

Maintenance of Traditional Occupation: A Case from the Telugu Speaking Artisan Community in the Islands

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ABSTRACT The so-called traditional crafts/handicrafts are one of the sources of livelihood for the millions of rural and tribal people even in the era of globalization. Though agriculture contributes major share in Indian economy, these crafts support human subsistence on secondary basis. Due to the advent of industrial revolution, these handicrafts struggle to exist with the foray of so many polymer and metal made consumer products. It is observed that the occupational diversity, shift from traditional to modern varieties of basketry, is contributing immensely for the sustenance of this craft. The present study envisages the process of adaptation of the *Medar* community in an Island situation, which is entirely new from their rural set up.

INTRODUCTION

There are many traditional crafts prevalent in India from the hunter and food gatherer stage to the present globalisation era. Advent of technological revolution and innovations replaced some of these crafts and other has become museum specimens though they contribute rich cultural prosperity and source of income to the dependent people. But these crafts are the indigenous creation of the ordinary people to meet their functional as well as their aesthetic needs. Basketry is one such ancient craft, had immense role in providing livelihood to the rural people in general and forest based communities in particular. Though agriculture contributes major share in the Indian economy, these crafts support human subsistence on secondary and/or subsidiary basis. Despite of industrial revolution and the entry of bountiful polymer products in the consumer world, basketry and its related works have still existed in the rural as well as tribal society because it is inextricably related to socio-cultural processes and allied economic activities. Even in urban context, these crafts are also diversified to suit the modernity of the people and had significant demands in the higher echelons of the society. Thus basketry plays a pivotal role in fulfilling aesthetic as well as functional needs of millions of people.

Basketry is a traditional craft, which is practiced with skill in contrast to 'art' and usually implies an intention of producing beauty or

pleasure as a full time as well as pass time activity. The term basketry generally misunderstands if it confines only actual basket making. But it is also related to wattle work, matting, ornamental and what ever the work that is made of bamboo and cane. It is linked to netting and knitting since it includes all activities that produce objects by manual means without the use of mechanical devices. This craft requires no investment for manufacturing products but it demands continuous supply of raw materials, which is regenerative type in the forest, and professional skills. Basketry is not commonly practised to all, only the craftsmen operate within an equally wide range of social forms. In India there are particular castes that associate with basketry exclusively belong to the socially under privileged groups.

The Medar

Medar, basket making community, is one of the backward communities mainly concentrated in the southern parts of India i.e. Andhra Pradesh, Orissa, and Tamil Nadu and sparsely distributed in several other parts in India with different sub titles. Apart from *Medar*, there are many other communities who are also practicing such craft known by different names in different places of our country. In Andhra Pradesh they are also known as *Meda*, *Medarlu*, *Mahendra*, *Medari*, *Mendara Kanam* and so on. Telugu is their mother tongue. Thurston (1909) reports that, according to their legends, they came from

Mahendrachala Mountain, when Lord Shiva asked Ganapati and other Gods to make bamboo baskets for Parvati; they came to *Mahendrachala* Mountain when they married Gandharva women who bore them children. The descendents of these children were called *Mahindrulu* or *Medarulu*. However, according to oral tradition their ancestors were created by Lord Shiva to cut the unexpected growth of bamboo trees touching the sky and obstructing his way to bless the 'Saint' (*Muni*) who is in deep penance. They were instructed by Lord Shiva to make use of that bamboo (*meda*) for earning livelihood. Since basket making has become their primary and traditional occupation.

Medar migrated to these islands long back from Srikakulam district of Andhra Pradesh and the Ganjam district of Orissa. People covered in the present study; originally belong to the boarding areas of Andhra Pradesh and Orissa. Since basketry is mainly used in agricultural related works it had significant place in the peasant society. It once viewed as a pass time activity to fulfil some domestic works since the ages but now it became a subsistent occupation for the *Medar*. The foray of metal and polymer domestic products in day-to-day life had adversely affected to the craft and now they switch over from traditional occupation to the market economy oriented sustenance with the demand of the changing society.

