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Livelihood Patterns of Potters Community: A Study on Maderganj Upazila at Jamalpur District

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Abstract

For ages, potters have been helping society by making earthen products suitable for daily use from clay. Potters keep the pottery alive. They have been making pottery for ages as a means of their life and livelihood. The origin of pottery in Bangladesh dates back to the Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa civilizations, following the discovery of earthenware during the excavation of Mohasthangar in Bogra. But, at present times, this profession has faced a lot of problems and the civilization and modernization-based society has not been interested at using pottery products. They are now using different types of plastics and material products at their daily life. On the other hand, the lack of support and initiatives for these traditional professions is causing them to evaporate from our society day by day, and the people involved in these professions are leading miserable lives. This research was conducted by the following qualitative research and case study was the prime method of data collection. The study has found that the increasing use of plastics and aluminium products has led peoples have not interested at using pottery products. So, the decrease of the incomes indicates they are facing a lot of economic problems and leading miserable life. At present time, the changing trend of profession in their community at high because of incoming of this profession has not sufficient to maintain their family and basic needs. For existing conditions, the government should have come forward keeping sustain this profession and sustaining the livelihoods patters of potters by taking different types of programs and policy at the grassroot levels.

Keywords: Livelihood, Patterns, Potters, Community, Bangladesh, Development, and Sustainable livelihood.

1. Introduction

For ages, potters have been helping society by making earthen products suitable for daily use from clay. Potters keep the pottery alive. They have been making pottery for ages as a means of their life and livelihood. The origin of pottery in Bangladesh dates back to the Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa civilization after the earthenware was found after the excavation of Mohas-

thangar of Bogra. The categorical folk arts found are still being used for modern artefact. The folk arts of these categories are being used in modern design and beautification in most of the tastefully decorated constructions in Bangladesh (Hossain, 2012). The potters are predominantly Hindus. Most of them bear the same Surname-Pal. For most, it has been a traditional profession carried by their families. Arte-

facts made of clay are called pottery. Earthen pots, yogurt pots, pat, bank, sara, bowls, surai, matka, jala, pie mold, various toys etc.

Earthenware has been used in our household for ages. Moreover, pottery is also used to enhance the beauty of our home. These things are being decorated in different colours these days. The main material of pottery is clay. However, this does not work with all soils. Pottery requires clean clay soil and water, small equipment and tools. The first thing you need is a wooden wheel. It requires a lot of effort. Requires manual dexterity and technical knowledge. A potter skilfully created pottery by hand with a quantity of soft clay between a spinning wheel. Then they dried the product and burned it to make it usable. Sometimes over burn destroyed the products. Potters claim that the price rising of clay, firewood and also, they are struggling because the selling price of the product is not as expected (Hossain and Islam, 2022).

As a result, they are regarded as the very poor, illiterate and backward populations of society. Pottery is a seasonal work. In Monsoon they are unable to make products and most of the time their ready products may get wasted. Their accommodation system isn't well. Most of the people are doing only this work and they aren't involved in any other work. So, these families depend only on pottery. In the world, they are still suffering. Working hard all day long they earn a little amount which is not sufficient for their livelihood. Due to lack of government patronage and taking over the market of modern pottery in the country, the livelihood of the potters' families has become worse. Village people used to use earthen pots, pans and tableware, but due to the widespread of plastic industry with the touch of modernity, no one wants to use earthenware anymore.

As a result, the tradition of village-Bangla pottery is on the verge of destruction today. The potters of palpara who earn their livelihood by making earthen pots and pans are not good. Their days are spent in trouble. Disappointment in their eyes. They spend their days starving and half-starved. Once upon a time, pottery made of clay was the only hope of meeting people's needs but nowadays people mostly used plastic, steel, silver utensils, that's why pottery is on

the way to getting lost. And along with that, the livelihood of the people involved in this industry is almost closed. Besides, the cost of production has increased due to increase in cost of soil, paint, labor, chalk etc.

Accordingly, the price of earthenware has not increased. We know most of the potters are living in remote areas. They are living there for periods. Here, they don't get any kind of assistance from any NGOs or Government organizations. In Palpara, people have been depending on pottery production since their forefathers. They are facing problems due to limited capital and rising commodity prices. Formation of cooperative societies is necessary to ensure a lead in the production of quality and standard products. These cooperative societies should take up the supply of raw material, purchase of finished goods from artisans, marketing and provision of credits (Hossain, n.d.) . From an analytical al perspective, the investigation intended to find out the livelihood patterns of potters in rural areas in Bangladesh and also to recommend some strategies to overcome those challenges from their occupation in Palpara village under Maderganj Upazila of Jamalpur district. My investigation is helpful to know about the present conditions of potters, their livelihood patterns and the challenges which they face in their occupation. The study focuses on the socio-economic and demographic conditions of the palpara potters and also provides recommendations to solve their problems.

