth and death ceremonies, *Lakshmi Puja*, etc. are collectively celebrated by the artisans. The artisans actively participate in these festivals.

2.16 Inter-caste Relationship:

In the village Tilana, the artisans from various castes or communities such as Kalita, Tamuli, Rajabngshi, Baishya, Nath, Tamuli, and Choudhury reside together. This tradition of *Japi* making is not confined to a specific caste or community. There are artisans from general castes such as Kalita and Tamuli. Besides, the artisans from other backward Classes take the surname as Baishya, Rajbangshi, etc. The inter-caste relationship among the artisans is very flexible. Inter-caste marriage among the artisans also happens, though marriage within their same caste is preferable.

2.17 Life-cycle Rituals:

Life-cycle rituals are referred to as biological crises of life that change the social status of an individual. These rituals are found in all societies, but the importance of such rituals may vary. These biological crises of the life-cycle can be categorized into childbirth, marriage, and death. Among the Japi artisan families, *Panchamrit* is observed in the 5th month of pregnancy. In this ceremony, the parents of the pregnant woman along with her close relatives of the maternal side come to feed her with a feast, and also the close relatives of the husband’s side are invited, though the entire cost of the ceremony is spent by the maternal side of the pregnant woman.

During the 7th month of the pregnancy, a similar kind of ceremony is also observed among them.

The Japi artisans observe birth pollution for one month. On the 30th day, they observe a ceremony called *Ganani*, which is a name-giving ceremony of the newborn baby. On this day, the close relatives and neighbors are invited, and a small feast is organized by the family of the newborn baby. First feeding of cereal is observed in the seven months of the baby, which is locally called as *Bhat Mukhat Diya*. Puberty rite is also an important life-cycle ritual among them, which is known as *Tuloni Biya*. It is found that in the case of girls the age of puberty is from the ages of 10 to 14 years while it is in between the ages of 11 and 14 years in the case of boys. However, *Tuloni Biya* is celebrated in case of girls only.

The marriage ceremony is celebrated by the families of the groom and bride both. The wedding ceremony is celebrated depending on the economic condition of the artisan families. Since the artisan families are not economically so much strong, they do not celebrate it grandly. Before 1 or 2 days of the wedding day, a ceremony called *Juran* is performed in which the family of the groom come to the bride's place and present her clothes, ornaments, and other necessary stuff and have food at the bride's place.

The Japi artisans perform the death rituals according to the Hindu customs. After the three days of the death of a person, *Tilani* is observed. On 10th day *Doha*, on 11th day *Shraddha*, on 12th day *Sapindan*, on 13th-day *bhoj* or *Matsyaspasha* and 14th-day *Bahi Bhoj*, etc. are performed as a part of the mortuary rite.

2.18 Food and drink:

Food is the basic need for the survival of all living beings. The staple food of all the communities of the village is rice. It is because of the agricultural production of the state. Besides, the people also consume fish and meat of goat, chicken, duck, and pigeon. Nowadays, the meat of pork is often consumed by some people. However, the consumption of beef is strictly prohibited in the village as the people are Hindus. The people eat rice with various seasonal vegetables available in the markets. They prefer rice in breakfast, especially with salt, oil, and chilli and sometimes eat puffed rice with milk. During lunch and dinner also, they take

rice. They do not make any traditional liquor. People drink tea a lot. The state Assam is one of the major tea producers of the country, and this is the reason for the availability of tea.

2.19 Dress Pattern:

People wear both traditional and modern clothes. Traditionally, the menfolk wear *dhoti* (bottom wear made of cotton fabrics), *Suria* (A type of shirt), and traditional *Gamocha* (handwoven towel) on their shoulder. On the other hand, the womenfolk wears *Mekhela* (bottom wear) and *Chadar* (top wear to cover the upper part of the body). Nowadays, due to the impact of the modern way of life, males wear pants, shirts, jackets, etc. However, in the case of women, *salwar kamij* is sometimes used by them. The young girls and boys prefer to wear dresses which are comfortable for them.

2.20: Other amenities and facilities

2.20.1 Drinking water:

There are three types of drinking water facilities such as hand pumps, tap water, and pond water in the village Tilana. Most of the people use running water supplied through pipe and hand pumps, and few of them are dependent on pond water.

2.20.2 Road:

The road in the village is a clay-built road which is not in good condition. During the rainy days, the villagers suffer a lot because the road is filled with mud. There is the provision of public transport from the Nalbari town to the main road of the village. Inside the village, there is no public transport system, and the villagers have to walk or depend on personal means of transport.

2.20.3 Organizations in the Village:

There is one village library named *Sonali Puthibhoral*. Some Self-Help Groups are also found in the village. These are Parana SHG, Pubali SHG, Abhijan SHG, etc.

The above chapter gives a vivid picture of the ethnographic and socio-economic profile of the village. This includes the general characteristics of Nalbari District, climatic condition,

settlement pattern, social organization, economic structure, life cycle rituals, food and drink, dress pattern, religion, festivals and inter-caste relationship of the study village Tilana. The chapter also explains the demographic profile, education, occupation structure, monthly income category and marital status of the sample population. The map of India, Assam, Nalbari District and the study village Tilana are also included in the chapter.

Chapter:3

Significance of Japi Craft and Its Organisation

3.1 Historical background:

“Japi”, a traditional headgear of Assam, is mainly used by the agriculturalist class. In addition, it symbolizes a token of honor and also it is used for decoration. The origin of Japi is not known. However, according to the local narratives, the term Japi is derived from the local word *Jaap*. This local term *Jaap* refers to “*Tokou paat* held together by wrapping”. Since *Tokou paat* is considered to be one of the prime raw materials for making Japis, the term *Jaap* means a bundle of *Tokou Paat*. Japi is manufactured by tying a bundle of *Tokou Paat* together. These Japis are produced on a commercial basis in the village Tilana.⁸ According to the information available on the website of the Directorate of Tourism, Government of Assam, the Chinese pilgrim Huen Tsang visited Assam. During that time, Kumar Bhaskar Barma, a renowned king of Barman dynasty, welcomed him with a Japi. Thus, it can be assumed that Japi was in use during that time.⁹

There is no mention of the origin of Japi in any historical literature. However, Edward Gait mooted about the use of Japi in his book *A history of Assam*. In that book, he writes that Japi was perhaps introduced to Assam by the Ahom. It is believed that Japi was adopted from the head covering of the Shan Tribe of Burma (Myanmar). The ornamented Japi was a symbol of authority, and so only the noble and the great were permitted to wear Japi in the presence of the Ahom kings or *Swardeos*. Besides, Japi is used by the female members of the Ahom aristocrat families as a headgear. The ornamented Japi was an essential article for trade (Gait,1905; Baruah 1995).

It is evident that apart from Assam, no evidence of Japi is found in the other parts of India. In some parts of South East Asia such as Vietnam, Mongolia, etc., evidence of using headgears similar to Japi is found. However, their headgear is little different from the Assamese Japi in the sense that the border of Assamese Japis is a little bent. However, it is different in the case of headgear found in South East Asian nations, where the borders of their headgear are straight. It is also assumed

⁸ <https://www.revolvvy.com/page/Jaapi>

⁹ <http://directortourism.assam.gov.in/information-services/details/art-craft>

that, as Assam is located in the vicinity of South East Asian nations, Japi might have come from those nations. However, there is no evidence of this fact, and nowadays, Japi is considered as the indigenous cultural item of Assam (Saikia, 2012).

3.2 Significance of the Japi craft:

The importance of Japi in the greater Assamese society and culture is undeniable. It is said that the use of Japi is intimately related to the life of the people of Assam. As the whole of India, Assam is also an agriculture-based society. Most of the people of Assam are dependent on agriculture for their livelihoods. The climate of Assam is tropical monsoon type. On this notion, the farmers and *Baganias* (tea garden workers) have to work in their fields despite having heavy rainfall or intense sun rays. They use Japi as a part of their livelihood. This Japi has a string which the farmers and the tea garden workers can tie on their neck while working. These Japis are very easy to use without any helping hands. Therefore, the Japi has been clinging to the rural life of people.

It is said that Japi also occupies a place in the social life of Assamese people. It is used as an item for showing reverence to someone. The utilization of Japi is manifold. It is used for decorating stages for various programs, for decorating the entrance gates of any ceremonial hall or marriages, and for decorating drawing rooms of almost all the Assamese houses because of its captivating designs and motifs such as the use of colorful papers and metallic *chumkis*. It is also considered as a prestigious item to gift someone.

Japi is also said to be associated with the cultural life of the people of Assam. Japi has its mention in the Bihu folk songs of Assam.

“Japi Lathi Tiyoni

Neribioi Neribi

Eribogoi Lagile

Thioi Thioi Moribi”

According to them, these lines are mentioned in an old Bihu song. The literal meaning of these lines is “Do not forget Japi, Stick, and Towel, or you will be in danger”. However, it is said that

the symbolic meaning underneath is the Japi, the stick, and the handwoven towel of Assam (*Gamocha*), which are attached to the life of Assamese people as these are essential parts of the material culture of Assam. Hence, it is the responsibility of all the Assamese people to preserve and promote these traditional things or else someday Assam will lose its pride cohered in such indigenous products.

The Bihu dancers often perform Bihu dance by holding Japi in their hands. This type of dance is called as Japi Bihu dance. It is a creative dance which was probably shown for the first time in the first Assamese movie *Joymoti* directed by Jyoti Prasad Agarwala in 1935. The importance of Japi is highly esteemed in the social and cultural life of the people of greater Assamese society and culture.

3.3 Categorization of the artisans:

The artisans of the village under study are divided into different categories, which are as follows:

- (I) On the basis of the marketing of Japi, the artisans can be categorized into two types.
They are
 - (a) Artisans dependent on village craft shops
 - (b) Independent artisans
 - (a) Artisans dependent on craft shops-

The artisans under this category are dependent on village shops located in the village. These artisans make Japis at their home and sell those in the village shops. They take the payment in advance and make Japis according to the quantity assigned by the shops. They make *Halua Japi* entirely on their own and sell those to the shops. Though in this case also the artisans take advance payment from the owner of the shops, it is different in the case of *Phulam Japi*. The artisans only make the frame of the Japi and sell them. The workers involved in these craft shops decorate those Japis and make them prepared for selling. Then, the owner of the shops sells those Japis to the state emporium or other places directly or with the help of intermediaries.

- (b) Independent artisans-

The artisans under this category carry out the Japi making activity on their own. They do not depend on the village craft shops. They make all types of Japis in their home at their own costs and sell those to the state emporium and other customers as per order. However, in most of the cases, intermediaries are involved in selling the products.

Table 3.1

Categorization of Artisans Based on Marketing

Types of artisans	No. of artisans	%
Artisans dependent on village shops	83	75.45
Independent artisans	27	24.55

(Source: Field data)

The above table shows that 83 artisans (75.45%) are dependent on the village craft shops for making, selling, and buying of Japis. However, 27 artisans (24.55%) are independent artisans. These 27 artisans perform Japi-making activity on their own because of some reasons such as their affordability to finance their own business, obtaining more profit as the profit earned is not shared among others, and lack of confidence on the village craft shops. Mostly the skilled and resourceful artisans are included in this category and few case studies are provided for the understanding of their life.

