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Skill development of Manpower-A Study on the Traditional Brass Metal Industry of Assam

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Abstract

Skill is a learned ability to carry out a task with predetermined results often within a given time frame. The world market has changed drastically for skilled and unskilled workforce and there is a growing need for workers with specialized skills. Skill development is developing oneself and one's skills in order to add value to the organization. Brass metal being one of the traditional industries of Assam can become one of the chief contributors towards the revenue generation of the state only if technological innovations are brought about in the revival of the industries, this is only possible when the workers of these industries will be trained and equipped properly. The present study aims to study the level of skill education in the brass metal industry of Assam and how it can contribute towards the revival of the sick industries in this sector. An attempt has also been made to study the problem areas where skill up gradation is necessary and whether the artisans are getting any help in skill education from the government. The study is mainly based on primary data with some references being drawn from secondary data as well.

Key Words: Skill development, Brass metal industry, Assam, Technology, government, formal training.

Introduction: Skill is a learned ability to carry out a task with predetermined results often within a given amount of time. It is an ability and capacity acquired through deliberate, systematic and sustained effort to smoothly and adaptively carry out complex activities or job functions involving ideas (cognitive skills), things (technical skills) or people (interpersonal skills). The world market has changed drastically for skilled and unskilled workforce. There is a growing need for skill particularly specialized skills. Skilled labour requires additional skills or education. This growing demand has led to the growth of the increase in skill development practices.

Skill development means developing oneself and one's skill in order to add value for the organization and for one's own career development. Fostering an attitude of appreciation for lifelong learning is the key to workplace success, continuously learning and developing one's skills requires identifying the skills needed for mobility and then successfully seeking out trainings or on-the-job opportunities for developing those skills.

The contemporary focus on skill building or skill development in India is derived from the changing demographic profiles in India, China, Western Europe, and North America. These changing demographic profiles indicate that India has a unique 20 to 25 years' window of opportunity called "demographic dividend". Demographic dividend involves two factors i.e. declining birth rates and increase in life expectancy. This accounts for India having world's youngest work force with a median age way below that of China and OECD Countries. Alongside this window of opportunity for India, the global economy is expected to witness a skilled man power shortage to the extent of around 56 million by 2020. Thus, the "demographic dividend" in India needs to be exploited not only to expand the production possibility frontier but also to meet the skilled manpower requirements of in India and abroad. Skill building can be viewed as an instrument to improve the effectiveness and contribution of labour to the overall production. I

As a result, in order to develop skill of manpower "Coordinated Action on Skill Development" with three-tier institutional structure consisting of (i) PM's National Council (ii) National Skill Development Coordination Board (NSDCB), (iii) National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) was created in early 2008.

Skill India Campaign 2015: Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched his pet project Skill India Campaign in New Delhi on the occasion of the first ever World Youth Skills Day which included the launch of the National Skill Development Mission and unveiling of the new National Policy for Skill Development and Entrepreneurship 2015. He said over the next decade India will have a surplus manpower of 4-5 crore and emphasised the need to provide this youthful manpower with skills and ability to tackle global challenges. Modi warned that the demographic dividend would otherwise become a challenge in itself.

The Prime Minister said that while in the 20th century the IITs made a name for themselves globally, now in the 21st century ITIs (Industrial Training Institutes) should acquire global recognition for producing quality skilled manpower.

He also called for constant updating of training programmes and syllabi to ensure that the youth are exposed to the latest technology and industry environment.

Profile of the Brass Metal Industry of Assam: Metal manufacturing in India has a glorious past. Archaeological evidences prove that metallic culture in India is as old as the Indus Valley Civilization. Assam is no exception to this general trend of metal manufacturing in the country. The art of making articles from brass metals are some of the important source of livelihood of the people of this region. The brass metal industry does

not have a clear genesis. The brass metal craft of the Sarthebari revenue circle is known as “*Sarai Silpa*”. The artisans engaged in the brass metal craft do not belong to any special religion or community. In the present day scenario the brass metal craft in Assam can mostly be found in the Hajo area where local artisans are engaged in this craft of manufacturing traditional utensils.