Statement of the Problem

Bangladeshi potters have been producing exquisite pottery products for ages. Pottery in this region can be traced back to around 1500 BC. Members of the potter's community, known in Bangla as 'kumar' who usually bear the title pal, are generally found in large settlements in potter's villages across the country. The main research question is to investigate livelihood patterns and also to analyze the causes of problems on the basis of their lifestyle, health, education, and social aspects. Over the last centuries, potters have faced a huge challenge in their livelihood pattern also their normal life. With the advancement of technology, ceramic and plastic are replacing the pottery in Bangladesh. The pottery despite having skills cannot compete with the production number and cost with the

technology tuned pitchers and pots (Sun, 2019). On the other hands, a number of problems found in potter communities. such as soil collection, low cost of product, clergy product preservation, transportation. Inadequate education facilities, a deficiency of modern technology, they don't involve other occupation so they also face unemployment problems. Many potters are leaving their ancestral profession due to low demand and other problems engulfing the old-age industry and they attribute this decline in profitability to the widespread availability of plastic and aluminum products flooding the market (*Paran Babu*, n.d.) So, the study aims to investigation and analysis deeply these problems of the potter community on their livelihood pattern. But many other things are also included in this investigation like health condition, education, accommodation, less recreation and also analysis support from govt. and non-govt. organization to cope these problems.

Objectives of the Study

The General objectives of the study are livelihood patterns of the potter's community and the specific objectives are:

- a. To know the socio-economic and demographic condition of potter's community;
- b. To analyse the daily activities of potter's community;
- c. To find out existing problems and responsible factors for obstacle in their business;
- d. To investigate existing GOs and NGOs support their development;
- e. To give suggestion and mitigation for coping their problems.

2. Methodology

This research is operated based on qualitative approaches to reach the roots of the problems, and to describe the factors using descriptive data. Since it is a qualitative research and in-depth case study has been followed. Primary data have been gathered from study area and secondary data have been collected from journal, reports, articles and newspapers.

Location of the study

The study was conducted in the area of palpara village under the Maderganj upazila in Jamalpur district.

Population of the Study

The total population who are working as a potter are considering population of my study.

Sample of the Study

It is a qualitative study, so, we used purposive sampling for collecting sample from population. By using purposive sampling, we selected five respondents for collecting information.

Method of Data Collection

In this study, we used in- depth interview and case study method for collecting the information from the respondents.

Method of Data Analysis

The systematic and thematic way was followed to analysis the data. As it is the qualitative research and here used the descriptive data as a descriptive way by following the open-ended questionnaire.

3. Results

We have identified five main themes: (1) socio-demographic and economic (includes some codes-age, education, present occupation, past occupation, living place, income, expenditure etc.), (2) Vulnerability context and livelihood pattern (which includes the codes- possession, basic need, financial support, position in family, vies of society, expectation from society and state etc.), (3) existing condition on potters community, (4) existing problems of Potter's community (includes the codes-barriers in decision making, socio-economic problems, views of family, religious superstition etc.), (5) suggestion for improving and sustaining condition. We have made a thematic analysis according to our objectives.

Analysis of the Socio-Demographic and Economics Information

We worked at Palpara at madergonj upazila in Jamalpur District. We worked with 15 respondents in our selected area. From the data collected by interviews we saw that the potters are both men and women. They are all Hindus. Maximum potteres are illiterate, 6 respondents are only writing their name, 3 respondents had studied up to class 5 and 2 respondents had studied up to class 3 and other 4 respondents are illiterate. Their monthly income is ten to fifteen thousand or less, making it difficult for them

to keep up with the current rising commodity prices. They work almost 8 to 10 hours daily. Among them one respondent said that, *"We are doing this for generations. This is only profession. My entire family is involved in this profession. As the use of pottery products is decreasing day by day our occupation is now on the verge of disappearing. Due to raising cost of raw materials and lack of adequate modern machinery we have to spend our days in difficulty"*.