Case Study 1:

Mukut Tamuli is a skilled artisan of the village Tilana. He is around 55 years of age and belongs to the Tamuli community. He holds the Artisan Identity Card containing number ASGWT000832. In his family, he has his father, his wife, and two sons. His wife is a homemaker and his two sons are still students. According to him, his father was a Japi maker and used to work under Japi

Samabai Samiti, cooperative society in the village, which was established in the 1980s. He worked for the development of the artisans in terms of manufacturing and marketing of Japi. However, due to financial crunch and also due to the cases of corruption, the society got closed. After that, his father made Japis independently.

Mukut Tamuli inherited this Japi making skill from his father and has been pursuing this activity since his young age. He performs Japi-making activity independently. After making the Japis, he sells those in the craft stores of Guwahati such as *Jagaran*, a Showroom of ARTFED (Assam Apex Weavers and Artisans Co-operative Federation Limited), *Pragjyotika Assam Emporium*, etc. He has good contacts with various craft stores of Assam, and thereby, it is beneficial for him to conduct this activity independently. Since he is pursuing this occupation independently, he himself needs to buy the raw materials required for making the products. He earns more than the artisan who is dependent on the village craft shops and other intermediaries.

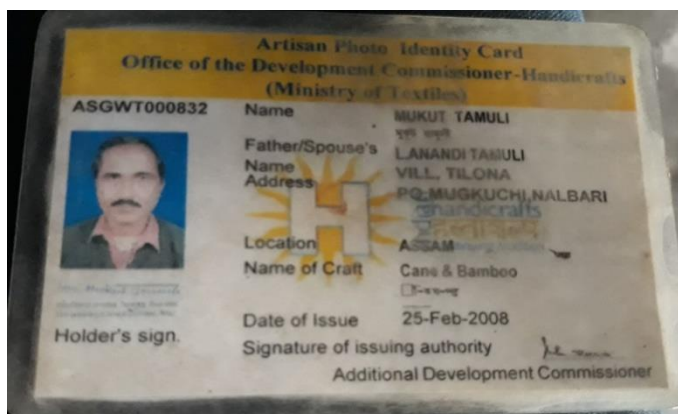


Plate 3.1

Artisan Photo Identity Card

Case Study 2:

Bhaben Rajbangshi is 49 years old, and he belongs to the Rajbangshi community. He is a skilled Japi artisan of the village. His family consists of his uncle, his cousin brother, his wife, a son, and two daughters. He has been in this profession since his young age. He narrated that he inherited this tradition from his paternal uncle who was a skilled Japi maker. During his early childhood, his father died and since then he was brought up in his uncle's house. He left studies after completing

his lower primary education and helped his uncle while preparing Japi. When he became young, he started pursuing Japi making professionally along with his uncle.

He said that now his uncle has reached his old age and is not able to conduct Japi making, and he is making Japis independently. After making the Japis, he sells those in the craft stores of Guwahati such as *Jagaran*, a Showroom of ARTFED, *Pragjyotika Assam Emporium*, etc. Along with these, he sometimes sells the Japis in the local market. According to him, his one and only cousin brother Ruben Rajbangshi helps him in various activities related to his profession such as bringing the products to the local market, buying raw materials from market, and sometimes in cutting bamboo. He shares his profits with his brother as well. During the peak seasons, he earns around Rs. 10000 to 12000 per month. However, during normal days, his profit is less. His wife also helps him in making *Phulam* Japis.

The above case studies provide an idea of how the independent Japi makers have been carrying out Japi-making activity. The cases indicate that the artisans who are pursuing this activity independently, are not dependent on the village craft shops. They usually prefer to sell their products directly to the customers in the markets and restrain from taking help from intermediaries and village craft shops in selling their products. In the first case, the artisan sells his products in the renowned craft stores of Guwahati city. The second case reveals that, apart from selling products in the craft stores of Guwahati, the artisan sells his products in the local markets as well. From both the case studies, it is evident that the profit is more as the profit is not shared with others.

- (II) Based on the involvement of the artisans in Japi-making activity, the artisans in the village can be classified into three types. They are
- a) Artisans work at home
 - b) Artisans work in village shops
 - c) Owner of village shops
- (a) Artisans work at home-

Under this category, the artisans do Japi-making the activity at their own residence. They individually make Japis. Among them, some sell their products to the village craft shops, and some others do everything, including making and marketing on their own.

Case Study:

Pramod Baishya is 46 years old and he belongs to Baishya community. He is one of the skilled Japi makers of Tilana village. In his family, he has his old mother, wife, and three daughters. He had been engaged in Japi making for around 16 years. He completed his High School education and started earning a livelihood for his own.

He said that he got married at the age of 22 years, and since then he has been supporting his family by making Japis. He makes the frames of Japis as per order from the owner of the village craft shop and sells those to them. As he is not economically stable, he takes advanced payment from the owner to fulfill his daily necessities. He narrated that the owner of the craft shop with which he is associated gives him payment as per the order. If the owner gives him the order of 20 Japis, the owner makes the payment of half of the Japis beforehand and, after the completion of making Japis, full payments are made by the owner. He carries out his Japi-making activity at his own residence, and the owner comes to collect Japis from him after getting the products ready. He further added that sometimes he himself collect some raw materials needed for Japi making which are locally available. However, most of the time, the craft shop owner assists him in this regard.

From the above case study, we learn that the artisans who work at home are dependent on the owner of the village craft shops for fulfilling their day-to-day necessities. Simultaneously, the owners of craft shops are also dependent on the artisans working under him. They take the orders from the customers on a large scale, and within a time period, they collect the products from the artisans. Thus, a cooperative relationship is seen between the owners of the craft shops and the artisans work under them.



Plate 3.2

An artisan making frame of Japi

(b) Artisans worked in village craft shops

Artisans under this category run Japi-making activity in the village shops itself. The artisans, including young and old, make Japis in cooperation with each other. The owner of the village craft shop gives them direction, and he himself is engaged in Japi making. This type of artisans receives payment from the owner on the basis of profits. Mostly, they decorate *Phulam Japis*, which are bought from the artisans of their village.

Case Study:

Dhruva Baishya is 27 years of age and a young Japi maker. He belongs to the Baishya community. He has been engaged in Japi making since he was 20 years old. According to him, after completion of his graduation 2nd year, he left his college due to financial issues, and since then, he has been working as a Japi artisan in the village craft shop named AB Art. He narrated that his father was also a Japi maker. However, due to some health issues, his father was not able to support their livelihoods. As the elder son, Dhruva had to support his family and thereby left his studies. By that

time, his neighbor Nripen Tamuli opened a craft shop in the village and asked him for joining his craft shop. Since then he has been working in the craft shop.

He informed that he mostly performs the work of decoration along with other artisans working in the craft shop. His work is mostly confined to decoration. However, he also makes the complete Japi if required. He does the works relating to Japi making at the craft shop itself. The owner needs to move from place to place/ for taking contracts from customers, collecting products from the artisans work under him, and for monetary issues associated with the profession. Therefore, mostly, Dhruva needs to look after the shop. He also told that the owner of their craft shop directs them in terms of quantity, procedure, and so on. Sometimes, he goes to collect the frame of the Japis from the village artisans. He further added that the profit is divided among the workers. He said that during peak seasons, i.e. during the English month April and May, he earns around 200-400 rupees per day for *Phulam Japis*. However, during regular days, the profit is less.

The above case study reveals about the work of the artisans in the village craft shops. The case shows that during peak season, the profit margin is more among them, while during normal days, the profit is less.

(c) Owner of the village shop

All the village craft shops are owned by skilled artisans who carry out the job of Japi-making, buying from the artisans of the village, and marketing of the products. They are included under this category. The owners of village shops are skilled artisans of the village. They give directions to the worker artisans engaged in their shops, and they have useful contacts and networks with various markets as well as customers. Besides, under these owners of the village shops, 15-20 households are conducting Japi-making activity. These households are dependent on them in terms of getting financial support, marketing, etc.

Case Study:

Dipa Kalita is around 35 years old and belongs to the Kalita community. She is the only female owner of the village craft shop, named J.B. Japi Udyog. After completion of her higher secondary education, she started doing various craft-making activities and also weaving activities. She said

that her father Gohin Kalita was a skilled Japi artisan and she inherited this skill from her father. Thus, she started concentrating more on Japi making specifically.

In her family, she had five sisters, among whom she is the youngest one. According to her, she wanted to be independent since her childhood and so after getting married, with the help of her husband, who is a private school teacher by profession and her in-laws, she opened a craft shop in the village and started pursuing Japi-making activity to support her livelihood ends. Under her, approximately 15-20 households are dependent. The artisan households make Japis according to her order, and the artisans worked in her shop to collect those and make them prepared for sale. There are five artisans who work in her craft shop. Under her guidance, they conduct various work relating to making Japis.

She further adds that usually, women are not allowed to go out from their families in search of livelihood and they want to get confined in between the four walls of their houses. Initially, she also went through some unfavorable situations. However, because of her supportive family members, she was able to continue her interest and now has become self-dependent.

From the above case study, it is apparent that the craft shop owners take responsibilities of the artisan households working under them. They mainly provide guidance and directions to the artisan in terms of design, quality, and quantity of the products.

Table 3.2

Categorization of Artisans Based on Involvement

Types of artisans	No. of artisans	%
Artisans worked at home	69	62.72
Artisans worked in village shops	34	30.90

Owner of village shops	7	6.38
------------------------	---	------

(Source: Field data)

The above table shows that 69 artisans (62.72%) worked from home. However, 34 artisans (30.90%) are engaged in village craft shops. It is evident from the above table that the first category, i.e. “Artisans worked at home” accounts more than the second category, i.e. “Artisans worked in village shops”. There are some reasons for this variation. The craft shops run by few artisans of the village are congested. They are also financially not very strong and hence not being able to take spacious rooms for their shops. Therefore, the small rooms are not enough to facilitate the engagement of more than 4 to 5 artisans. Besides, the owners have to pay rent for their rooms. Large rooms cost more, which is a problem for them. Thus, most of the artisans of the village prefer to conduct Japi, making the activity at their own residence.

There are only 7 owners of the village craft shops which accounts for only 6.38%. This is indeed very less as compared to the other two categories. Their works revolve around giving direction to the artisans work in the shops, taking contracts from customers and other organizations, collection of frames of Japis from artisan households, etc.



Plate 3.3

A Village Craft Shop

3.4 Raw material used:

According to the Japi artisans, the original raw material used for making Japi is bamboo. It is a type of grass like a woody plant which has more than 125 species in India. In Assam, the percentage of growing stock of bamboo is 16.23% (Pandey and Pandey, 2008). Therefore, bamboo is highly efficient for manufacturing of various types of handicrafts in Assam. The use of bamboo in Japi making is also considered as very beneficial because it is a plant with fast regrowth capacity by re-growing itself just from clumps. Thus, it is readily available in areas of Assam, and poor

artisans can easily make use of it by making various handicrafts, including Japi. This is also a reason because of which bamboo is also considered as a renewable and sustainably manageable plant.

Apart from bamboo, another essential raw material according to the artisans for Japi-making is *Trachycarpus Martianua*, a type of palm leaf locally termed as *Tokou Paat*. There are two varieties of palm plant found in Assam. One type is found in North-East India while the other type is available in North-Central Nepal. It is a plant having split leaves and flexibility. Therefore, it is advantageous in making Japi as these leaves can easily be placed between bamboo stripes and can be bent according to the shape of a Japi.