Medar is a patriarchal in the form and the inheritance is patrilineal. The property is inherited to their elder son. After marriage bride used to go along with his husband's house and adopts the surname of her husband's family. Familial authority vested in the hands of head of the household. Still they are maintaining their occupational guilds as this is being practiced from generations, headed by one knowledgeable person in the community. They are the part of the hierarchal order of the Hindu caste system, subjugated to the lower rank.

Though they have been encountering occupational challenges in the contemporary world, present diversification of this occupation encourage them to continue it, even in the different socio-economic set up. There are many crafts have vanished from the mainstream due to lack of demand and infrastructure facilities, but basketry is still sustaining due to its versatile utilization in daily life. This phenomenon led the concerned academicians, artists, and amateurs

to carry out their studies on the sustenance of this particular craft and the craftsmen.

Some of the anthropological studies by Boas (1927), Forde (1970), Elwin (1959) reveal the significance of basketry in the economic, social, religious spheres of primitive people. There are some western and national scholars¹ produced monographs highlighting the relationship between ecology and the material culture related to these occupations. There were scanty of literature available with regard to rural basket-making communities in India in general, and in these islands in particular.

In this context, an attempt has been made to understand the adaptation of this community in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, in an entirely new environment from their rural set up. It has been relevant to understand their social structure, network of their social relations, and the process of craft, craftsmen role, and their way of life for social engineering.

METHODOLOGY

For the present study, the fieldwork was carried out in 2003 in a cluster of *Medar* households of Dairy Farm area of Port Blair city in A&N Islands. Primary data was gathered by using standard anthropological techniques i.e. participant observation, structured schedules, key informant interviews and focus group discussions. Being an anthropological fieldwork, the researcher performed two months intensive field visits to get first hand information.

In and Around the Knitting: The study delineates the way of living of the *Medar*, which consists of network of social relations and interplay of various factors immensely influences formulation of personality of the craftsmanship, which is necessary for their existence of traditional occupation in an entirely new environs.

Arrival to the Island: The present study is focussed mainly on the *Medar*, who live in the Dairy Farm area of the Port Blair town, who migrated from coastal areas of Andhra Pradesh and Orissa. Though Telugu is their mother tongue, here in the Andaman they can speak little bit in Hindi, Tamil and Bengali for maintaining inter-group communication. In 1975, there are 15 families migrated to Andaman with the persuasion of fellow *Medar* who come in 1950's with the help of his friend, in search of livelihood. Initially they were transient in nature for earning money and goes back to native places after two to three

years. Huge economical importance of bamboo products insisted them to migrate from their villages. The migrant people whose financial position was much better than the village residents were attracting as well as inspired them to migrate. Since then, it became a continuous process. Each year two to three families reach here for the perceived benefits involved in their occupation. At present they are altogether 58 households spread over the islands, though their major concentration is in the Dairy Farm area of Port Blair (30 households), that place which is mostly populated by the Telugu speaking people. Now, this area is being projected to the whole Bay Islands as the cradle of basketry work.

How ever, in connection with their appearance and existence in the island scenario, some relevant socio-economic factors should be taken in to consideration, before entering to the details. Push Factors:

1. Indebtedness
2. Inaccessibility of raw material (bamboo)
3. Lack of patronage on behalf of Govt. organisations
4. Demand restricted only in social net work

Pull Factors:

1. Excess demand beyond the social boundary
2. Availability/ accessibility of raw material
3. Encouragement from small-scale industries department
4. Consumerism

Those push and pull factors were not similar to every household, it varies between households. In their native places, supply of bamboo (*veduru*) has been restricted and reserved to meet the needs of the pulp industries. Due to inaccessibility of bamboo, their traditional occupation was in the verge of extinction. Moreover, they were bound by indebtedness to the neighbouring moneylenders for maintaining their social obligations. Some of their kinsmen had to leave for towns and other distant places in search of employment opportunities and most of them had to serve as daily wage labourers in construction, road-laying works etc. In Andaman they have been getting logistic assistance from local administration in providing raw material for keeping up of traditional crafts. Hence they decided to settle in Andaman for the welfare of their children's education and to support their dependents those who are in mainland. Each household assigns two hundred bamboos on monthly basis from forest department.

