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Exploring Atoshbaji (Fireworks) Industry of Barpeta

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Abstract

Fireworks are very popular in India and during Diwali, Occasions, Marriage Ceremonies and Festivals etc. it has an extensive demand. Barpeta District of Assam is also recognized for its Fireworks products in the NER, which is older than Sivakasi (Tamil Nadu). Fireworks of Barpeta were about 130 years old and earlier it was called 'Fotoka' by the local people of Barpeta. Firework industry of Barpeta today bears a distinctive mark of excellence and identity for its quality products. At present there are five firework units in Barpeta and the entire production process is based on manual system rather than mechanized production process. The present study reveals the History of Firework industry, various products, its market condition, people engaged in the industry, SWOT analysis and about the various initiative taken regarding environment protection by the industry. This study is based on both the primary and secondary data. Barpeta Firework which is also known as Atoshbaji has good market potentiality, but due to the lack of proper communication (as Barpeta still does not have Railway Station) and inappropriate marketing, people of Assam are still unaware about this firework industry and further, it facing competition with other industries of same line, like Sivkasi and Chinese firework products available in the market.

Key Words: Firework, Barpeta District, Market, SWOT, Products.

Introduction: 'Assam', is popular for its environment and the word itself tends to portray about its attractive nature, defining the magnificent of beauties of flora and fauna. The charming beauty of Assam is found in its culture, tradition, dresses, ornaments, festivals, foods etc. as well, which reflects the rich heritage of Assam and that makes the various products attractive and unique one.

Barpeta district of Assam is renowned as the "Land of Satras". The meaning of Bapeta is derived from 'Bar' which means 'Big' and 'Peta' means 'pond'. Barpeta District is bounded by International border of Bhutan in the North, Nalbari in the East, Kamrup and Goalpara districts in the South and Bongaigaon district in the West. The rich heritage and Culture of

Barpeta District is prevalent by the remarkable work of great Mahapurush Srimanta Sankardeva. Barpeta District is well-known for many famous things such as:

Manas National Park – Barpeta is the Gateway to the Manas National Park, it is wild life sanctuary. It is a Project Tiger Reserve, an Elephant Reserve, a Biosphere Reserve

Satras – Number of Satras are founded in Barpeta District. Name of those Satras are- Patbaushi Satra, Ganakkuchi Satra, Jania Satra, Sundaridiya Satra, Barpeta Satra, Baradi Satra, Satra Kanara. **Barpeta Satra** is one of the leading attractions in Barpeta, it is the largest and powerful satra of Assam and famous for its devotion and Holi Celebration which is also called Fakuwa or DouL Mahautsav by the people of Barpeta.

Bell Metal of Sarthebari – Bell Metal Industry of Sarthebari is famous for its historical Assamese Bell metal utensils and for Traditional Assamese **XORIA**.

Rash-Leela (Howly) – Howly is located in between the Barpeta Town and Barpeta Road, where the largest Rash Mohautsav takes place every year. Many people from different district participate in this Rash-Mela and various cultural programs are organized in this Rash-Mela.

Assamese Traditional Ornaments – Barpeta is also known for its beautiful handicraft Assamese Traditional Ornaments. Barpeta in lower Assam have been major the hubs of manufacturing of Assamese Traditional Ornaments throughout the centuries. Assamese Ornaments are unique and the designs are inspired by Flora and Fauna, surroundings objects such as Musical Instruments etc.

Atoshbaji (Fireworks) – Barpeta which is equally famous for its Atoshbaji (Fireworks) in the entire Assam. All the firecrackers are labour manual and it has colossal demand during Diwali, Festivals and Marriage Ceremony etc.

Objectives:

1. To study the History, Products, People engaged in the firework industries in Barpeta
2. To study about the Market, Income generation and SWOT analysis of the firework industries in Barpeta.

Methodology: The study is based on both primary and secondary data. As the researcher have experienced limited numbers of secondary data/information available on the subject matter of this study and most of those information have gather from online sources. Regarding primary data the researchers made modest effort to bring the actual picture of Barpeta Firework Industries in this study. As there are only five units of these firework products in Barpeta, so, all those units have been personally visited and interviews were conducted with the owners and other persons working in those industries and necessary information were obtained and expressed in this paper.

History of Barpeta Firework Industries: History Barpeta District is preparing itself to make fireworks available to the people of Northeast. Since the century Barpeta is well known for old firecracker making industry. Firework of Barpeta dates back to about 130

years and locally it is called 'Fotoka'. Late Lakshiram Pathak of Majorhati was founder of fireworks industries in Barpeta who started the industry after going through a Bengali book on Chinese Fireworks published in 1885 which give an idea of cracker making techniques. The industry was also patronized by Queen Victoria who was satisfied with the work of Lakshiram Pathak and awarded him a gold medal and donated two bigha of land at Bilortarihati Barpeta to ply his trade.