Distribution of the brass metal industries in Assam: The articles made of brass metals in Assam are popular form of traditional utilitarian items. During that period, brass metal production centers were existed at Titabar, Raha and Dhekiajuli in eastern and central Assam. However, these centres were disintegrated during the colonial period and confined mainly to Sarthebari region of western Assam. On a limited scale, the industry also exists at some other areas of western Assam, like Kartimari-Asharkandi-Sapatgram, Bilasipara and Gauripur. Hajo of Kamrup district and Sarthebari cluster of Barpeta district are centres of brass metal industry. The minor pockets of the sector are located at Mugkuchi of Nalbari district, Uzan Bazaar and Athgaon in Guwahati of Kamrup district, Silchar of Cachar district, Kakojan of Jorhat district and Methdung of Sibsagar.

Review of literature: Amitendu Palit in his research “Skill development in India: Challenges and strategies” (2009) found that higher education capacities in India are unevenly distributed across the country. They display a clear tendency of concentrating on a few large states. India’s present formal technical training infrastructure is much more restricted than the requirements. Specific technical training is available for different disciplines within the broader ambits of agriculture, engineering and technology. 90% of the diploma programmes and 80% of the certificate training programmes are in engineering subjects.

Arvil V. Adams in his study “The role of Skill Development in overcoming Social Disadvantages” (2011) analysed that the presence of jobs and the widening of access to education and training have combined to help improve employment opportunities for all. Countries in which there is an effort towards skill building the status of people have significantly improved.

Prof. Krunal K. Punjani in his paper “Requirements of skill development for the success of “Make in India” project” (2014) analyses the level of skill development in India. He found that 10% of Indian workforce has formal training and India is lagging behind by 20% in terms of skill building.

Vandana Saini in her paper entitled “Skill development in India: Needs, Challenges and Ways Forward” (2015) found that in order to make India internationally competitive a skilled workforce is very essential and also as India moves forward towards a knowledge economy development of skill is more essential and the government should try to introduce more holistic solutions towards development of skills in manpower.

Objectives:

- To study the status of skill development at the micro level with special emphasis on brass metal industry of Assam;
- To study the need of skill education in these industries ;
- To analyse the problems faced by the artisans and government initiatives taken in the field of skill development in the brass metal industry;

Methodology: The paper “Skill development of workers of brass metal industry with special reference to Assam” is a descriptive study.

Sources of data: The study has been conducted mainly by taking into account the primary source of data. Primary data has been taken by visiting the brass metal clusters in Assam. Secondary data has also been consulted for the survey by referring to various books, websites, journals, newspapers etc.

Sampling technique: The present survey has been conducted by using the multistage random sampling technique where the state of Assam has been divided into various districts from these districts, the researcher has randomly chosen the districts of Kamrup (rural), Kamrup (Metro), Barpeta and Jorhat. Now these selected districts are divided into towns and the researcher has chosen the towns of barpeta, Hajo, Guwahati and Jorhat based on the brass metal clusters present there. Then the researcher has conducted a study by randomly choosing two clusters of brass metal industry from each selected town.

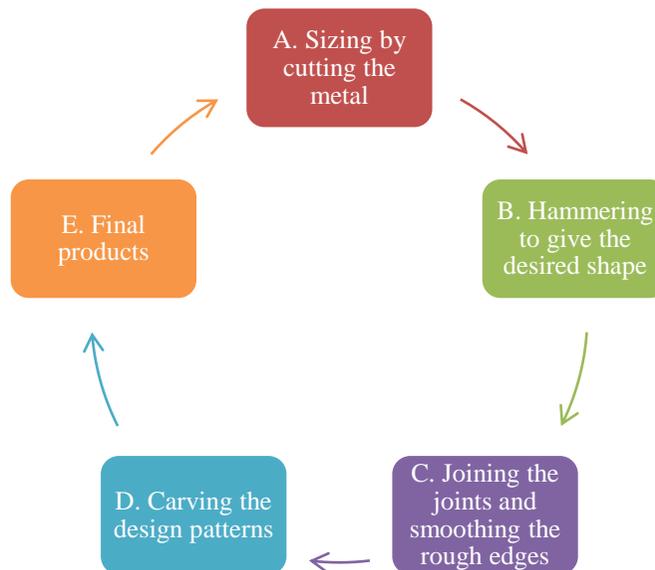
Sample unit: The study has been conducted by conducting a survey across 8 clusters of brass metal manufacturing units.