It is noted that some other decorative items such as cotton fabrics, velvet papers of various colors, the lace of white color, wool, thread, gum, etc. available in local markets are required for making *Phulam Japi*. *Chumki*, a metallic decorative item, is also used for decorating Japis. The *Chumkis* are of various colors. Nowadays, the artisans also use glass type *Chumkis* which enhance the beauty of *Phulam Japis*.

Moreover, various decorative cotton fabrics, especially of red, blue, orange, and green color, are used for covering the rim of the *Phulam Japis*. These cotton fabrics are cut longitudinally and stitched into the outer rim of Japis. These colorful fabrics make *Phulam Japis* more attractive. Velvet papers of various colors are another essential decorative item for making *Phulam Japis*. These velvet papers are used for making designs over *Phulam Japis*. The artisans cut these papers into various small to medium pieces which are of various shapes such as circular, semi-circular, triangular, and so on. These are placed and stuck into the upper part of the Japis.

In the process of making *Phulam Japis*, white lace is also an essential item. This lace of white color is used to paste in the boundary of every piece of velvet paper. Red wool is an item used for decorating purpose. This wool of red color is cut into pieces and made a shape of the flower. These flowers made of red wool are placed on the top or cone of *Phulam Japis*. All these items used for making *Phulam Japis* are available in local markets. Besides, gum, thread, needle, etc. are used for the same purpose. According to the artisans, collecting raw materials nowadays are becoming a problem for them as the prime raw material such as bamboo and *Tokou Paat* (palm leaves) are getting scarce.



Plate 3.4 Bamboo Stripes



Plate 3.5 *Tokou Paat*

3.5 Process of Japi-making:

The process of Japi-making is a time-consuming as well as labor-intensive work. Different stages of the manufacturing process are involved in Japi-making activity. The artisans execute the whole Japi-making process in coordination with various level of working in the activity. Few essential processes of Japi-making are discussed below:

3.5.1 Collection of raw material

The original raw materials used for making Japi are bamboo and a type of palm leaves which is locally termed as *Tokou Paat*. Therefore, in the first stage of making Japi, the artisans cut the bamboos and pluck palm leaves from the forests or nearby areas. Some households of the village grow palm leaves in their own land and sell those to the village artisans.

3.5.2 The process

The collected palm leaves are dried separately under the sun for 2-3 days. These palm leaves, i.e. *Tokou Paat*, are then tied together for some time until required. After that, the artisans split the bamboos into small stripes with a big knife called *Daa*. Again, these bamboo stripes are also tied together for some time and used for making bamboo frames.

The artisans use a triangle-shaped base locally termed as *Khasa*. The *Khasa* is also made of cane. For creating *Khasa*, the artisans use a type of material called *Khangra*. The bamboo stripes are woven with small gaps over the *Khasa*, and the cap or the upper structure of the Japi is made. For making the bottom of Japi, the bamboo stripes are woven with massive gaps. These gaps are made so that the *Tokou Paat* is placed between these enormous gaps. After making the upper and bottom structure, the artisans make the side rims of the Japi. The side rims are made with bamboo sticks so that it can form a roundish or circular shape, which gives a perfect conical shape to the top of the Japi. After these works, the palm leaves or the *Tokou Paat* is placed in between the gaps of the bamboo frame as per the shape of a Japi.



Plate 3.6

Khasa, a triangular base



Plate 3.7

Khangra

In the case of making *Phulam Japis*, the decoration is essential because, in the Assamese language, the word *Phulam* refers to “floral decoration”. These *Phulam Japis* are mainly used for decorative purposes. However, the decoration is not required in case of *Halua Japi*. The reason behind this is that *Halua Japis* are made to be used in fields by the farmers and *Baganias* (tea garden workers) to protect them from intense sun rays and rain. According to the artisans, the term *Halua* is related with the Assamese term *Haal*, i.e. plough. Such kind of Japi is used while ploughing in the agricultural fields. Therefore, these Japis do not require any decoration and are called *Halua Japi*. Various decorative items such as cotton fabrics, velvet papers of various colors, the lace of white color, wool, thread, gum, etc. are bought from the local markets. First, the cotton fabrics of various colors are cut into pieces longitudinally and then stitched along the side rims of the Japi. In this regard, the red color is mostly preferred though other colors such as blue, green, and orange are also used.

After this, the velvet papers of various colors such as red, blue, white, etc. are cut into pieces of various shapes and are placed in the upper part of Japi with the help of gums. Then the metallic decorative items called *Chumkis* are placed over the velvet pieces of papers according to the design. Laces of white color are pasted to cover the border of velvet papers so that it gives a good color-contrast look to the borders. Another essential decorative item, i.e. wool of red color is used to make the shape of a flower by cutting it into small pieces. Then with the help of thread and needle, some flower shapes are made from these pieces. These flower shaped wools are placed over the top or conical point of the *Phualm Japi*. Finally, the finished product is made.

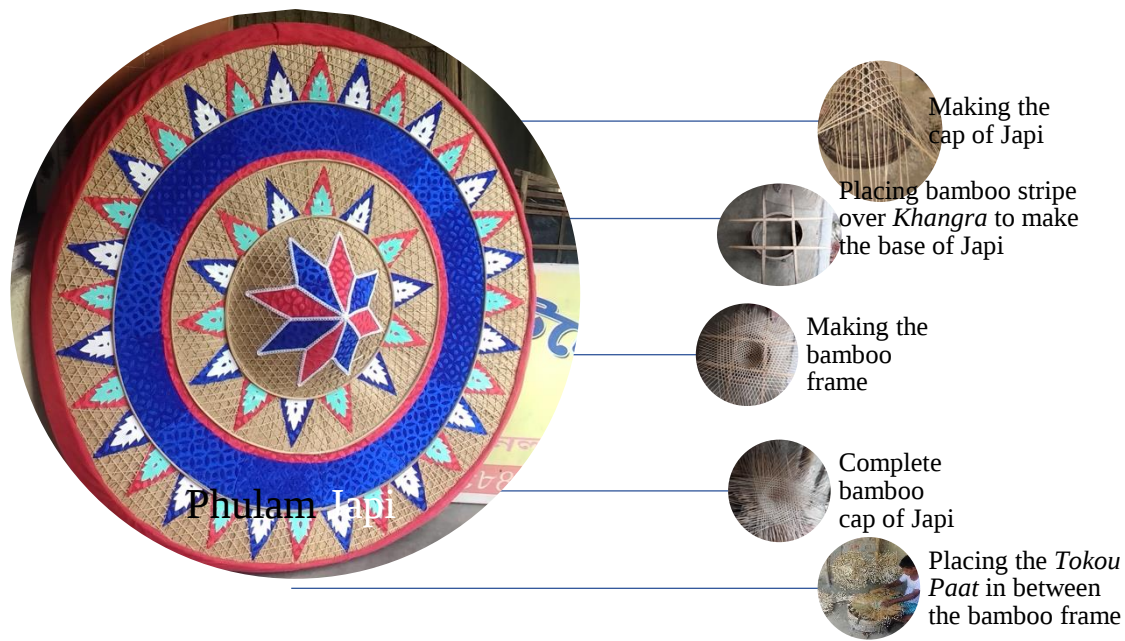


Plate 3.8

Diagram of the Japi-making process

3.6 Division of labor:

Division of labor has been discussed as an important role in the society since it does not only rely on the provision of economic services, but also creates harmony between individuals. Scholars look at the division of labor as a means to increase production although much more has to be derived from it through new and better conditions. Here, the core principle is to convey as to why the division of labor is vital. Critically, this makes its influence to be on a personal level and based on one's psychological liking. Specialization in the face of division of labor creates a need in individuals to operate on a communal basis so that they may maximize the returns and hence increase happiness. Durkheim's theory on the division of labor may be of great value to modern society as he uses scientific methods to explain the source and evolution of an ordered society. This gave rise to sociology and other disciplines which envisions the society as being composed of several factors which must act in tandem. Wherever there is a common ideology between people

living together, they tend to have creative thinking that can be useful to them. Division of labor has had a history of revolution to what it is today.¹⁰

Correlating the division of labor to Japi-making activity, we find that since inception this traditional handicraft industry is considered as labor-intensive work. Important works are done by the menfolk. However, women and children also take part in various stages of Japi-making process. The menfolk usually do the work of cutting bamboo and plucking *Tokou Paat*. The work of drying palm leaves is done by anyone of the family. There is no hard and fast rule for the division of labor regarding this. Both men and women folk are expert in the weaving of bamboo stripes. Yet mainly it is done by men. The palm leaves or *Tokou Paat* are placed in between the woven structure by the menfolk. Therefore, it can be said that the major works of Japi-making are done by menfolk. The number of days required for making one *Halua Japi* is 2 to 4 days approximately as this does not require decoration.

On the other hand, the decoration is essential in the case of making *Phulam Japis*, in making which the women take an active part. The menfolk or children do the work of procuring various kind of decorative materials such as white lace, wool, *Chumki*, velvet cloths, etc. from the market. The womenfolk then decorate Japis with these materials. Hence, those Japis which are used for honoring purpose requires the writing of letters over these. So, letter writings or the making of letters by cutting papers is done by menfolk, though sometimes women also do the same as per requirement. In the case of *Phulam Japi*, 3 to 5 days are required to finish one Japi.

However, the division of labor is a little different in case of the artisans work in the village craft shops because of the lack of women participation in the craft shops. In contrast to the participation of more women in decoration work among artisans who work at home, the decoration work is done by the artisans of the village craft shops irrespective of their gender and age.

The following table will clearly show the division of labor among the Japi-making families:

Table 3.3

Division of Labour Based on Sex

¹⁰ www.ukessays.com

Sex	Activities
Male	Cutting of bamboo, plucking of <i>Tokou Paat</i> , drying up of palm leaves, weaving of bamboo stripes, placing the palm leaves in between the woven structure.
Female	<i>Drying up of palm leaves, weaving of bamboo stripes, placing the palm leaves in between the woven structure, decorating the Phulam Japis</i>
Children	Decoration of <i>Phulam Japis</i> , writing of letters over <i>Phulam Japis</i>

(Source: Field data)

Therefore, it can be concluded that among the artisans, the division of labor is flexible as per the requirements of the making process. It is found that the strenuous and complex works are done by the menfolk whereas the works that are a bit easier are done by women and children.

3.7 Sources of raw materials:

Raw materials are indeed essential for manufacturing any product. The Japi-making activity requires some raw materials, which are locally available, while some are needed to purchase from the market. The two prime raw materials essential for Japi making are bamboo and a type of palm leaf locally termed as *Tokou Paat*. Bamboo is locally available. It is easily accessible as it is commonly found in the forests of Assam. Some of the households grow bamboo plants in their household garden. Rajen Rajbongshi, a Japi artisan, says that the lack of space for growing bamboo plants also compels them to purchase bamboo from the *Hatkhole* market of Nalbari town.

Tokou Paat is not grown by all the artisan households of the village. Few households grow this by their own and sell to other artisans as well as to the owner of the craft shops. Besides, *Tokou Paat* is also purchased from a place called Baranghati in Kamrup District and approximately 30 km far from the village Tilana.

Some decorative items are essential in case of making *Phulam Japis*. These decorative items such as cotton fabrics, velvet papers, metallic decorative items, wool, white lace, gum, etc. are purchased from local markets.