In 1920, Pathak was awarded a license from the British government to carry on with his trade. After Pathak's death his son Late Narahari Pathak continued the legacy of traditional firework production process. Within the family other Entrepreneurs like Manoranjan Pathak of Brindaban hati, Nalini Pathak and Achinta Pathak of Majorhati, Late Amrendra Pathak, Late Niren Pathak, Gopjit Pathak and Deepmani Pathak of Bilortarihati all established firework industries separately. There are altogether five Pathak families today at Barpeta who carries the firework industry (Ghosh, 2014).

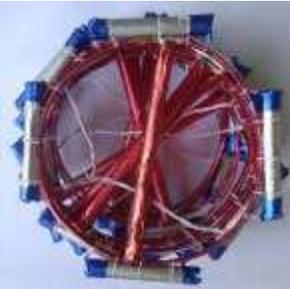
Barpeta's proposed Atoshbaji Village: Assam Government under Chief Ministers' development fund Rupees Seven crore has been sanctioned to District Industries and Commerce Centre along with allotment of total 30 acres of land set up Barpeta Atosbazi village. After a rough patch in 2012, the 127-years-old industry is set to have a common facility centre along with other facilities. From the seven crore, the government has sanctioned 3.5 crore to Assam Industrial Infrastructure Development Corporation (AIIDC) on March 2013 and Rupees One crore has been released for construction of boundary wall and land filling. Each of the five firecracker units have been allotted two acres land. According to the scheme, all necessary infrastructures will be provided by AIIDC and handed over to the firecrackers units.

Various Products of Barpeta Firework Industries: The firework industry of Barpeta today bears a remarkable and identical position for its product. Barpeta Firework which is also known as *Atoshbaji* or *Fotoka*. Customized fireworks products are manufactured in the Barpeta, but during the Occasions and Festivals they also manufactured the products as per the demand and needs of their special customers or clients. During the Diwali, Marriage Ceremonies, Occasions and other Festivals this *Atoshbaji* has colossal demand. Barpeta firecrackers are of good quality and the entire production process is based on labour manual rather than mechanized production process. Barpeta firework industry recently got a Logo by the National Institute of Design in Jorhat, district industry centre of Barpeta and the ministry of micro, small and medium enterprises which gave unique identity to the products. The artisans of Barpeta firework units are preparing 30-35 varieties of firecrackers.

The Firework products or Atoshbaji that are manufactured in Barpeta are:

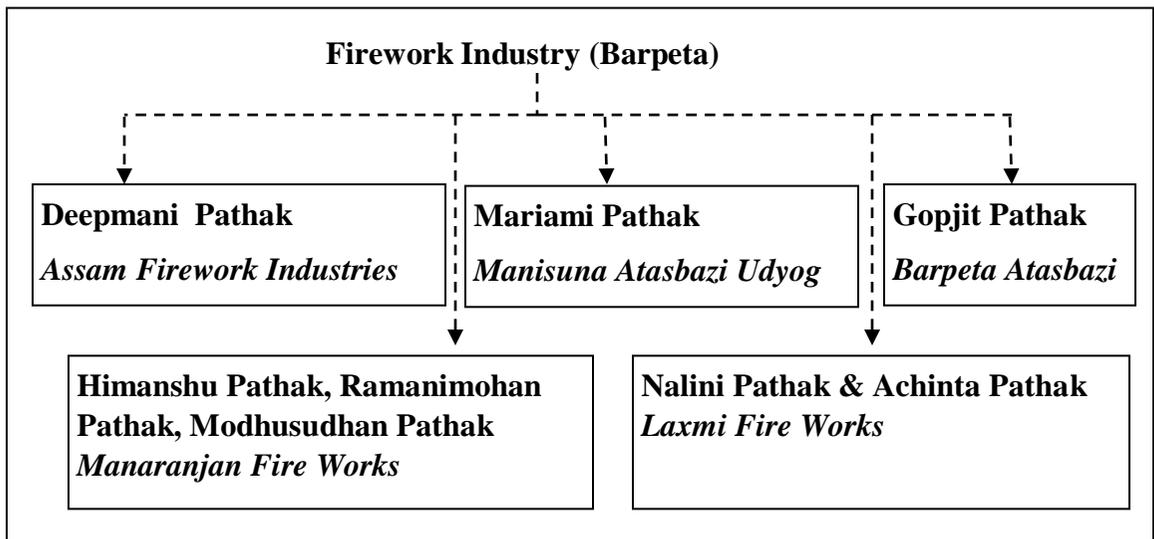
1. Asman Gola (Big Asman Gola and Small Asman Gola)
2. Fanush
3. Phuljari (flower pots- Big Phuljari, Medium Phuljari, Small Phuljari)
4. Mata (Big Mata and Small Mata)

5. Letter Gash
6. Cherkhy Gash (English and Assamese Alphabets)
7. Patta Lori
8. Pote Bazee, Sun Bazee
9. Atom Bomb
10. Colour Smoke
11. Holy Chocket
12. 60 Shot
13. Paper Blast



About the Area of Study: Geographical area of Barpeta is 3,245 square kilometers, this District is bounded by International border i.e. Bhutan Hills in the North, Nalbari District in the East, Kamrup and Goalpara District in the South and Bongaigaon District in the west. The Barpeta District, headed by the Deputy Commissioner, has two sub-divisions – Barpeta and Bajali. Barpeta is located between 91degree 'E longitude and 26 degree N latitude.