Area of the study: The current research has been conducted mainly in Barpeta, Hajo, Jorhat and Guwahati brass metal industries.

Process of manufacturing: The process of manufacturing the traditional Assamese brass and metal items is not a simple process. A lot of efforts of the artisans go into carving out these fine articles from the metals.

Raw materials: The raw materials used for the products are mainly brass metal sheets and are provided by the local supplier and wholesalers who pay only labour charges to the artisans and provide them a time limit within which they have to manufacture and supply the finished products to them.

Fig no-1: Process of manufacturing



Source: Primary data collected from the artisans.

Sizing by cutting the metal and hammering to give the desired shape: The sheets of metal are burnt in a fire vent, to soften them and are hammered continuously in wooden mould to give the desired shape.

Joining the joints and smoothing the rough edges: The darkened layer is scraped off by using a long iron rod called khonta by the local craftsmen, to bring smoothness and glaze to the metal wares

Carving imprints on the metal works: After the products are made there base are heated in a fire vent called Kunda Apor and then sealing wax is used to seal the base of the metal wares.

Carvings rings (Bhor Mara) on the items: In order to give final touches to the metal wares, sharp tool made of iron is used. The craftsmen used a bow like instrument called dhonukar.

Skills of the artisans engaged in brass metal trade: During the course of the survey it was found that the artisans engaged in this trade did not possess any formal education or skill in this craft. They learned this craft from their forefathers and these traditional skills passed on from generation to generation. Most of the pockets of manufacturing these metals are privately owned and the owners had on an average 10 to 11 workers under them. Only a few huge pockets are located in industrial estates of Hajo and Sarthebari with a large number of workers engaged in the craft. There is no training centres for this craft neither do the artisans have any new facility for manufacturing their articles, they are still using the

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age old tools and equipments for the purpose of trade. The businesses are mostly family business with the craft passing from the fathers to the sons.

Tools and equipments used:

Fig No-2: List of tools and equipments.



Source: Primary data collected from field survey.

Items manufactured with brass metal:

Some of the products manufactured from brass metal are as under:

Fig-3: Showing the traditional assamese sarai, bati (bowl), kahi (plate) and the koloh (pot)



Source: Primary data.

Status and Need of skill education in brass metal industry: The brass metal industries of Assam being one of the oldest industries in the state and having a historical and traditional relevance in the Assamese society needs to be revived and redesigned with modern

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technologies to make them marketable in the changing economic scenario. With no effort coming from any direction in this area most of the units of manufacturing have become sick with no scope of revival. These industries can become chief generators of revenue for the state of Assam, for this skill development of the artisans is important. They have to be taught the modern methods of manufacturing the items as the age old methods are becoming obsolete and are highly hazardous. The craftsmen are using traditional tools and methods from shape making to final finishing but they are not up to the mark and quality up gradation is necessary. They ignore the critical art of finishing as random hammering leads to variation in sizes of the products, training camps need to be organized to educate the workers for the same. The young generation are no longer interested in the art of making these metals and they go for other options and search for other jobs, attention of the young generation should be drawn towards these craft by introducing new technologies and new ways of manufacturing these items and for around development of these craft skill development efforts play a very important role in this sector.