3.8 Season:

In the village Tilana, Japi-making activity is a full-time activity, and the artisans are solely dependent on this profession throughout the year. The economy of Assam is based on agriculture. The farmers working in agricultural fields and the tea garden workers use *Halua Japis* as headgear while working. These Japis protect them from intense sun rays as well as rains. Therefore, making of *Halua Japis* continue throughout the year.

The state festival of Assam is *Bihu*. According to Prabodh Baishys, especially during the time of *Bohag Bihu*, *Phulam Japis* are of extensive use. The season is from mid of April to May. During this season, *Phulam Japis* is very important because many programs are held during this period. The *Phulam Japis* are used for various purposes.

Most importantly, for honoring the guests at the *Bihu* programs, *Phulam Japis* are used. Besides this, for decorating the stage, decorating the entrance gates, and for many decoration works, *Phulam Japi* is of great importance. Apart from these, the dancers who perform *Bihu* dance also use *Phulam Japis* while dancing. Apart from these, *Phulam Japis* are also used in various meetings to honor the guests, delegates, and dignitaries. Since numerous meetings are held in various seasons of the year, *Phulam Japis* are also made throughout the year.

3.9 Technology used:

The type of technology used in handicraft products is usually simple. The producers of such products mostly prefer those tools which are locally available and easily accessible to them. In a developing country like India, the producers of handicraft items are not economically stable.

Therefore, they cannot afford sophisticated machinery and so they use tools and equipment which are locally available. The process of Japi making is done through simple technology. There is no use of sophisticated machinery in making Japis. The artisans have been continuing this activity for a long time through manual labor work. They have learned the simple indigenous technique for making Japis from their forefathers. All the works required for making Japis are manual. The artisans manually do all activities needed for Japi-making and make these as finished products.

The artisans use a type of big knife which is in local language called *Daa*. This *Daa* is used to pluck off *Tokou Paat* and also for cutting bamboo. *Daa* is essential for cutting the bamboos into small stripes. *Daa* is made of an iron blade with a wooden handle, and it looks like a knife. The grip of the handle is tied with basketry. However, its size is large as compared to a regular knife. Sometimes, this *Daa* is also called as Blacksmith's knife. Apart from this, scissor is an essential tool for making Japis. It is mainly used for cutting velvet papers, colorful papers, etc. Therefore, it can be said that these two are the prime tools used for making Japis. There is no evidence of using highly sophisticated machinery in regard to Japi-making.

3.10 Marketing facilities:

For the sustenance of a traditional handicraft industry, adequate marketing facilities are of great importance. Proper strategies involved in marketing helps in promoting the industry as well. In the case of traditional Japi-making industry also, proper marketing is essential. In the village named Tilana, the existing village craft shops are mainly doing the job of selling and buying the products. There are seven craft shops in the village, namely AB Art, K.B. Japi Industry, *Bezbaruah Japi Store*, and so on. These shops are located on the main connecting road from Nalbari District to the capital of Assam, i.e. Guwahati.

These village craft shops are owned by the skilled artisans of the village. The owners employ the village artisans in their craft shops. Young artisans, who are interested, usually take part in this activity. However, the young generation is not willing to do Japi-making as there is very less benefit. The workers under the craft shops make Japis under the guidance of their owners and make the final products ready for sale. The labor artisans do not get a fixed salary, and the profit from the sale is divided among them.

The owner of these craft shops also buys Japis from the village artisans. The artisans are too poor to afford the cost of buying decorative items. Therefore, they sell their unfinished Japis to village shops without any decoration, and the decoration work is accomplished by the labor artisans of the craft shops. The owner of the shops pays money to the artisans in advance, and the artisans buy their day-to-day provisions using that money for survival. The artisans working under the owner of the village craft shops mostly do the decoration work of the *Phulam Japis* such as cutting and making the letters for writing the names on the Japis, putting colorful metallic *Chumkis*, and so on. In the case of distribution of profits, the owners of the craft shops share the profits with the artisans. The details of the information are mentioned in the following table:

Table 3.4

Price of Japis and Share among Artisans

Types of Japis	The total cost of raw materials (Rs.)	The selling price of each Japi (Rs.)	Share give to artisans per Japi (Rs.)
<i>Halua Japi</i>	40-50	50-80	10-15
<i>Phulam Japi</i>	60-70	80-150	30-40

(Source: Field data)

The above table shows that the *Halua Japis* are sold to the buyers at the cost of 50-80 rupees each approximately, and the share given to the artisans per each Japi is around 10-15 rupees. However, in the case of *Phulam Japis*, the cost is approximately from 80 to 150 rupees and the share given to the artisans ranges from 30 to 40 rupees per each Japi. The entrepreneurs take the orders from various business networks, and according to the requirement, they send the Japi products to the destined locations all over Assam.

The shop owners usually take contracts from state emporiums, tea garden owners, and others. As per the contract, the Japis are made. After final production, the Japis are sent to the markets for sale. Hence, often for selling Japis, the presence of intermediaries cannot be avoided. The intermediaries take the contracts from outsiders and give those to the owners of the village craft shops and sometimes to those who do Japi-making individually. They give the order, and accordingly, the artisans make Japis. Then the intermediaries buy those products from them and sell those in the markets. However, the intermediaries take the lion's share of the profit while selling. Thus, it can be said that the artisans do the work of making Japis in cooperation with each other and form a structure among themselves and also perform the work of marketing.

Moreover, some artisans of the village run their business solely. They are not dependent on the village craft shops for buying and selling Japis. These artisans make the Japis as per order is taken from the buyers and sell those to them. They also sell the products in the local markets. Sometimes, these artisans also take help from the middlemen or intermediaries who give them orders for making Japis. These Japis made by the artisans are also sold in the local markets and in exhibitions. The artisans who do it solely by themselves bring their products to the weekly markets and sell those.

Case Study:

Anjana Tamuli is a 38-year old widow and she belongs to Tamuli community. Her husband Late Haren Tamuli, who was a Japi maker by profession, died at the age of 45 due to an accident. Anjana was a homemaker and used to help her husband in Japi-making. However, after the death of her husband, she is pursuing Japi-making as livelihood activity to support her family consisting of three children. She makes Japi and sells to the craft shop, named J.B. Japi Udyog. Earlier, she used to sell her products to a *Bepari*, i.e. middleman, who used to come to her village and bought the products from them. They used to give payments together for buying the products. But later, she realized that the *Beparis* were not giving them the proper price of the products and were making a lot of profit from them. After this, she contacted Dipa Kalita of J. B. Japi Udyog, and for 1^{1/2} years, she has been making Japis under her. According to Anjana, she gets 10-15 Rupees for each *Halua Japi* and 30-40 rupees for each *Phulam Japi* during offseason, while during peak season, she earns about 50-60 rupees for each *Phulam Japi*. When she used to sell the products to

intermediaries, she was earning much less compared to this. The reason is that the village craft shop owners are from her village, and hence along with profit, they also take care of the artisans under them.

The above case study reveals the marketing of Japis and the profit incurred from such marketing facilities. It shows that profit is more in case of selling the products in the village craft shops. This is because of the owners of the village craft shops.

The current chapter provides an insight into the significance of Japi making tradition in the entire Assamese society and the organization of the same. It is evident that traditional Japi is considered as an integral part of the Assamese material culture. The Japi artisans are divided into some groups based on the marketing and involvement of the artisans in the activity. The study reveals that artisans follow a simple division of labor and technology for manufacturing Japis. The study shows that the marketing of the products is done either independently or through village craft shop owners. However, the interference of intermediaries is also undeniable in the marketing of Japi products.

Chapter: 4

Problems Associated with Japi-making Tradition

After agriculture, the major source of livelihood for rural India rests with the small-scale industries such as handicrafts, handloom, etc. However, these industries have lately been grappling with survival crisis. The woeful condition of these industries can be seen in various parts of our country. Varanasi is one of the productive weaving centers of Uttar Pradesh and the world famous center of *Brocade* and *Zari* works. It is also an internationally renowned silk saree production center of the country. However, due to the emergence of various issues such as increasing price of raw silk, imitation of the original products in less price, old designs, etc., this traditional weaving industry is facing existential threats. An example can also be cited from the terracotta craft of Panchmura village of Bankura District of West Bengal. By manufacturing various terracotta crafts ranging from engraved items to household products, Panchmura village has been able to spread its fame from local to the international markets. Looking at the grey side of things we witness that inadequate storage facilities, the dearth of proper marketing facilities, etc., have been pushing the artisans to the path of extinction. (Faisal:2016, Satapathi: 2011).

Problems associated with traditional industries are also evident in various craft-making traditions of Assam. Mask making craft of Majuli District of Assam forms a dominant craft manufacturing tradition of Assam. While attempting to propound his thoughts and messages via a performing art medium, saint Mahapurush Sri Sri Sankardeva used these masks or *Mukhasas* during his performances. However, due to the advent of various alternative means of entertainment, lack of interest from the younger generation and various socio-economic challenges, the demand for this traditional craft making activity has been dwindling considerably. Similar issues are being apparent in the Japi making tradition of Assam as well. Japi making clusters of Tilana village is also no exception.

Some significant problems associated with this traditional handicraft industry are as follows:

4.1 Problems with raw materials:

Japi-making requires a specific type of bamboo namely *Jati Baanh* and “TokouPaat” (a type of palm tree) as raw materials. All the households of the village do not cultivate bamboo and the palm leaves. Brajen Baishya, an artisan, is of the opinion that some of the households of the village grow *Tokou Paat* and sell those to other households who do not cultivate those at the cost of 3 to 5 rupees per piece. Some artisans, for whom *Tokou paat* is scarce, buy it from a place called Boronghati which is about 25km away from the village. Thus, along with the costs of *Tokou Paat*, they also have to bear the transportation costs.

Fragmentation of land stands as one of the major setbacks for raw material production. Many households of the village have left the joint family system and have formed nuclear families. With the increase in village population, the joint family system is declining as it becomes difficult to fulfill all the necessities and demands of a large number of people in the joint families. This leads to land fragmentation among the family members. Earlier they had land for growing bamboo and *Tokou Paat* but now as they become nuclear families, the households do not have land for growing raw materials. The small amount of land holdings they get hereditarily is not sufficient for cultivating bamboo and *Tokou paat*. Further, *Tokou Paat* growing is a lengthy process. It usually takes 4-5 years to get fully matured. Thus, households are not willing to grow it. It can be clearly understood from the following case:

Case Study:

Amala Baisya; 65 years old, belong to Baishya community is a homemaker and the wife of late Mahesh Baishya who was a Japi maker by profession. She said that they used to reside in a joint family consisting of her husband, three sons, their wives, and children. She said that her husband used to own 2 Bighas of land which he received hereditarily. He used to cultivate *Tokou Paat*(Palm trees), mango trees, betel-nut trees, and other green leafy vegetables. As there was sufficient land to cultivate *Tokou Paat*, he used to use this for making Japis. After the death of her husband; frequent quarrels started occurring among the wives of their sons. This finally resulted in the separation of their three sons leading to the division of the property All the three sons are now residing separately at their own individual houses. However, she is being taken care of by her younger son and his wife.

The above case study is an exemplary example as to how land fragmentations happen and how they impact traditional crafts such as Japi making. This contributes to the scarcity of raw materials.

In addition, it is observed that the village Tilana is having a high density of population. One house is located in close proximity to another. All households do not have the required land to grow bamboo and *Tokou Paat*. According to them, those who have enough land, they usually prefer to sell the bamboo and *Tokou Paat* by which they earn more money rather than engaging in a time consuming and low return activity such as Japi making.