Firework Village of Barpeta is situated at Ganakkuchi village of Bapeta District of Assam and the distance is 4.8 km from Deputy Commissioner’s Office of Barpeta. It takes 1.6 km from Adarsha Vidyalaya Model School, Barpeta. Its about 4.4 km from Barpeta Bus-stand and Nakhanda River is about 600m from the Firework village. Adarsha Vidyalaya Model School, Barpeta is in the North, Nakhanda River is in the South, Barpeta District Jail is in the West and Patbausi Satra is in the East of Firework Village.



Market of Barpeta Fireworks: The market potential of Barpeta Firework industries is very good as well as profitable. There are about 40-60 agents, traders and shopkeepers in different place in the entire North-Eastern States with whom the unit proprietor has a business tie-up, they also deals with the retail shop owners. The retail shop owner brought

the firecrackers from the firework unit directly and then they deal with the customers during marriage ceremonies, occasions and festivals. These products are famous in the north eastern states and also have good mark in the other districts of Assam like Guwahati, Dibrugarh, Nagaon, Tezpur, Biswanath Chariali, Bongaigaon, Kokrajhar etc. Guwahati is the main market, but also have their distinct mark in Shillong and other states too. During the marriage ceremonies, functions, occasions, festivals it has huge demand and these are the main events for the sale of firecrackers. Between September to November both the production and market demand is very high it is the peak season, where the unit members has to work day and night production shift, even they have no time to have meals. But between the June to August the market demand and production is very low.

People Engaged in Firework Industries in Barpeta: The 130 years old Barpeta firework industries are still manual/labour intensive industry, where the workers/artisans depend on making firecrackers for their livelihood. The artisans/workers engaged on either daily basis or weekly basis or monthly basis on understanding. Some of workers/artisans involved for part-time as well for full-time working as per the production requirements, market demand and customers/clients orders. In each unit there are 15-20 workers/artisans who work whole year but during Diwali more than 200 workers/artisans engaged in making firecrackers. More than 2000 people are earning their livelihood by making firecrackers in Barpeta and around 40 to 45 potter families are also involved in the trade. Barpeta firework industry creates directly and indirectly employment and income opportunities to the people. Wages are paid to the workers/artisans on daily basis and monthly basis. There are many artisans who have been working since last 10-12 years in these firework units.

SWOT Analysis of Barpeta Firework: As Barpeta Firework Industries carries a long history and gone through many ups and downs in their journey till now, thus effort has been made for SWOT analysis of these industries:

Strength:

1. There is a huge demand of Barpeta Firework products in the entire Assam like Guwahati, Dibrugarh, Tezpur, Kokrajhar, Bongaigaon etc. and also in the other states of NER.
2. The demand of Barpeta Firework is more than the units can accumulate the supply. The 130 years old firework Industries are well-known for excellence and identity as the products are handmade.
3. Barpeta firework products are known for goodwill and quality products as compared with the Sivakasi and Chinese products.
4. The units produced customized products as per the special needs and demand of the clients, best suited for the Occasions, Marriage ceremonies, Festivals, Anniversaries, Birthdays etc.
5. Raw materials are mostly from native place and it is easily available locally.

Weakness:

1. Poor infrastructure on workstation, improper work shed /workplace, storage, poor manufacturing facilities in all units.
2. Most of the time the units goes into fulfilling seasonal market orders and due to lack of time there is no innovation on production, marketing and technical.
3. During monsoon due to high moisture and humid content the production stops completely
4. The price of the Barpeta products is more as compared to Sivakasi because the entire production process is based in labour manual.
5. A traditional input of Barpeta Firecrackers, bamboo, does not extended shelf life hence unused bamboo cannot be stored for the next season.

Opportunities:

1. Barpeta traditional fireworks have got a logo from government it will help to capture the domestic market as a unique brand.
2. There is a scope to expand the business as well as they can export their products in other states.
3. MSME, Design Clinic Scheme helps to increase the scale of production of Barpeta Firework products.