Bamboo is the only source of raw material procured from the forest areas of Baratang, Diglipur, Rangat, and Mathura, Jhirkatang. Every year bamboos have been collected from different locations by Forest Department, keeping in view the sustainable use of resource. Settlers, who reside adjacent to the bamboo brakes, were assigned the task of fetching bamboo from the forest at the cost of Rs. 5/- per each bamboo. In this way supply of raw material is very regular to them. Initially, they used to bring bamboo through marine transport, when there road transport system was in infancy. With the advent of the Andaman Trunk Road (ATR), in recent years supply has become much regular.

Two main varieties of bamboo i.e. *Bambusa Atr Lindl* (big size bamboo) *Bambusa Kurzii Balaks* (small size bamboo) were used for basketry works. Bigger one is used for construction works i.e. bamboo polls, inner ceiling of the huts, matting for covering the house (*chetakulu*) etc. The later type is amenable for basketry works. The nature of bamboo in this island is very soft when compare to mainland, where the bamboo is very thick and hard, not amenable for different varieties mending works.

Basketry: Technique and Typology: They generally apply three main varieties of basketwork, out of different varieties that are mentioned in Notes and Queries of Anthropology (1874). These are mainly check, twilled and hexagonal. With these techniques they can make baskets swiftly. First one gives employment regularly that has demand in market for daily chores and commercial purposes. Other kind of techniques i.e. coiled type is very time consuming and tedious, which only applies to any product of aesthetic purposes.

They use *Katti* (long hatchet), which is used for shafting bamboo and *Davanam* (knitting nail with sharp and pointed edge) for knitting purpose. For design works they use modern implements like sharpener, lighter, clips etc.

Major types of baskets prepared by these people are storage baskets (*dibba*), carrying baskets, (*gampalu*, *thattallu*), receptacles (*chinna pachhikalu*), winnowing fans, (*chatalu*), *chatakulu* (bamboo mats), various types of mats (*chapalu*), marriage baskets (*PELLI BUTTALU*), *pooja buttalu*, window curtains, pen stands, and so on prepared by *Medar*. Winnowing fans and carrying baskets has significant demand in Andaman.

Basketry is a household oriented activity, performed by all the family members irrespective of their age and sex. Children assist their parents in some minor knitting works till they attain perfection in their occupation. Elders will do the mastery knitting as long as he lives. They viewed that there is no retirement for this occupation because no extra energy or strength is required for making baskets. Both men and women are equally took part in the occupation. Apart from their netting work, women have to look after the daily chores in the house. Their role in caste council (*kula sangham*) and other decision-making aspects are restricted. Women and children go around places for selling baskets. Men travel a long distance for marketing. Men play a key role from the procurement of raw material marketing and even in getting work orders from government and private agencies.

Inter-group Relations: During those initial days, *Medar* had close inter group relations but gradually these relations are curtailed by the circumstances and limited to some extent only. Dairy Farm is well known for one of the areas of Telugu speaking communities in Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Social proximity to the other Telugu speaking communities is also one of the main reasons for their settlements. They prefer this place due to its geographical proximity to all sorts of transport i.e. road and harbours. As it is placed almost centre of the town and very much amenable to market of their product. Initially, they were tenant of the neighbouring people. Later they occupied near by wastelands for construction of their permanent base in the islands and this process was continued for quite some times. Though such activities was thoroughly resisted by neighbour groups- YBC ("Young Brother's Club" consists of different Telugu speaking caste people), who were also claim for setting up a play ground and brought it to the notice of civic authorities. Then administration swiftly acted in vacating their encroachment and offered alternative place for their rehabilitation but they did not opt due to their attachment with that place. That conflict was over with the re-encroachment of the same place by the dominant group (i.e. the members of that 'club') through construction of a community hall. Finally, the *Medar* encroached the present location, which is nearer to that place and negotiated with authorities for approval. They accepted for the payment of rent for *pucca*

houses in places of their temporary huts.