Plate 4.1

The houses of the artisans

Sometimes the artisans have to buy bamboo and the cost of bamboo is high, which again creates a problem for them. The artisans are poor, and therefore, it is difficult for them to purchase bamboo at a high cost.

The costs of other raw materials which are used for decoration purpose are also high due to which most of the poor households are not able to buy those items. So, they are compelled to sell those only by making the frame of Japi without any decoration at a low cost to some village craft shops for decoration purpose. For instance, a small Japi of 14 cm breadth and length, may fetch them 50 to 80 Rupees. The craft shops after decoration sell those to some traders. Those traders again sell the Japis in markets outside the district at the costs of around Rs. 150 to 200 per piece.

It is said that there was an NGO in the village called “ASHA” (All Assam Socio-Cultural and Health Association) who took the responsibility of selling and buying Japis in the village. The NGO was established in the year 2003. According to the people of the village, right after its inception, the NGO played a significant role in selling the Japis in local exhibitions, state level exhibitions, and fairs, etc. However, the NGO became non-operative as it faced a financial crunch. There are also some Self-Help Groups in the village Tilana such as Parana SHG which was established in 2002, Abhijan SHG established in 2005, Pubali SHG established in 2006, etc. These were mainly established to help and promote Japi making activity. But till now except Parana SHG, the other SHGs have not received any subsidies, credit disbursed amount, etc. Therefore, the self-help groups are also unable to help the artisans though they are willing to do so.

4.2 Nexus of intermediaries:

The biggest threat to the Japi artisans is the vast nexus of middlemen or intermediaries. The families doing Japi making are not economically sound enough to take their products to the market and sell. At this juncture middlemen, seeing the opportunity ahead buys these commodities from the artisan at a low cost and sells it in the market for double the rate for which it was bought.

These intermediaries are mostly businessmen from outside the village. They take the contracts from various shops from various parts of Assam. They give those contracts to the artisans of the village, and the artisans make the products according to the order they receive from the businessmen. The businessmen buy those products from the artisans and sell those at a higher cost to the shops and other organizations from where they take the contracts. Therefore, the actual labor of the artisans is not paid off, but the main stake of profit goes to the middlemen or intermediaries.

During the fieldwork, it was noticed that most of the households only make the frame and sell those to the village craft shops, and then the village craft shops decorate those and sell to the intermediaries. Some households do all the works, including decoration and finishing and sell those to the middlemen, traders, etc. These artisans make Japi at their own cost.

In a conversation with Haliram Rajbongshi, it is apparent that the intermediaries sell the produced items at a high cost in the big towns and cities. He shared the experience he had at Fancy Bazar in

Guwahati. The same products they sell to the intermediaries are sold at very high costs. A single *Phulam Japi* which was bought by the intermediaries for 40 to 50 rupees, the same Japi was being sold for 80 to 100 rupees. Abani Kalita mentioned about the gradual decrease of Japi making tradition with the interference of the intermediaries and the private money lenders. He said that craftsmen hardly receive any profit while the large share of profit is taken away by the intermediaries.

4.3 Absence of entrepreneurs and lack of government funds and policies:

It is evident that there is a lack of entrepreneurial activities in the village. Only very few artisans are taking the required initiatives. Though the artisans are equipped with required skills, yet due to the lack of financial assistance, the artisans are unable to set up their own units. There are only seven artisans in the village who have made their own shops to perform the Japi manufacturing activity and have been assisting the artisans of the village in surviving.

For improving traditional crafts and handicrafts, logistic Government assistance is vital. Ideally, the government should help the artisans to make Japi-making a better income returns business and encourage young people not to abandon traditional skills. The artisans require government intervention to help settle the exploitation they face at the hands of the intermediaries.

The biggest challenge that the artisans face is the lack of monetary assistance. Due to which they are reluctant to continue their traditional occupation. Applications for loans and subsidies remain piled up at the District Industries Centre (DIC) office. More often than not the loans go unapproved because the applicant hardly has any income source to return the loan. Yet another challenge is the lack of awareness among the artisans regarding government schemes and loans.

Moreover, in the village, some artisans are provided with training to improve their artistic skills under the schemes of Nehru Yuva Kendra which is an autonomous organization under the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports. It aims at providing opportunities to rural youth for developing their personal skills and encourages them to contribute to nation-building. But large criticism exists that opportunities to work with such government ventures are always guided by business. Therefore, some deserving artisans are unable to get an opportunity. Because of this reason also Japi making activity is being hampered. Some of the artisans are of the opinion that some guidelines should be

introduced according to which the Japis can be made. Due to the absence of adequate guidelines for making Japis, the quality is degrading.

Case study:

NripenTamuli; 41 years old, from Tamuli community, is the owner of a Japi craft shop and also a skilled Japi artisan. He said that there was an NGO in the village called ASHA. That NGO was established by 11 leading persons in the village, and this NGO was registered on 29-09/2003. Among them Upen Kalita was the chairman and Abani Kalita, Dipali Kalita Devi were the promoters who took the initiative in establishing the NGO ASHA. AbaniKalita is the relative of the informant NripenTamuli.

The registration number was RS/NAL/246/C/63. This NGO was active for about 10 to 15 years and also received the best NGO in all of Assam on 15th August. He said that through the NGO Japis were sold to many places. The NGO played a pivotal role in marketing the products. Unfortunately, due to the severe financial crisis, the NGO had to stop its operations around 3 to 4 years ago, says Tamuli.

The above case study opens up into the stark realities of an artisan's life. It portrays the severity of the economic crisis that the Japi-making industry is going through. Also, it calls for urgent countermeasures from the part of the concerned government authorities.

4.4 Lower social status:

Social status is also a significant obstacle for the entrepreneurs of the village. The younger generations of this village consider this occupation as associated with lower social status. Usually, Japi manufacturing entrepreneurs are not economically sound. As there is an absence of government funds and policies, the entrepreneurs are forced to collect their funds from family members, money lenders, etc. and hence often get trapped in debts. As the entrepreneurs and the artisans of Japi crafts are not economically stable; they are considered as of lower economic status. Therefore, the young peoples of the village are reluctant towards taking this occupation as their primary means of livelihood.

Case Study:

Chintu Mani Nath, 34 years old, belongs to Nath community. He is an owner of the 'Japi craft shop *Japi Store*. He narrated his story of how he struggled to own his store. He was part of a joint family that consists of his wife, father, two brothers, their wives, and his and their children. Among his siblings, he is the only Japi maker and his elder, and younger brothers are engaged in some other profession. He tried to manage finance from various sources such as bank and DIC office. However, he did not get any loan or subsidy. As a last resort, he borrowed an amount from his elder brother to start his shop. As he was new and was not aware of market links, he did not make sufficient profit.

He said that this led to a misunderstanding between him and his brother as he was not able to repay his amount. The wife of his elder brother started using abusive words to his wife and finally led to a quarrel. Then to repay his debt, he sold his bike. After that incident, he got separated from his elder brother and converted into a nuclear family. He said that now his shop is running well under him, thirteen household artisans work and three artisans work in his shop.

The above case shows the problem of indebtedness among the artisans. This case indicates how debts cut off family ties.

4.5 Emergence of alternate means:

The emergence of alternate means is also a significant problem for the artisans, which makes the products become less important in the life of people. The modern lifestyle of urban areas has caught the fascination of the younger generation. Few of them have completed formal education and now being engaged in service sectors. These people opt for other alternatives than Japis. Due to the emergence of cheap alternative means, the traditional designs and motifs of the Japis have been threatened. This can be understood from the following case:

Case Study:

Budhin Baishya; 67 years old; a Japi maker by profession belongs to the Baishya community. He has been working under the village craft shop *Japi Mart* for 8 years. Before that, he used to make Japis independently. However, as he became older, it was getting difficult for him to carry the Japis to the market. Thus, he joined a Japi store, a craft shop of the village Tilana.

According to him, the demand for Halua Japi has decreased because of the reduction in the supply of HaluaJapis to the tea gardens. The reason he stated that nowadays, the owner of the tea garden provides his workers with modern umbrellas as they are long lasting in comparison with the HaluaJapi. He said that earlier the Japis were taken from their village by trucks. They used to get a lot of contracts, especially from *Doomni Tea Estate*. It is located in the Baksa District and near to Nalbari District. However; now, this has decreased substantially because of the alternative they have opted for.

In the above case study, it is apparent that the use of Japis in the tea gardens are becoming reduced with the emergence of modern umbrellas. These alternate means are cheap and readily available in the markets. Thus, dependency on Japi has been reduced to a large extent.

4.6 Indigenous technology and lack of innovation:

The technology used in making Japis is very simple. The artisans use elementary tools and equipment such as *Daa* (knife) and scissors. Japi making relies completely on manual labor. The artisans are not familiar with the use of modern tools and techniques in making Japis. Because of these simple tools and techniques, the whole Japi making activity becomes very time-consuming. The profit is very less as compared to the hard labor the artisans have to give for making Japis. This reason contributes to the unwillingness of artisans to continue this traditional occupation.

Moreover, the designs of traditional Japis are also outdated. It is mainly because of the lack of innovative ideas among the artisans. Due to the emergence of the modern lifestyle of people, the traditional motifs and designs of Japis are no more fascinating for people. The people of today's world do not find the importance of these traditional Japi items in their day to day lives. In certain households, Japi items have been reduced to mere decoration items rather than objects of daily use.

A Japi maker of Tilana village named Upen Kalita has cited the need for the introduction of strict guidelines by the government to preserve the traditional designs and motifs of the Japis and also to initiate some training facilities to promote and explore the innovative ideas among the artisans. This would in turn provide the Japi makers a good deal of motivation to experiment with innovative ideas and with strict guidelines in place, product quality will stay stable.

4.7 Improper market facilities:

The proper market facility is imperative for the growth of Japi making the industry to a considerable extent. Market facilities in *Tilana* fall short of expected standards. The Japi artisans are impoverished, and so they are very much dependent on the village craft shops and the middlemen. According to the artisans, the village craft shops mostly take the initiative regarding this, though they operate at a micro level and cannot take the proper initiatives regarding marketing. In spite of submitting many applications for subsidies and loans in the DIC office, proper actions have not been taken yet.

4.8 Poor infrastructure:

One of the significant obstacles of Japi making industry is the poor and inadequate infrastructure. The artisans require proper space for doing Japi making activity. However, most of the artisans are poor, and they do not have a spacious place for conducting their activity. This also creates obstacles in their working condition. Besides, the artisans keep the necessary raw materials in their houses, which are usually thatch houses and the floors are made of mud. Because they do not have proper storage facilities, during rainy seasons, the raw materials such as bamboo, *Tokou paat*, etc., which the artisan had bought from the market, get damaged.



Plate 4.2

Storing of Japis

The owners of the village shops are also not economically sound and hence most of the owners of the village shops take a room near the main road of the village and there the artisan workers do the Japi-making activity. As the rooms are very small and congested so the owner of the village shops cannot recruit the required number of artisans in their shop. Therefore, the output from the worker artisans in the village shops is also low. The cost of production is high as the collection of raw materials is becoming a problem for them. The poor artisans have to buy the raw materials required for Japi-making activity. This also becomes a problem for them.