Now-a-days, in Bangladesh, the use of pottery products is decreasing. Plastic, silver and steel and ceramic products are used in everywhere. For which, the potters are also losing interest in this profession. Another respondent said that, *"Due to low income, we are not able to ensure that our children get a good education, and as a result, we are not able to move ahead with the next generation and society"*. Other respondent said about their socio-economic condition, *"We are largely excluded from the affluent sections of society due to poverty and this extinct profession. Another reason why we are not valued as such in the society is that we are backward in terms of education. Lack of money is leaving our next generation and society behind"*.

Analysis of the Vulnerability Context and Livelihood assets

The maximum number of respondents faced problems in their workplace. They worked from morning till midnight. For that reason, they could not get time for recreation when they worked a long time in the mud. Their feet and hands got stuck in mud and water. They also suffered many complicated problems when they collected soil. It was not easy for them to collect soil easily. They suffer from various types of diseases like asthma and shortness of breath. Their economic and educational statuses are not standard. They earned very little money, which was not enough for them to support their family easily. We talked to 15 respondents.

Among them one respondent said that, *"At the time of working. I face many problems like back pain and my hand stuck with mud and water for a long time."* Most of them faced these types of problems like bone loss, shortness of breath asthma, etc. Because they worked a long time and it was not easy for them.

Another respondent said that, *"This work was more in demand during pujas fairs and Eid. Other Season it was not demandable."* It is seasonal. It was not all the season. In the Rainy season, they face problems because they store it outside. So, in the rainy season, it was more difficult to store.

Other respondent said that, *"I am not satisfied with my income. It is not enough for me to bear my family easily."* They could not get sufficient money from this work. The soil which they used to buy for 100 takas, now they have to buy it for 5000 taka and paint has become 10 taka per kg. A century ago they were satisfied with their occupation. But now, they are not satisfied with it. Because people look their occupation with negligence today. They are complained by their neighbours about the air pollution caused by their work.

The others respondent said that, *"I could not get any financial help from GO & NGO's. So I faced a financial crisis."* They want financial support for GO and NGOs and they also won't their product value. It becomes more helpful for them if they get an interest-free loan. So, this study found that they wanted their product value and got a loan. So that they run their work easily.

Analysis of the Existing Condition on Potters Community

Pottery is an ancient occupation. The respondent said that they are both men and women associated with this occupation. Majority of the respondents (15) said that, *"Pottery is their only source of livelihood. They are not involved with any other government or non-government occupation or profession"*. The demand of clayey products is high in spring and winter, low in monsoon. Among them one respondent told, *"We face various problems to collect raw materials and preserve these products. For example, always perfect soil is not available to make earthen products, to preserve these products is a big problem because soil made materials breaks easily; customers are not available all the season to buy products"*.

Now a day, people are more attracted to other products than earthen products Due to these reasons, the sales of earthen goods are decreasing day by day. Another

respondent told, *"We earn low money and belong in the low class in the society"*. They cannot fulfil their basic needs and can't bear the cost of study in their children and discriminated by other people in the society. Other respondent told, *"We also face health problems such back pain, there are not available drinking water and fall financial crisis to invest pottery industries"*. They don't have capital for business. Sometimes they take a loan from private institution after they have to pay it with extra interest. Lack of government and non -government support pottery facing adversity.

Analysis of the Existing Problems of Potters Community

Maximum respondents of our selected areas face various problems such as economic problems, irregular supply of raw materials, good marketing facilities, lack of diversification of products, obsolete technology, lack of working capital, lack of research and development efforts etc. Among them one of the respondents said that, *"I earn 12 to 15 thousand taka per month, with this money I have face a lot of trouble to run my family of five members. I have stopped my daughter's education due to lack of money"*. The majority of the respondents said that, *"They are suffering from extreme financial crisis"*. Another respondent said, *"It is becoming difficult to survive on our incomes in the current rising commodity market."*

The advancement of modern technologies, demand of metal, ceramics and plastic products, decreased the demand of pottery products. Unable to deal with the problems the age-old industry, many potters have left their ancestral profession. Other respondent said, *"Our ancestors were involved with the occupation for hundreds of years, I have learned the techniques from my father and I am still continuing the work, but I do not want my children to continue with this occupation because the earning is not sufficient to survive"*.

At present many others have shifted to other occupations or businesses. Maximum potters are uneducated. This study showed that as they are underprivileged and due to their ignorance, they are discriminated and they don't get any kind of help from any government or private organizations.