With these circumstances *Medar* have been maintaining a respectable distance with the YBC and simultaneously got politically affiliated with Tamil community in the Municipal elections for their community interest. It finds very limited inter-group relations with their neighbouring communities. Not only with their linguistic groups but also with their clients especially Bengali farmers and Tamil businessmen. It is due to their occupational interests i.e. in case of development of unnecessary intimacy with the clients may cause negotiation and bargaining of price during transaction. Whenever they visit surrounding places they used to keep their unsold products at the farmer's house and even if that place is distantly located, where hotel facility lacks, they have to pay for the lunch that is offered by the client members. In their native rural structure they had cordial relations with their neighbours and had some sort of ritual obligations with other communities. This kind of practice is not found here due to the ethnic mosaic of these islands. They had formal relations since farmer's co-operation is required for the market of their goods.

During the preliminary period of immigration kind of barter exchange prevailed between the farmers and the *Medar*. But it was a compulsion, because of the quality of food grains supplied by the administration was too poor to consume. They used to exchange their products for good quality of rice and other grains from the settlers. Ultimately, this kind of practice could not sustain for a long period, due to frequent use of currency in all sorts of daily transactions. During their hawking in the villages, they were offered meal. However, over coming of the immediate hesitation as the outsider, food acceptance became a part of their social bindings. Most of the clients were Hindus and they were faith full to their religious thoughts irrespective of their caste position. There are no restrictions and/or prescriptions with regard to inter-dinning between *Medar* and any Hindu people. They took part in the marriage ceremonies at Andhra Association (the communal organisation for the Telugu migrants) and offer presents. That was almost a reciprocal social process. In the case of marriage and other life cycle rituals, rites had to be performed by the Oriya Brahmin, who are in Govt. services and settled long back in Andaman & Nicobar Islands. In return they offer cash or kind to him. But

ceremonial kind of attachment was not practiced here as it happens in their village social structure.

In occasion of the Tamil festivals they supply baskets, which specially made for sacred use. It is the customary to use basketry related goods in rituals by Tamils from generations. In case of Bengali, winnowing fans are mostly use for their ritual processes that have been manufactured and supplied by the *Medar*. In this way a very occupational specialization necessitate limited relationship between *Medar* and other groups.

Social interaction is very much limited to verbal relations only. Exchange of brides with other groups has been considered as community offence. If any body violates these connubial rule is boycotted from their caste i.e. person will be excommunicated as a result of prosecution. There are two cases of inter-group marriage between *Medar* and the settlers. Economic security of the both parties made them to override the endogamous rule. Those couples were staying away from their community and finally found no way to return back to the mainland.

Being a member of minor social position, they have been protecting their interests as a cohesive group. Otherwise they feel that they will be marginalized in cases of disputes with other groups/communities, with in no time like other settlers of the isles.

Intra-group Relations: There also had strong intra group relations when compared to inter group relations. If anybody migrates to Andaman in search of employment from mainland will be received whole-heartedly. Each person contributes some bamboo, money and moral strength as the initial capital for him. Their council head and elder people extend all logistic supports for his registration to getting allotment of bamboos for his livelihood.

In mainland each village has its own *kula sangham* (caste council) and headed by '*Behra*'² (president). In case of big villages (i.e. having more population) there are two *Behra* represents their caste council. But here there is no *Behra* soon after their settlement because they hail from different places in mainland. They felt the need of one council to protect the interests of the occupation during the volatile circumstances. In the recent past only they formed caste council and elected a person as a *Behra* to their council. It was formed with the advise of their apex body '*Taluk*'³ which is located in Berhampur, Orissa.

In their political organization, siblings,

numerical preponderance and education playing a major role in the election/selection of the president. The post of *Behra* is not hereditary one, (unlike in mainland where the post is transformed hereditarily) elected by all their caste members through consensus or/and election. If he does any wrong or misbehaviour he will be removed and go for new head. They hold council meeting once in every two *pournamies*⁴ (full moon). There is no need to inform about their meeting to each household separately. It is mandatory for all who stays in and around Andaman to gather at their work place to discuss the issues relating to their occupation and organisation. There they discuss all the matters pertaining to their caste only. Dispute resolution is the key feature of their *kula sangham* meetings. During the marriage and other ceremonies they cooperate each other and shows their belongingness through various means. Contribution either in cash or kind is obligatory for their community members during these ceremonies.