4.9 Lack of training:

Absence of proper training and guidelines also acts as a threat to the artisans and to the entire Japi manufacturing activity. The artisans inherit this occupation from the older generations and have been continuing this with their indigenous techniques. There are no proper training facilities for the new artisans. Due to this reason, the qualities of these particular products are far from satisfactory. The few training centers that they have been known for their biases. Artisans who have good contact with the outside world make use of these facilities while the others even after having good skills remain underprivileged.

Case study:

Mr.X (privacy of the informant maintained); 64 years old, is a betel nut shopkeeper of the village. Earlier he was a Japi maker. However, now he has a small shop at the entrance of the village. He left his Japi, making the profession a few years back. X said that once a training program from Nehru Yuva Kendra was being provided in the village. The program was aimed at providing some skills and training sessions for upgrading their Japi making activity.

However, some persons associated with this initiative did not inform all the Japi artisans of the village and exercised biases in the selection of skilled labor. His elder son, who is an employee in a private company in Guwahati city, somehow got to know about this issue and informed his father. As he tried knowing about the issue in depth, Mr. X came to understand the fact that the experienced artisans who came to provide training, selected only those who were close with them. Because of this partiality, many of the skilled artisans were unable to participate in the training program. After that incident, the informant had given up any association with the respective persons regarding Japi-making and now have started a small shop for his livelihood.

The above case study apparently shows that the conduction of training programs also creates issues sometimes. The partiality among the artisans seems to be the cause of such issues.

4.10 Unwillingness of Young Generation to Continue to This Profession:

The young generations are becoming reluctant to take up a labor-intensive and time-consuming process such as Japi-making. Hence, they are not willing to choose this profession as their

livelihood; instead, the artisans prefer to take other professions such as business, service, etc. which have less work and have a decent income. It is observed that the young generation of the village is reluctant to inherit their traditional Japi-making skill due to the complex manufacturing and time taking process. In some cases, skilled artisans want to keep the skill preserved within his bloodline and hence the skill vanquishes without anyone imbibing it. This also may create a problem and lead to the extinction of traditional Japi crafts.

Case study:

Bishwajit Kalita; 25 years old; belong to Kalita community. He is professionally an electrician. His father was a skilled Japi maker and him along with his two brothers, also know the Japi making skills. However, he does not want to take up Japi-making as his profession because of less profit. According to him, he can earn more by doing electrical work. If he does some electrical work in a day, he can earn 300 to 400. But, by selling a Japi, he can only earn 40-80 rupees and that for manufacturing that Japi takes more than 3 to 5 days.

The table shows the difference between the income earned from traditional Japi making and present-day profession of an electrician.

Table 4.1

Comparison of income earned from Japi making and other activity

Labour and income from Japi-making	Labour and income of electricity job
1. The labor involved is not a one-day routine. It involves 3 to 5 days and mainly requires manual labor.	1. The labor requirement is less as compared to Japi-making. It does not require processing stages as that of Japi-making.

2. The average income of a Japi commonly being sold in the market = Rs. 80 (for the minimum size of a radius of 14 cm) and Rs. 150 (for the maximum size of a radius of 50 cm) check	2. The average minimum income of an electrician in a day = Rs. 200 to Rs. 500
--	---

The above table shows that the difference between the labor and income from Japi making and from the present-day occupation of an electrician. A person who can take up other occupation such as Electricity work can earn more than manufacturing Japis.

From the above case study, it is apparent that the young generations of the village become reluctant to pursue Japi-making activity as their livelihood since profit is more in other professions.

4.11 Impact of globalization:

Globalization is definitely an essential path for the economic development of a country. It refers to the expansion of various trades among different countries without considering national boundaries. It has made the whole world into a small global village. Though globalization has many positive sides, yet it also has made some negative impacts as well. These negative impacts are mainly experienced by small and micro scale industries. These adverse effects of globalization are also clearly evident as we study about the state of the Japi-making industry. Due to the impact of globalization, the competition among various trades has become high. However, the simple and indigenous technique of Japi manufacturing activity is not able to compete in the global market. The process of globalization has also made available cheap alternative products in the market. Thus, Japi products are losing their importance and the industries existence is being threatened.

4.12 Impact of Industrialization:

It is seen that due to the impact of industrialization, these Japi crafts have lost their essence, and they have become items of sale that are solely manufactured as a commodity. These products are

being replaced by machine-made products such as hats, umbrellas, etc. which eventually have created unhealthy competition between these traditional Japi crafts and similar substitute products at the global level. Moreover, the emergence of the modern way of life has also decreased the desire for traditional Japi industry. As a consequence, the handmade traditional Japi products are being diminished at a faster pace and also have started facing stiff competition in markets. Besides, buyers mainly prefer trustworthy sellers and also want diversity in product manufacturing. It is not possible for the micro level Japi artisans to fulfill all the requirements of the buyers.

4.13 Impact of commercialization on Japi-making:

Growth of Japi making has been reduced due to the decline in the interest of artisans in continuing the tradition since they have more diverted to money-oriented market where profit is given more priority. Since the commercialization of other alternate items like hats, umbrella, etc. have taken place in market use of traditional Japis is declining and hence there is an adverse impact on their livelihood. In addition to it, the advent of mechanized agricultural implements such as Tractors, Power tillers, etc. have reduced the time of the agricultural labor and now people are seen to involve in the field. This indirectly reduces the use of *Halua Japi* in the field as now there are fewer requirements of such items which were earlier an inseparable part of agriculture.

As a result of all these impacts, the social structure of the Japi-making tradition has been undergoing changes. Initially, the artisans of the village performed this activity collectively and on a communal basis. However, nowadays they have become more individualistic. These artisans are primarily concerned about their personal profit rather than trying to get the benefit for the overall development of the Japi artisans of the village. The owners of the shops also concentrate more on selling the products of their individual shops.

This chapter has described various problems associated with Japi-making tradition. Right from the procurement of raw materials till the marketing of the products, the Japi-making tradition transit through various problems. Confrontations with these problems have changed the due course of the development of this traditional industry as such. Citing various case studies as examples this chapter has looked into the gravity of the challenges that Japi-making is currently facing.

Chapter: 5

Changes and Adaptation Strategies

Change is an inevitable element of societal life, Tilana village has had its own transition phases in terms of the social and economic life of its artisans and their perception towards the traditional Japi-making the industry as such. Since time immemorial the Tilana village has always been a renowned Japi making center in all of Assam. Every household of the village used to be active Japi-making units. But now things have changed drastically. Struck by an economic and social crisis many families have left this traditional industry and has shifted to more profitable occupational means.

5.1 History of Japi-making in the village

According to the artisans of the village, Japi-making has always been the primary means of livelihood in the village. In the past, a few people who possessed cultivable lands were engaged in agricultural activities. These people were also well versed in the skill of Japi-making. Initially, they followed a system of exchange between the Japi artisans and the agriculturalists. To them, the exchange used to happen between *Halua Japi* and agricultural products.

As population expansion happened with leaps and bounce, agricultural lands were converted to habitation spaces. This, in turn, has forced many people to turn towards new modes of occupational engagements. Initially, the Japi artisans were mainly confined to making *Halua Japis* as the importance was much upon the agricultural fields. However, now as the importance of *Halua Japis* has been substantially reduced, *Phulam Japis* are getting much attention.

With the collective efforts of the Japi artisans and some renowned people of Nalbari District, in 1985 a cooperative society called *Japi Samabai Samiti* (Japi Cooperative Society) was established. It was active for 9 to 12 years. The cooperative society was aimed at encouraging the Japi artisans of the various Japi clusters of Nalbari District to manufacture traditional Japis and market the same during exhibitions and trade fairs. Unfortunately, due to certain malpractices within the organization and the lack of an effective and responsible administrative panel, the cooperative

society was forced to shut down. Again, in recent years an NGO called ASHA was established in Tilana village to assist the Japi makers of the village in various aspects such as financing the artisans in making Japis and its marketing. However, due to the lack of government funds and policies and vested interests of the administrative machinery, ASHA too faced a closedown.

It is important to note here that earlier the artisans used to work under the *Japi Samabai Samiti* where activities were conducted collectively. The place adjacent to the Tilana Lower Primary School which is in the middle of the village used to be a gathering spot where the villagers spent their whole day making Japis. Each artisan who gathered used to manage a different aspect of Japi making. The Japis were then sold to markets, customers and tea gardens. After the closing down of the cooperative society, ASHA was helping the artisans. However, nowadays, some of the artisans have started their own independent units. These artisans, with the support and assistance of their family members, have converted their homes into Japi production centers.

These days, some of the skilled youngsters have started entrepreneurial activities with a vision to revive the Japi craft and improve the living condition of the artisans. Among them, few started establishing craft shops in the village. These craft shops assist the artisans in terms of access to raw materials and the marketing of the product. The first Japi craft store of the village is *Bezbaruah Japi Store*. According to the owner of the shop, initially, he started his shop at his home in the *Sotal* (an empty platform between dwelling houses). He used to conduct the Japi making activity. He explained in detail how he used to call the neighbor artisans, and along with them did the production work. Due to the lack of adequate infrastructure support he had to confront a lot of difficulties especially during the rainy season.

He even had to put the production on hold due to lack of proper workspace. With an aluminum tin roof raised on four bamboo posts, the workspace could not offer adequate support for production. However, later, when he started earning a profit, he took a room near the main road connecting Nalbari and Guwahati and employed two artisans in his shop for helping him in various activities related to Japi-making.

In due course of time, the color choices for the ornamentation of *Phulam Japis* has also changed because of the emergence of various colorful fabrics. They said that in the earlier days, they mainly used red and black color fabrics in the form of circular and semi-circular cut-outs from the cotton

fabrics. They stated that nowadays, with the emergence of various colorful fabrics such as blue, green, yellow, they also have started applying these colorful fabrics in decorating the Japis. They sometimes use *Muga* (Golden silk) fabric in place of cotton fabrics.

The motifs of the *Phulam Japis* are also evolving. The artisans Nripen Tamuli stated that nowadays the artisans have started experimenting by adding new motifs such as *Sorai* (a traditional showpiece made of bell metal), the cut-outs of Lord Krishna, Saint Sri Sri Sankardeva as per the requirement of the occasions. He mentioned that if the *Phulam Japi* is required for any religious events, then the motif of the Japis is on Hindu Gods whereas if the occasion is a felicitation ceremony, then the motif of the Japi will be the cut-outs of *Sorai*. Besides, the motif of the peacock is also being applied in the *Phulam Japis*. Therefore, such creative instincts are seemed to be usual nowadays, which was absent in the earlier days. According to them, some skilled artisans put wall clocks also on the middle of the *Phulam Japis* by replacing the conical part of the *Phulam Japis* to make it more attractive and useful as well. The use of metallic items such as *Chumkis* and glass work is also a new practice. These metallic items were not used initially.

In terms of raw materials, the artisans said that some of the bell metal artisans have also started using bell metal for making Japi designed showpiece which looks more attractive than the ones made by bamboo and *Tokou Paat* (palm leaves). The reason being that prospective customers from the city usually are more inclined towards buying Japis made with bell metal. As this provides more richness to the Japis than the traditional Japis. Initially, there was an abundance of bamboo and palm leave plants in the village. The artisans said that majority of the households cultivated palm leaves at their *Baari* (a place inside their habitat where various types of vegetables and plants are cultivated). But with the boom in population density, production of raw materials at home has been stopped hence forcing the artisans to buy the raw materials. For buying bamboo, the artisans mostly depend on the weekly market of Baranghati, which is located in Kamrup District and the market of *Hatkhol Bazar* of Nalbari town. The weekly market opens every Thursday. The owner of the craft shop is the one in charge of collecting the raw materials.