Areas of skill up gradation in brass metal craft:

- **Product:** The designs of the products are getting repetitive and markets are getting confined to certain places as a result new product development and diversification is necessary. Products need to be developed as per the latest market trends.
- **Process:** There is a need to introduce modern technology and tools for process up gradation, quality improvement and better finishing.
- **Pattern:** The product patterns need to be improved keeping in mind the contemporary trends.
- **Packaging:** Lack of proper packaging, standardization, no visual identity creates problem while creating brand identity for the product.
- **Marketing:** With the onset of globalization the lifestyle of people have changed and traditional products are needed only in rituals and the decorative items are facing huge competition from similar looking products of other materials available in much cheaper prices. So the workers should learn the skill of developing new designs in their products.

Fig -4.1: Showing scope of new technology, design and modernization:

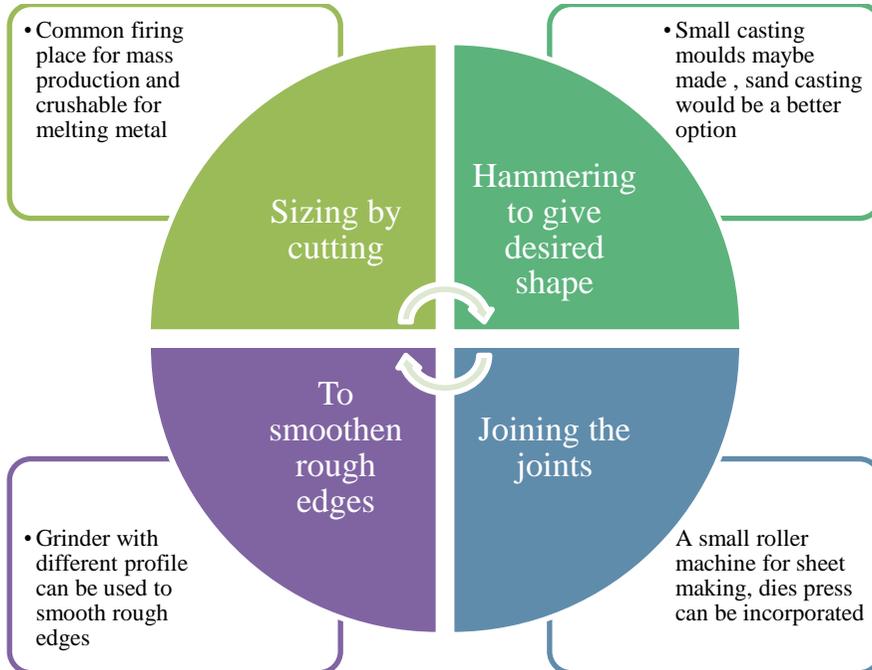
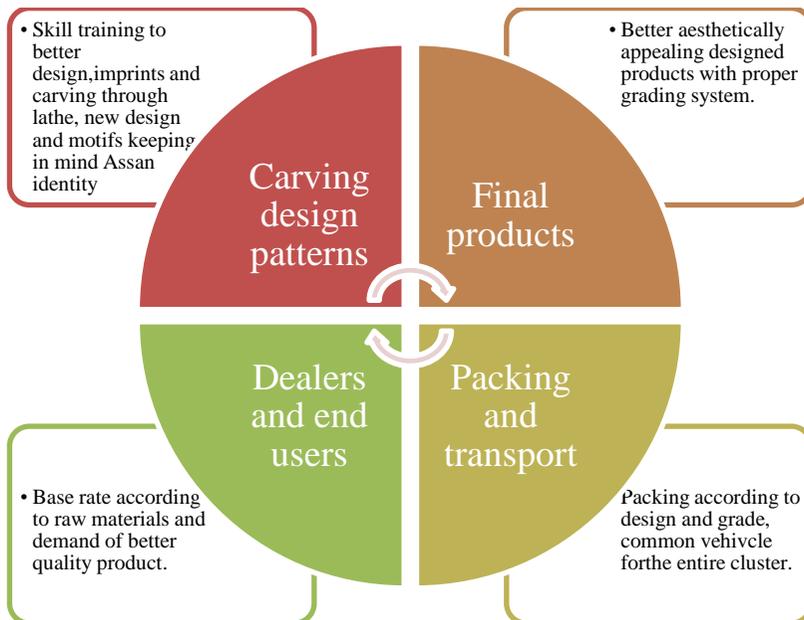