Inter-State Mahendrulu Cooperative Society, has collectively formed and registered in 1999, has been mandate for the welfare measures of maintaining their traditional occupation in the islands. It has also been maintaining thrift to meet their financial ends. There is no representation of women in their traditional council as well as in co-operative society. In spite of contribution of equal manpower in preparation of baskets, female folk are not entitled for significant position. They are restricted to enter in the council meeting, unless it is essential in dispute resolution. They don't have any role or voice in decision-making. Presence of women at graveyard and some other works are taboo. They attribute this to the system, which is practicing from generations.

The *Medar* youth formed one self-help group, "Sri Ganesh Bamboo Unit". It acts as a catalytic for their mutual cooperation. It consists of 11 members and got registered at National Cooperative Union of Industries (NCUI). Besides their assistance to the caste council, they are engaged in thrift activities to meet the financial contingencies. Each person contributes 100/- per month and disburse loans to members with a little interest and the dividend amount shared equally including borrowers. This facility is restricted to their unit members only, thus helps in strengthening personnel bonds between their community members.

Medar are maintaining social as well as

physical isolation with other groups for their occupational concerns, which is indirectly contribute in strengthening their personnel relations. Mutual help, understanding is possible between *Medar* due to same occupation and it was not possible with the non-*Medar*. There is a chance of arising conflicts with other communities with regard to the disposal of dust and waste bamboo material. Their neighbour i.e. fellow *Medar* does not object because of the common nature of their work. Neighbouring Telugu people considered basketry is one of the polluted works and maintain physical isolation from their work place. Their work requires lot of lengthy open space for keeping long spilt bamboos for knitting. Hence they built houses in a rectangular shape unlike non-*Medar*'s houses. It is due to the proximity of their house, they are reciprocating necessary modern skills with each other. There is no formal socialization of their children to their occupation. Their children learn the art of basketry by continuous watching since early ages. They learn the skills automatically but guidance is necessary for sharpen the skills.

Their personnel relations were characterised in each and every aspect of their routine work. Though they came from different villages they have their own kinsmen and had close consanguine as well as affinal relations among them. Their *Behra* is from Berhampur, belong to the same community and settled in Orissa long back. Most of them had relatives in several parts of Orissa. They were strictly abided by the decision of their caste council. Whenever they face some urgency, it is discussed by all households in a meeting, which is arranged at their work place with consultations of elders. In the cases of disobedience or detachment from their council or caste norms they will be punished severely. This may be the imposition of fine to the social boycott (excommunication). These cases are referred to '*Taluk*' for necessary action. Once *Taluk* decides the judgement, they are bound to follow. Sentenced people are not allowed to take part in any of their community related activities i.e. marriages, festivals, dinning etc.

Another remarkable feature is the distribution of work equally when a single person gets huge work order. In case the consumer come to give work order as per his requirement, the order accepted by the concerned person. At the same

time this work is to be distributed equally among those, who presented during that time, even the women and children are also share the responsibilities. Some times unemployed persons offer labour for wage to the community members, when there is no work for him to undertake. During the off-season unsold basketry used to be purchase by a few shrewd *Medar* and sells it by travelling various islands.

They provide financial assistance among themselves irrespective of their kinsmen who are in need of help. It was not common with regard to other Telugu caste group in Andaman. For other caste people financial assistance is restricted in to their close relatives only. Through marital alliances some of the craftsmen come to stay along with the concerned bride and/or bridegroom's party. These people take care of all the minimum requirements of the newly married couple in providing shelter, raw material and financial assistance. There are so many cases illustrate these kinds of relations at Dairy Farm.