Threat:

1. There is a stiff competition with the other branded fireworks products like Sivakasi and Chinese firecrackers which look fancy and attractive in the retail market and create competition.
2. Sivakasi and Chinese firecrackers are pushing cheaper and smaller products inside and outside Assam with cause effect on the market and creating competing on large quantity flooding the retail market.
3. Bad weather, lack of proper transport/communication because barpeta still does not has railway station and other political disturbance affect the production badly.
4. There are increasing concerns about the impact of firecrackers on the environment as people are becoming more aware about environment pollution.

Income of Unit Proprietor: As very few industries are holding license to do this business in the District, so they are enjoying great scope of benefits and opportunities and that offer good earning potentials to them. There are five fireworks units in Barpeta and five Pathak families that are engaged in this 130 years old industry. The units' proprietor manufactured quality products and their products are well-known in the market, they manufactured the products during Diwali except that there production is also based on customers/clients order. During marriage ceremonies, anniversaries, opening and closing inaugurations the get special order and according to the demand they manufactured the products. Customers specially order Letter Gash during marriage ceremonies. Clients/Customers who place an

order to the proprietor, 10 days in advance before marriages, functions, festivals, diwali etc. they also arrange to pay an advance 30-50 percent to confirm the order. During the study discussion were made with the proprietors regarding their earnings from their firework industries and results obtained are given as follows:

Name of the Proprietor	Name of the units	Earning in a Year
1. Deepmani Pathak	Assam Fireworks Industries	20 Lakhs (Approx.)
2. Mariami Pathak	Manisuna Atasbazi Udyog	8 Lakhs (Approx.)
3. Nalini Pathak & Achinta Pathak	Laxmi Fire Works	5 Lakhs (Approx.)
4. Gopjit Pathak	Barpeta Atasbazi	10 Lakhs (Approx.)

Initiative towards Environment Pollution: Barpeta firework units are manufacturing quality products as compared to other firecrackers that are available in the market, which itself demand for less environmental pollutions or harms. Barpeta firecrackers are known to cause less pollution than other firecrackers in the market. The firecrackers are made with organic materials instead of chemicals so that make it less pollution. Artisans use earthen pots and more organic materials in making the crackers and sparklers. There is an increasing concern about the impact of firecrackers on the environment so they are manufacturing less pollutant products as compared to other products that are available in the market. Bamboo, earthen pot, papers, jute, charcoal are used in making Barpeta firecrackers which make it less pollutant.

Findings:

1. The firecrackers in Barpeta are mostly handmade and machine is very minimum, so its products become costly as compared to Sivakasi firecrackers and Chinese Products.
2. The Barpeta Atoshbaji are popular for the quality products as compared to Sivakasi and Chinese firecrackers, which attracts the customers.
3. The Barpeta Firework Industry got its logo designed by National Institute of Design (NID) which will help in marketing in coming days.
4. Barpeta firecrackers face tough competition from the firecrackers made in Sivakasi in Tamil Nadu and China in terms of cost and availability.
5. People of Assam are unaware about Barpeta Fireworks Industry, they are not aware which firecrackers are made in Barpeta and which are made in Sivakasi, this logo will help the people to identify the Barpeta firecrackers as a unique brand.
6. More than 2000 workers directly or indirectly engaged in Barpeta Fireworks which help them to earn livelihood and this also creating employment and income opportunities to some local people.
7. Barpeta Atoshbaji contains less pollutant as compared to other firecrackers products.
8. During monsoon due to high moisture and humid content the productions stop completely.

Suggestions:

1. Few machine and tools should be designed and introduced for the artisans in making crackers so that it can reduced the time required in manufacturing the products which are mostly handmade.
2. They should increase the infrastructure facilities so that it will cause less damage to the products save time of transportation of products.
3. Techno-Savvy is required so that it can make aware to the people and help in marketing.
4. Standardization is required in the Barpeta firework products as Sivakasi products are fancy and attractive.
5. There is a scope to expand the business as well as they can export their products in other states, so some focus of the stakeholders and government essential.

Conclusion: Barpeta is well-known for Fireworks within Assam as well in other states of N.E region. Barpeta fireworks is known for goodwill and quality products as compared to Sivakasi and other Chinese firecrackers, but in the meantime they also face tough competition with the firecrackers that are made in Sivakasi. Barpeta firecrackers are mostly handmade and there is minimum use of machine. Barpeta firecrackers have got logo designed by National Institute of Design (NID) and government has sanctioned and set up land for the Firework Industry named as Barpeta Atosbazi village. More than 2000 people are engaged in this firework industry and depend on making crackers for livelihood. Barpeta firecrackers are known to cause less pollution than other firecrackers available in the market. There is a huge demand of these products during Diwali, Marriage Ceremonies, Occasions, Anniversaries, and Festivals etc. and also they manufactured the products based on customers/clients order, these industries carries huge demands and potentials just needs proper care and planning to explore to its optimum.

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