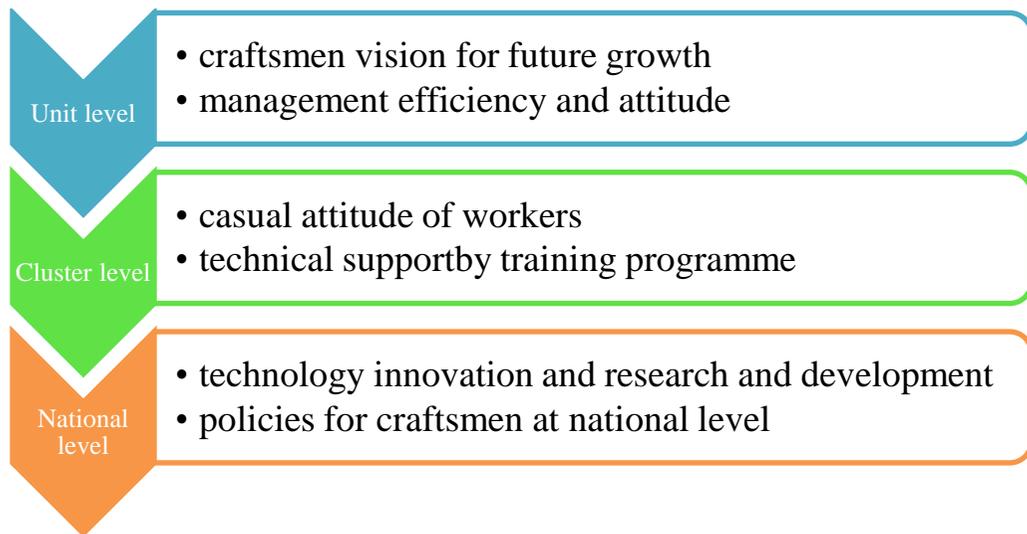
Fig -4.2: Showing scope of new technology, design and modernization (contd.)



Source: Brass metal craft, A need Assessment Survey, Barpeta, Assam (2011) by Rakesh Sah.

Issues in the way of skill education:

Fig.5 Showing problems of skill education



Source: Primary data.

Findings: Skill development initiative in the age old brass metal industry of Assam is limited. Hardly, any initiative has come from any sector for the up gradation of skills of these workers. During the course of the survey the researcher found that no Government initiative has come up in this field in recent years, the artisans do not have any formal training in their craft. They only have informal education of their craft which has been passed on from generation to generation. Some of the units like the Ganeshpara, Guwahati units have closed down due to lack of manpower. In addition to the problems of skill up gradation the other problems faced by the artisans are lack of raw materials, capital, manpower, lack of government initiatives in the field etc.

Suggestions: The brass metal industry of Assam has a huge potential for revenue and employment generation of the state of Assam. With the improvement of skills of workers of this industry it can again touch new heights. Skills can be improved by introducing new technology and equipments in this industries and giving formal education to the workers about the same. Effort on the part of the government is also important for skill up gradation and for revival of the sick industrial units.

Fig.6 Showing a technologically advanced machine for production of brass metal items.



Source: Rakesh Shah (2011) Brass metal craft, A need assessment Survey, Barpeta, Assam.

Conclusion: The brass metal craft holds an important place in the tradition rich Assamese heritage, due to this survival of this industry is important for the Assamese culture. Skills play a pivotal role in this art as the craft is dependent on the artistic creation of the workers in the industry. The present scenario of skill development in this sector is below par, so, for the revival and survival of this sector cooperation of the government as well as the people of the state is important. Skill plays an important role in all crafts so is the case with the brass metal industry of Assam without proper skill education and training the workers of the industry will not be able to compete in the global market.

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