They practice caste endogamy and clan exogamy. They did not accept bride from other communities and attributes this to the requirement of the occupational skills. In this regard their stereotype is that other caste people are not well versed with necessary skills. In the case of inter caste marriage they have to face problems in getting livelihood because basketry is a familial output rather than individual one. There are only two cases of inter-caste marriage from entire community in this island. These are because of attraction of secured as well as settled government services.

Marketing: Use of bamboo in construction works is no more popular in these islands, due to easy import of advanced construction materials. Apart from construction of huts there are other usage of the basketry, which still has immense demands. Bamboo works have been maintaining its integral application in the agro-horticultural activities, ritualistic performances and some other pretty businesses. Demand of the basketry in the township is more less than the peasant economy, thus they hawking their products in the farmers doorsteps rather regular maintaining of shop in the urban market. Such strategy helps them also for getting a gross work order from the rural areas. In case of any urgent purposes people directly rush to their area and purchase it. Simultaneously, they run business in their households, which is append to their workshop.

Allied Economic Activities: Basketry is their only source of economic pursuit in the isles. Very few (six persons) are engaged in government service and two were auto driving. Those who are in service also used to take part in the traditional occupation during leisure. In spite of having the ownership of buses, two persons are also continuing their age-old profession. They perceive their occupation is having dignity of labour than other occupations, where people are not bound to serve against their will. It is some sort of self employed occupation. It is the reason for even educated persons does not hesitate in taking part.

Metamorphosis: Cause and Effect: With the immense increasing of modern materials, while the traditional handicrafts have been facing a tremendous competitive market, demand for basketry is still noticed in Andaman. It is because of compulsory use of baskets in the arena of agro-horticulture economy as well as comparatively cheap price of products could not produce much impact on basketry. Recent changes of their occupational pattern do not brought major alteration in their social organization. These contributed their endeavour to improve their entrepreneur as well as occupational skills. Improvement in livelihood does not affect any major alteration on their social institutions, except a few.

Nuclear type of family set up is most common feature, though in few cases of extended nuclear families are observed. Soon after the marriage couple prefer to stay in a nuclear households. No traces of joint family are found in the study area. With regard to marriage they still prefer the arrange one, as per selection of parents and close relatives. A few cases of broken families are noticed in the present study area. This is due to the extra-marital relations with other community people. Members of those deserted families are engaged in basketry and get social, economical and moral supports from their community members.

They have been still observing traditional rituals, norms, and values. This has been illustrated in social boycott of two persons who abridged their traditional norms. They were intimately affiliated to their caste council in protecting the interests of their occupations and caste solidarity. Decision-making about marriage, family, occupation, and others are still depending on the family and community head. No individual

overrides the caste-council (*kula sangham*) and settle whatever the minor disputes arises in their community among them. They approach courts in case of major crimes like murder and made it accepted from their Taluk also. Court verdict should get accepted from Taluk otherwise they have to face the social boycott.

In the past they were treated as lower caste but now they do not have such stigma in the islands. They are trying to polish their status with that of other communities living in the neighbourhood and also in mainland. Due to this tendency they have been toiling a hard for improving their economic condition to get recognition in the traditional hierarchy. Hence they hardly show interest for investing money behind any kind of permanent settlement in Andaman. They wish to settle permanently in their own villages, where they have their ancestral relatives and properties. This was best illustrated in the case of marriage patterns. They regularly moved to mainland to get marry to their children. They never engaged marital relations with the people who are already settled here.

There is a perceptible change noticed in the deeds due to the impact of market economy. They have developed entrepreneur skills in dealing with the businessmen, government servants and farmers for the marketing of their products, thus lead them compete themselves in getting public and private work contracts. Now they are able to communicate in Tamil, Hindi and Bengali to some extent. They are even familiar with the art of dealing with the authorities for bulk work orders. Now they accustom to the filing of tenders and quotations for the supplying of products. Considering the demand of their products, they usually form syndicate and quote accordingly and if the rate gets approval, they divide the whole work among themselves and finally share the profit.

Modern items are massively affecting their traditional varieties of basketry, which has immense contribution for agriculture. Earlier farmers used to invite *Medar* for the construction of *Dibba* (huge grain storage basket) at their houses; *chetakulu* (big size bamboo mating used for construction of huts, shops and fencing) has significant demand for immediate construction of huts, shops and so on. Tin and asbestos sheets, cement and iron replace these old varieties. Farmers are being constructing pucca rooms for the storing of grains.