5.2 The decline of indigenous knowledge

With the advent of a tech-savvy culture, the younger generations seem to lack interest in acquiring indigenous traditional skills. Their focuses have now greatly been laid upon pursuing higher

education and thereby explore the enormous opportunities that come by its wings. More often than not Japi making, due to its low-income returns, has been looked upon by the youngsters as a low-status job. Therefore, gradually, the indigenous traditional skills have started disappearing, and the quality of this age-old traditional Japis has started to degrade.

In addition to this, some old artisans are not willing to transfer their traditional skills to other skilled people. Though their younger generation is not interested in learning the skill, these artisans are reluctant to share the knowledge with people outside their family circle. As a result of such chauvinistic ideologies, this traditional skill is in a path of decline. It is also observed that product quality has also stooped greatly.

5.3 Shifting of occupation

Many artisans of Tilana have turned to other occupations such as daily wage labor, service holding and so on which appears to offer better economic input. Jiten Kalita (48), who used to make Japi independently, had left Japi making after getting a job in a private company at Guwahati city. He opined that though his current job is hectic, he gets a fixed salary at the end of every month. Moreover, he earns more when compared to a Japi artisan. Ananta Rajbangshi (37), installed a tea shop near the connecting road of Nalbari and Guwahati. He said that he had to shift to his present occupation because of his increasing debts in the family. He feels comfortable with his present occupation, and his earning has also increased than earlier.

Japi-making is very time-consuming work and it requires much hard work. The process of making Japi includes drying up the *Tokou Paats*, making the frame of bamboo, decoration, etc. which takes many days. However, compared to the hard work and time taken, the earning is very low. So, the artisans are unable to make both ends meet. Intermediaries and money lenders have made their lives even tougher. As most of the artisans are poor, they have no other option other than taking help from money lenders at heavy interest rates. Therefore, the young people from the artisan families prefer to take some alternative livelihood means rather than continuing Japi-making as their primary source of income.

Villagers seem to be very much disappointed as they do not get adequate funds and help from government agencies. They reveal that many government agencies have visited the village for

surveys, yet no viable measures have been taken from the side of the officials. Tilana and its people have witnessed the media presence also in the past. TV channels and local print media came into the village to weave reports and documentaries around the pathetic scenario of the artisans. Yet the impact stands nullified.

Artisans complain that only a handpicked few are availed chances to access wider platforms such as national level exhibitions conducted at Patna, Kolkata and other metropolitan cities. During a conversation with Dharani Baishya, one of the few who received an opportunity under the initiative of Nehru Yuva Kendra to attend a trade exhibition in Bihar said that the experience was amazing. He said that from the first day of the exhibition onwards, he received a positive response from the visitors. On the other hand, few of the artisans who were not lucky enough to get to the big platform opined that the selection process was heavily biased. They said that the artisans who have useful contacts and links with customers and government craft development centers such as *Pragjyotika Assam Emporium* and *Jagaran* easily strike it big time.

The tradition of Japi-making has been continuing in the village since long back. The artisans have inherited the skill from their parental generation. They stated that during earlier days, the tradition of Japi-making was running smoothly with the help of the co-operative society of the village. Thus most of the artisans of the village, who have reached their old age, did not acquire any other skills and did not take up any other occupation. Amidst a conversation with an artisan named Budhin Baishya, 67 years old, he expressed that since he lacks skill in any other profession and because of old age, he has no means to earn his living other than Japi-making. Though the profession doesn't provide much monetary input he is left with hardly a choice. Observing the plight of their predecessors, the younger generation started to acquire other skills and engage in other means of livelihood, such as electricity works, wage labor, mobile repairing, carpentry, etc.

This section has dealt in detail the reasons as to why the artisans drifted away from Japi-making. If some left it for better prospects, most others opted for alternatives as they struggled to make both ends meet. It is observed that most of the persons whoever shifted their occupation are mostly happy and satisfied with their work. Moreover, it is also found that many of the older generation Japi makers in the village are continuing Japi-making as a livelihood means with dissatisfaction, as they do not have any alternative other than Japi-making.

5.4 Change of this occupation from full time to part time

In earlier days, the majority of the people of Tilana village perform Japi-making activity on a full-time basis. They were involved in Japi manufacturing activity for the whole day and were solely dependent on this traditional activity. On the contrary, nowadays it has turned into a part-time livelihood activity of some of the Japi-making families of the village.

Reasons beneath this change from full-time Japi-making activity to part-time activity are quite evident. Some artisans are reluctant to continue Japi-making tradition as their profession yet has to carry it on for the sake of heredity. Bhupen Tamuli (40), by profession a teacher at Tilana Upper Primary School, stated that he knows the skill of Japi-making well. When he was pursuing graduation as a pass time spot he used to make Japis. He said that since his childhood, he was considered as creative. He used to decorate Japis with his ideas. After getting the job as a teacher he is no more getting free time to brush up the art. However, he finds time to help and direct his brother Nripen Tamuli, who is the owner of a craft shop.

It is apparent that some of the artisans perform Japi-making activity on a part-time basis and along with Japi-making simultaneously they also engage in some other works too for their livelihood. Artisans in Tilana has witnessed changes in the economic condition and occupational pattern. Hence, the artisans are forced to adapt.

To put in a nutshell, this chapter throws light into the metamorphosis of the art of Japi-making over time. It shows how and why certain sections of the artisan community have abandoned the skill and shifted to other means of livelihood. It has also staged a discussion as to why certain people view it as a full-time job while some pursue it as a part-time activity. We have also had a peek into the struggles and hardships of the artisan community to meet their ends and the stark apathy of the concerned officials and the media.

Chapter: 6

Summary and Conclusion

6.1 Finding and analysis

Indian economy essentially has its bedrock in an agricultural and traditional industry. Of which traditional handicraft industry stands as a definite source of income for quite a large section of the country's rural population. Unfortunately, at the face of enormous economic crisis and lack of support from the concerned sources, many artisans and craftsmen have been forced to switch to other means of livelihood.

In this context, the present study has been carried out among the Japi manufacturing artisans of Tilana village of Nalbari District, Assam. The study attempts to sketch the current predicament of the craft and the craftsmen by carefully tracking the changes that came into the industry over time. The focal aspects that the study attempted to explore include: 1) an understanding the socio-economic condition of the Japi manufacturing artisans 2) the historical perspective of the Japi-making tradition 3) an analysis of the organization of Japi manufacturing activity, 4) an examination of the problems that resist the development of this particular craft making industry 5) to explore the adaptation strategies of the artisans during changing industrial conditions.

Majority of the people at Tilana are dependent on Japi-making activity. However, some of the households have given up this activity as their profession. The Japi makers in the village constitute about 59.41% of the total workforce of the village. The literacy rate among the artisans of the village is high i.e. 90.57% which is more than the average literacy rate of the whole Nalbari District. As a result, the young artisans are not interested in such traditional activities which they consider as of lower social status.

Most of the households among the sample population consisted of nuclear families which form 80% of the total households of the village. This is due to the economic crisis and self-interest of the families. In some cases, the fragmentation of families has also led to the fragmentation of the land. The artisans, though they possess only very little patrilineal land, have to distribute it among their sons. The land thus distributed will only be sufficient enough as a mere habitation space.

With the division of land, production of *Tokou Paat* and bamboo, the prime raw materials for Japi makings, has come to a standstill. This, in turn, forces the artisans to buy the raw materials from the market which incur them additional expenses increasing the cost of production.

By large artisans of the Tilana can be categorized into two categories- the artisans dependent on village shops and those who are independent. The study reveals that the independent artisans earn more than the dependent ones because the profit is not shared. Artisans involved with the craft of Japi-making operate at three different levels- artisans with workspace at home, artisans working under village shops and artisans owning craft shops. The artisans do not get fixed salaries rather the income is based on the profits from selling the products. The owner of the village shops are the skilled artisans who provide a livelihood for most of the artisans of the village. Under each owner of the village craft shops, there are approximately 15 to 20 families. The owners make an advance payment to the artisan households under them and collect the frame of the Japis and the decoration works are mostly done by the artisans working in their shops. The owner himself works with the artisans associated in the shops. However, as the owners need to move around for getting contracts and orders, he or she mainly gives directions to the artisans.

The Japi craft artisans experience various hurdles in their Japi-making activity such as problems associated with collection of raw materials, nexus of intermediaries, inadequate government funds and policies, poor infrastructural facilities, indigenous methods of manufacturing Japis, lack of innovation in the craft design, inadequate market facilities, impacts of globalization, industrialization, commercialization and others. Because of such problems, the artisans are becoming hesitant to pursue this age-old Japi-making tradition and eventually, this traditional handicraft occupation is moving to the verge of extinction.

The study reveals that the traditional Japi-making industry has evolved over time. The socio-economic status of the artisans, their perception towards the tradition has all been altered. These changes have also left an impact on the entire social structure of the village.

Initially, Japi-making activity was done by the artisans of the village collectively. Each of the households of the village Tilana was linked with each other. If someday a segment of the artisan's collected raw materials, others did the work of making bamboo frame of the Japis, some did the decoration work and so on. Thus, one section of the artisans used to be dependent on the other as

they performed this activity in a collective manner. Now some of the artisan households have given up this Japi-making activity and have shifted to some other occupation. Thus, because of the variation in their functions, the structure of their society has also been affected to a great extent. In addition to this, the Japi makers used to have good social contacts with the agriculturalist of the nearby villages as the agriculturalists used to buy Japis from them to use in their agricultural fields. However, due to the recurring fluctuations in the production of the commodity, the social relation between the Japi makers and the agriculturalist has been severely hampered.

On a concluding note, the study projects Japi-making tradition as one of the intrinsic components of Assamese society. It focuses on the organization of Japi-making activity and depicts it as an entity of social relations that are mutually interdependent. The structural-functional approach highlights the importance of various parts of Japi-making society such as the craft shop owners, the artisans and their families, all of which helps in deriving a total understanding of the society as such. More than a source of income, Japi-making stands as a social identity for the artisans. It remains significant at varying levels of social life starting from as a means of livelihood to a heredity marker. However, from the study, it is evident that recurring changes in this traditional activity have altered the living conditions of the individuals involved. Changes mostly include-organization of the artisans, marketing of the products and the change in the attitude of the youth towards this traditional activity.

All said, Japi-making still remains as a major livelihood activity among the artisans of Tilana. Though this traditional craft has witnessed several transition phases it still stands as an ineluctable aspect of the lives of the people. The need of the hour is to revive the craft by providing it the handholding required to become a more stable source of livelihood for those artisans who still practice it.