Analysis of the Suggestion for Improving and Sustaining Condition

There is an urgent need to take steps to bring about the solution of the problems faced by the pottery workers at palpara at maderganj upazila. Analysis of the suggestion for improving and sustaining condition is very important for this research. Potters want to sustain their pottery. Some potters and potters tell us what they need to sustain their pottery which is discussed below:

Among them one of the potters said, *"They want good quality soil. The quality of manufactured pottery made from good quality clay will increase and demand for pottery in the market will also increase. They want the price of raw materials like clay, brush, paint etc. to be within their reach."*

Other potters said, *"They want a large open field from the government, where they can dry their raw pottery in the sun. They require a warehouse or a large room to protect the pottery from rain after drying in the sun."*

Other potters said, *"They want financial support from the government and NGOs. They seek low interest loans from banks. They go to schools and colleges for the education of their children, in those schools and colleges their children can study free of charge. They want the government to provide them with a place to live and a house from Asharyan Project."*

One potter said, *"They want their pottery to be sold in the domestic market as well as the international market. They want to build their pottery online. They want government and private organizations to help buy machines used in the pottery industry and provide training."*

Other potters said, *"They want assurance of insurance for their health and product compensation and for their health protection they want masks, hand gloves, clean water and health training etc. They want government and private organizations to come forward to improve their quality of life."*

Other potter said, *"They want fair value for their work. They want people to be aware of the importance and benefits of pottery and to be interested in using pottery."*

So, we found in this study that people of the country along with government and private organizations should come forward to sustaining this ancient pottery that is almost extinct and help and cooperation should be extended towards them.

4. Discussion

Difference types of occupations are available in Bangladesh. Among these occupational groups, potters currently lead the most miserable lives. The lifestyle of the potter community is distinct from that of the general populace. But the socialization process of the family of this community learnt the early income because of poverty. In this way, the situation initially separated them from schooling that prevented to make relation with outsiders (Anwar, n.d.). They live in isolation at the edge of the village, belonging to a special, lower-class group. In the traditional Hindu caste system, they are classified as Pal, and their occupation involves making pottery. Hindu products are sold to Muslim consumers, fostering societal unity through the honorable ethic of utility (Glassie, 2010).

Today, potters are struggling to maintain the pottery traditions of their forefathers. The name of Palpara village in the Maderganj upazila of Jamalpur district once echoed throughout various areas. The earthen goods crafted by the skilled hands of Palpara's potters could satisfy the needs of the region across different parts of the district. However, Palpara is no longer recognized by that name. There is now a lack of singing during various puja parvanas. According to the International Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) agreement, the government is obliged to fulfill the basic needs of employment, housing, education, and health care services for lower caste individuals (Fotographer, 2009).

Now, they are struggling just to secure food for themselves. Earthenware items have lost their value, prompting many potters to seek alternative occupations. The people involved with the pottery industry have had a hard time managing the family expenditure for the last few years and they have begun to switch over to other professions leaving their ancestral job (*Bogura Potters Passing Hard Times*, n.d.) They face several challenges in their craft, including economic difficulties and issues with materials like soil and

firewood. Most are eager to change their line of work, but a lack of opportunities makes this transition nearly impossible. Currently, many residents of Palpara have found work in hotels, some drive vans, and others labor as day workers in different homes. A visit to Palpara reveals that their living conditions are quite precarious, with residents not wearing decent clothing. Still, they send their children to school every day, hoping that their children will grow up to provide a better life, free of sorrow. Most potters report that the demand for clay products has declined due to the rise of aluminum and plastic. Nonetheless, there remains hope for preserving the curd stock industry. There is a need to sustain the pottery traditions inherited from our ancestors, despite the difficulties. Presently, they earn a living by selling mud-made curd tubs, kadais, jute, mud, and toys. The potters express that they could sustain their trade if they received government and private support, as well as low-interest loans. The potter's family cannot thrive solely on the income from selling pottery. If the pottery is sold, they eat; if it is not sold, they starve. Potters may go hungry, but they cannot let their children starve. They manage their households by borrowing money from lenders at exorbitant interest rates to buy food. Once widely used for cooking, water storage, or religious purposes, pottery items are now relegated to showpieces in upscale homes (Tanim, 2011).