Intervention by Andaman & Nicobar Administration for the perpetuation of the craft is noteworthy with regard to *Medar*. They realise the need of occupational diversification for better way of living despite the continuous demand for few varieties. (i.e. winnowing fans, carrying baskets). This has been materialising with the help of National Cooperative Union of Industries (NCUI) and Andaman Nicobar Construction Organization (ANCON). They use to organise rotational monthly training camps for improving their skills with regard to modern design works on free of cost. Single person from each family participated in that camp and 7 to 8 varieties of design works of flower basket, fruit basket, pooja materials carrying baskets, lampshade and other toy related works taught in that camps. With this knowledge they are producing some other new varieties on their own. One physically handicap person sent to Bangalore for training for six months on free of cost. He occasionally engages himself in producing the fashionable bamboo items because of lack of infrastructure and financial facilities. Routine basketry works is practising for his eke-out. They attribute this low demand for design works and continuous demand for their routine business. Their design works are as an occasional activity and only depends on the work orders from the *Sagarika* (government handicraft sale emporium). They are bound to pay after the sale proceeds. Due to the cumbersome procedure with regard to the fixation of minimum price and sale proceeds made them to feel like uneasy. In spite of their entrepreneurial skills; lack of proper infrastructure made them to depend on handicrafts emporium for the marketing. Otherwise they can sale these artefacts in some tourist points on their own.

CONCLUSION

Thus basketry and its related works had significantly contributing the major livelihood to the *Medar* community who migrated from different places in search of subsistence. Their occupational specialization limit the possibility of inter group relations to some extent but not at large. At the same time it strengthen their bonds of solidarity among themselves for mutual co-operation. The sheer identities are due to the interests involved in their enterprise of the product in marketing. When compared to this phenomenal effect with their life in mainland, they

conceive it is a better place for flourishing their traditional work.

Though the entry of polymer affected their occupation to some extent, use of basketry is very much profuse in all walks of life in Andaman. Now a day, a shift has been taking place from traditional to modern varieties to meet the changing needs of the common. Thus they are coping with the problems of plenty by engaging in all sorts of works, which is related to bamboo.

Nature of their traditional occupation is one kind of self-employment, that does not allow them spend the time ideally. Despite this fact, they too can succeed in competing with other techno products in the modern cut through competitive world as they provide necessary infrastructure facilities. Though these factors exist, basketry has been spiralling effect on the income levels when compared it to their mainland situation. Versatile use of basketry has made them self-sufficient, self-employed, and self-reliance in all aspects of their social life in the Andaman & Nicobar Islands.

Thus the study of *Medar* community as a whole, it is found that the art of basket making deeply embedded in their socio-economic life as mentioned in the earlier studies, even in urban setting. Further it is proved that the sustenance of any art/occupation depends on its diversification for fulfilling the needs of the modern society.

NOTES

1. Padam and Miniyong (Roy, 1960), Idu-Mishmi (Boruah, 1960), Tangse (Dutta, 1960), Sherdukpen (Sharma, 1961), Aka (Sinha, 1961), Dafla (Shukla, 1961), Gallong (Srivastava, 1961), Tribes of Arunachal Pradesh (A.K.Das, 1971), Hill Miri (Choudhury, 1973).
2. Behra is the designation of *Medar* headman. In Each village, *Medar* community will have one Behra and he led their caste council. All the *Medar* abide to what he says.
3. Taluk is an apex political organisation of *Medar* in mainland. Each Taluk consists of 10 to 15 villages; and take up the serious issues, which are not settling at village level. Taluk guide various aspects relating to norms and values of their caste and assists Behras whenever he needs help.
4. Pournami is a sacred day for *Medar* and is observed monthly once. All the *Medar* stops work on that particular day. If any body violates the rule will be fined severely. It is the cultural prescribed notion, which is imbibed in their occupation for taking rest during that period.

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