References

- Ahmad, W. (2013). Study of Handicrafts Marketing Strategies of Artisans in UP and Its Implication. *Research Journal of Management Sciences*, 2(2), 23-26.
- Alka Pandey, R. L. (1997). Folk Musical Instrument Makers of Punjab: An Ethnographic Study of a Languishing Craft Tradition. *Indian Anthropologist*, 27, 49-61.
- Assam, G. o. (n.d.). Directorate of Tourism. Retrieved 12, 2019, from <https://directortourism.assam.gov.in/information-services/detail/art-crafts>.
- Bakal, G. (1993). *Development of Small Scale Industries*. New Delhi: Anmol Publication.
- Banu, R. (2016). Role of Handicrafts in economic Development: A Case study of Carpet Industry of India. *International Journal of Management and Social Sciences*, 04(03), 512-525. Retrieved from [https://www.research_advances.org>downloadsPDF](https://www.research_advances.org/downloadsPDF)
- Baruah, S. (1995). *A Comprehensive History of Assam*. Guwahati: M. Publishers Pvt. Ltd.
- Baruah, S. (2012). *Assam Abhidhan*. Guwahati: Banalata.
- Bhattacharjee, S. (2012). Indigenous Knowledge, Material Culture and Economy: An Anthropological Study on the Handicrafts of Assam. *IJRDMs*, 6, 111-119.
- Boro, N. (2016). Tradition and Change of the Arts and Crafts of the Bodo Tribes of Assam. *International Research Journal of Indisciplinary and Multidisciplinary Studies*, 2(11), 148-154.
- Brown, A. R. (1952). *Structure and Function in Primitive Society*. London: Routledge, and Kegan Paul.
- C. Khurana, V. P. (2014). An Analysis of Problems Faced by Handicraft Sector in Jaipur, Rajasthan. *International Journal of Research Science and Management*. Retrieved from <http://www.jrsm.com>
- Chattopadhyay, K. (1975). *Handicrafts of India*. New Delhi: Indian Council for Cultural Relations.
- Chetry, D. B. (2010). Changing Occupational Pattern Among the Bishakarmas: A Case Study of Hemja VDC. *Himalayan Journal of Sociology and Anthropology*, 4, 49-60.
- Costin, C. (1998). Introduction: Craft and Social Identity. *Archaeological Papers of the American Anthropological Association*, 8(1), 3-16. Retrieved from <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com>doi>abs>

- Costin, C. (1998). Introduction: Craft and Social Identity. *Archaeological Papers of the American Anthropological Association*, 8(1), 3-16. Retrieved from <http://www.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs>.
- D. Kumar, P. (2014). Marketing Challenges of Handicraft Retailers in Changing Environment. *ZENITH International Journal of Business, Economics and Management Research*, 4(10).
- D.B. Datta, S. B. (2016). An Analysis on Problems and Prospects of Indian Handicraft Sector. *Asian Journal of Management*, 7(1), 5-16.
- Ete, M. (2014). The Present Scenario of Bamboo and Cane Handicraft Industry of Galo Tribe in Arunachal Pradesh. *Journal of International Academic Researches for Multidisciplinary*, 429-442.
- Faisal, S. (2016). The Decline of Varanasi Silk Handloom Cottage Industry: A Study of Brocade Weaving Community of Varanasi. *Chitralkha International Journal on Art and Design*, 6.
- Gait, E. (1905). *A History of Assam*. Guwahati: Amar Prakash.
- Goswami, B. (2012). *Traditional Crafts of Assam and their Role in Employment Generation a Study in Lower Assam with Special Focus on Some Selected Crafts*. Guwahati: Gauhati University. Retrieved from <http://hdl.handle.net/10603/114327>
- Gurubasappa, R. (2008). *Role of Small Scale Industries in Development of Backward Regions*. Delhi: Abhijeet Publications.
- Handique, K. (2010). *Handicrafts in Assam*. Delhi: Kalpaz Publications C 30.
- Harris, J. (2014). Meeting the Challenges of the Handicraft Industry in Africa: Evidence From Nairobi. *Development In Practice*, 105-117.
- India, G. o. (2011). *Census Report*. Census Report. Retrieved 11 03, 2018, from Censusindia.gov.in/dchb/DCHB-A
- Jadhav, M. (2014). Indian Handicrafts: Growing or Depleting? *IOSR Journal of Business Management*, 7-13.
- Jaitley, J. (1990). *The Craft Traditions of India*. London: Jiger Books International.
- Khadria, N. (1990). Traditional Crafts and Occupational Structure of the Assamese Rural Society in the 19th Century. *Social Scientists*, 18, 36-63.

- Liao, Z. C. (2010). The Revival of Traditional Handicrafts: A Model From A Local Community in Taiwan. *Coll. and Res*, 9-20.
- Little, I. (1987). *Small Manufacturing Enterprises*. Oxford University Press.
- M. Carronzzino, A. S. (2011). Virtually Preserving the Intangible Heritage of artistic Handicraft. *Journal of Cultural Heritage*, 82-87.
- M. Rennu, L. J. (2011). Developing Sustainable Heritage Based Livelihoods: An Initial study of Artisans and their Crafts in Viljandi Country, Estonia. *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 17(5), 401-425. Retrieved from <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13527258/2011.589199>
- Micro, S. a. (n.d.). *Brief Industrial Profile of Nalbari District Assam*. MSME Development Institute, Guwahati. Retrieved from [www.dcmsme.gov.in>Nalbaridistrict:profile.pdf](http://www.dcmsme.gov.in/Nalbaridistrict:profile.pdf)
- Narasiah, M. (2001). *Small Scale Entrepreneurship*. New Delhi: Discovery Publishing House.
- Nimkulrat, N. (n.d.). Hands-On-Intellect: Integrating Craft Practices into Design Researches. Retrieved October 12, 2018, from <http://www.ijdesign.org>>article
- Odyuo, I. (2013). The Various Aspects of Naga Art. *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 9, 13-22.
- Phukan, R. (2012). Handloom Weaving In Assam: Problems and Prospects. *Global Journal of Human Social Sciences*, 12.
- Rajan, M. P. (1984). Bamboo Crafts of North-East India. *Indian International Centre Quarterly*, 95-104.
- Rao, R. (1978). *Rural Industrialization in India*. Delhi: Concept Publishing Company.
- Rao, R. V. (1978). *Small Industries and the Developing Economy in India*. New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company.
- Roushan, A. (2016). Traditional of Brass Metal Working: A Study Among the Moriyas of Muslimpatti Village in Hazo, Kamrup District, Assam. *International Journal of Interdisciplinary Research in Science Society and Culture*, 2.
- S., F. (2016). The Decline of Varanasi Silk Handloom Cottage Industry: A Study of Brocade Weaving Community of Varanasi. *Chitrlekha International Journal on Art and Design*, 6.
- Sahay, M. (2015). Turnaround Strategy for Brass and Bell Metal Industry in Assam, India. *International Journal of Innovation and Applied Studies*, 11, 191-196.

- Saikia, S. B. (2012). *Mukhkuchi Japi Cluster*. Survey Report.
- Sarma, K. (2017). A Study on Economic Prospects and Problems of Terracotta and pottery Crafts of Assam with Special reference to Asharikandi Village of Dhubri District. *International Journal of Management Studies*, 5. Retrieved from [http://dx.doi.org/10.18843/ijms/v5i2\(6\)/07](http://dx.doi.org/10.18843/ijms/v5i2(6)/07)
- Satapathi, M. (2011). Terracotta Craft of Panchmura: Problems and Possibilities. *Chitrarekha International Journal on Art and Design*, 1.
- Shyama Mukund, B. S. (2001). *Traditional Industry in The New Market Economy: The Cotton Handlooms of Andhra Pradesh*. New Delhi: Sage Publications.
- Singh, Y. (1973). *Modernization of Indian Tradition: A Systemic Study of Social Change*. Faridabad: Thomson Press Limited.
- T.M. Uddin, L. M. (2014). An analysis of Current Scenario and Contribution of Handicrafts in Indian Economy. *Journal of Economics and Sustainable Development*, 5. Retrieved from <http://ijste.org>
- Terry, M. E. (1999). *The Economic and Social Significance of the Handicraft Industries in Botswana*. PhD thesis. Retrieved from <https://www.eprints.soas.ac.uk>pdf>
- Textiles, M. o. (n.d.). *Working Group Report on Handicrafts For 12th Five Year Plan*. Retrieved 01 15, 2019, from <http://www.planningcommission.gov.in>wrkgrp12.PDF>
- Tirthankar Roy, M. L. (2004). *Handmade in India: Traditional Craft Skills in a Changing World” in Poor People’s Knowledge*. (J. F. Schuler, Ed.) Washington DC: Oxford University Press.
- U. Harikrishanan, K. S. (2015). Promoting Sustainable Livelihood Among the Tribal Community Through Traditional Handicrafts in Wayanad district, Kerala, India. *International Journal of Advanced Research*, 3, 620-628.
- V. Oyekunle, O. S. (2018). The Role of Design in Sustainable Development of handicraft Industries. *African Journal of science, Technology, Innovation and Development*, 10, 381-388. Retrieved from <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/20421338.2018.1461968>
- Vijayagopalan, S. (1993). *Economic Status of Handicraft Artisans*. New Delhi: National Council of Applied Economic Research.

Vincent, J. (2001). *Functionalism in Anthropology*. International Encyclopædia of the Social and Behavioural Sciences. Retrieved 04 19, 2018, from <https://doi.org/10.1016/B0-08-043076-7/00874-3>

Traditional Handicraft and Contemporary Problems: A Case Study of Japi-making Artisans of Nalbari District, Assam

by Nibedita Choudhury

Submission date: 24-Jun-2019 02:18PM (UTC+0530)

Submission ID: 1146618039

File name: M.Phil_final.pdf (2.79M)

Word count: 25498

Character count: 128405

Traditional Handicraft and Contemporary Problems: A Case Study of Japi-making Artisans of Nalbari District, Assam

ORIGINALITY REPORT

3%

SIMILARITY INDEX

2%

INTERNET SOURCES

0%

PUBLICATIONS

2%

STUDENT PAPERS

PRIMARY SOURCES

1

www.ukessays.com

Internet Source

1%

2

www.abhinavjournal.com

Internet Source

<1%

3

dcmsme.gov.in

Internet Source

<1%

4

seminarprojects.net

Internet Source

<1%

5

Submitted to Tezpur University

Student Paper

<1%

6

Submitted to Higher Education Commission
Pakistan

Student Paper

<1%

7

www.ijdesign.org

Internet Source

<1%

8

J. Vincent. "Functionalism in Anthropology",
Elsevier BV, 2001

Publication

<1%

9	www.roboconsulting.in Internet Source	<1 %
10	Oluwayemisi Adebola Oyekunle, Mziwoxolo Sirayi. "The role of design in sustainable development of handicraft industries", African Journal of Science, Technology, Innovation and Development, 2018 Publication	<1 %
11	www.apjor.com Internet Source	<1 %
12	www.akceducation.org Internet Source	<1 %
13	Submitted to Pacific University Student Paper	<1 %
14	Submitted to Anglia Ruskin University Student Paper	<1 %
15	Submitted to Vels University Student Paper	<1 %
16	Submitted to University of Pune Student Paper	<1 %
17	Submitted to University of Wales Institute, Cardiff Student Paper	<1 %
18	Submitted to Hackensack High School Student Paper	<1 %

19	www.assaminfo.com	<1 %
	Internet Source	

20	korea.prkorea.com	<1 %
	Internet Source	

21	Submitted to Oxford Brookes University	<1 %
	Student Paper	

22	Harris, John. "Meeting the challenges of the handicraft industry in Africa: Evidence from Nairobi", Development in Practice, 2014.	<1 %
	Publication	

23	Submitted to Symbiosis International University	<1 %
	Student Paper	

Exclude quotes	On
Exclude bibliography	On

Exclude matches	< 14 words
-----------------	------------