Nowadays, people have lost interest in pottery products, leading to numerous challenges for potters. For instance, their work has lost societal value, preventing their children from attending school and college, contributing to malnutrition and starvation among the kids. The health status of women also remains critically insufficient, as they face various reproductive health issues, including Reproductive Tract Infection (RTI) and menstruation management (Anwar, n.d.). Potters also face some other health problems such as skin diseases and sores on their hands and feet due to prolonged work with clay; Black smoke entering the potters' lungs during pottery firing causes lung cancer, asthma, respiratory problems, etc.; Still they use raw quality latrines which results in diseases like diarrhoea, dysentery etc. They are not conscious about cleanliness, living in a damp environment, which results in various diseases including

worms. They are suffering from various diseases including back pain, body pain, and bone loss due to sitting in the same place for long time. There is no good quality treatment for them. Earthenware is healthy for people. For example: Eating food in earthen dishes reduces human diseases, water in earthen pitchers is cold, etc. Potters have no leisure time; they work from morning till midnight. Even after working so much they are not able to live comfortably. The price clay and paint with which they make earthenware has increased the soil which they used to buy for 100 takas, now they have to buy it for 5000 taka and paint has become 10 taka per kg. They are not able to buy the machine because the price of the machine is 2 lakhs taka. During pujas and fairs, the workload of potters increases a little. The rest of the day is spent in misery due to lack of work. The people of the country and the public and private organizations should come forward to arrange the work orders that they receive. This pottery is slowly losing its existence. If effective steps are not taken now to keep this traditional pottery of Bengal alive, this pottery will be destroyed at some point. From the above discussion we find that with the help and cooperation of government and private organizations this ancient pottery will regain its lost zeal.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

Potter communities are not a burden for our country; they are an asset for this country. Because they preserve the traditional culture by making pottery. Even 30 years ago, the pottery community was the real backbone of the middle class and poor communities. Ancient people used earthenware, cooking utensils, tableware, teapots, water pots, flower tubs, in palaces and earthenware to decorate palaces. The use of pottery was very good for health, low cost and within the reach of common man. One of the most important communities of this time is facing various socio-economic problems today. The potters are currently experiencing extreme financial crisis. The government of Bangladesh should help them financially so that they can sustain their grandfather's occupation. Government and non-governmental organizations should come forward and extend their helping hand to improve their quality of life. It is essential to provide adequate support to the potters in their socio-economic

development by ensuring social, emotional, economic, political and environmental support. Only then will the quality of life of the potters improve and pottery will regain its lost zest.

Recommendations

Based on the above discussion about the socio-economic and livelihood patterns of the potter's community, it can be said that they are living in a vulnerable condition in the society. So, the time has come for the government along with the people of the country to improve their socio-economic condition. So that they can live a happy and safe life like the common people of this country. That's why we recommend some main points better. The recommendations are given below:

- Potters have to invent new designs. They have to break out of monotonous designs and think something new to stay ahead of the competition.
- To make the potters competitive with outside machine-made products, they should be trained in machine-made products according to the market demand. Government and private organizations should come forward to buying machines and provide training.
- Ensure supply of good quality soil. The quality of manufactured pottery made from good quality clay will increase and demand for pottery in the market will also increase. The cost of raw materials like clay brush paint etc. should be kept within the reach of the potters.
- A large open field should be provided for the potters, where they can dry the raw clay products made from the clay in the sun. A large house or warehouse should be provided to protect the raw pottery from the rain.
- Free education should be provided for their children. They should be given accommodation and house to stay from the Asharyan Project.
- Health and product indemnity insurance should be ensured for potters and masks, hand gloves, clean water, health training etc. should be provided to protect their health.
- Proper promotion of pottery should be done to increase the demand of pottery in the market. Different types of handicraft fairs and social media can be one of the mediums for promoting

pottery products. They need support to sell and promote their manufactured products in international markets.

- Governments and NGOs should extend their helping hand by providing appropriate financial support. Banks should come forward to provide them with low interest loans.
- Pottery should be developed on an online basis. Since potters are not aware of the online market for pottery, online marketing is a meaningful way to create awareness.
- A producer group can be formed to strengthen the potter's community.
- Research and development are needed to make pottery products more attractive and attractive.
- Potters should be paid a fair price for their work. People should be made interested in buying clay products. People should be made aware about the importance and advantages of pottery.

6. Authors Contribution

M.A.M.S.: is the corresponding author of this article and was responsible for data collection, data presentation, and data analysis for this research. H.K. and I.K.: did the thematic analysis of the data according to the objectives, and M.I.: also did the grammatical section work and the checklist of the reference. P.R.G.: played a significant role in collecting data from the respondents and converting the data into English.

7. Ethics Approval

Ethical approval has been obtained before receiving the participant's information.

8. Data Availability Statement

The data are not publicly available due to the privacy of the participants.

9. Acknowledgement

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10. Conflicts of Interest

There is no ways to conflicts of interest in this research.

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