

Entrepreneurship Among Tribal Women Artisans: A Case Study of Bell Metal Workers of Pichola Village, Arunachal Pradesh

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Abstract:

Entrepreneurship, in a simple sense, is to organize, develop, or run any business with the motive of profit-making. Traditionally, the rural economy of tribal inhabited regions of Arunachal Pradesh is driven by agriculture. The tribal women in Arunachal Pradesh are known for their expertise in weaving and basketry, but their involvement in any form of metallurgy is not very popular. Pichola is a small village in the south-eastern fringe of Papum Pare District, mostly inhabited by a tribal population belonging to the Nyishi community. The tribal artisans of this village practice the art of making bell metal ornaments, which is exclusive to Pichola and a few adjoining villages in the context of Arunachal Pradesh. Bell metal craft is a popular art form in other regions of the country, such as Chhattisgarh and Assam. These artisans produce traditional ornaments that have great cultural and social significance in the tribal society. The womenfolk largely practice this art form and can be considered their primary source of livelihood. It can potentially strengthen the rural economy, particularly for the womenfolk, making them economically self-reliant. This study is an attempt to explore the art of bell metal craft as well as the women artisans as entrepreneurs who have developed their skills and art into a promising business. The study is primarily based on first-hand information acquired through field visits, personal interviews and observations.

Keywords: Bell metal craft, Pichola village, Tribal women artisans, Women entrepreneurs.

Introduction

Traditionally, the rural economy of tribal inhabited regions of Arunachal Pradesh is driven by agriculture. People rely on their agricultural produce for their sustenance, and it is the predominant source of livelihood. Pichola is a small Nyishi-inhabited village in the south-eastern fringe of Papum Pare District. The Nyishi are one of the tribal communities of Arunachal Pradesh, primarily residing in Papum Pare, Pakke Kesang, Kurung Kumey, Kra-Daadi, Keyi Panyor, East Kameng, West Kameng and parts of Upper and Lower Subansiri districts. The Nyishi are the largest ethnic community residing in the state of Arunachal Pradesh, with an estimated population of about 300000 (District Administration, n.d). The tribal women of Pichola village practice the art of making bell metal ornaments, which is exclusive to Pichola and a few adjoining villages only, in the context of Arunachal Pradesh. Bell metal, known as *Kanh* or *Kansha* in India, is an alloy of Copper and Tin. It has been widely used since ancient times to make various artefacts such as utensils and bells. The metal's gold-

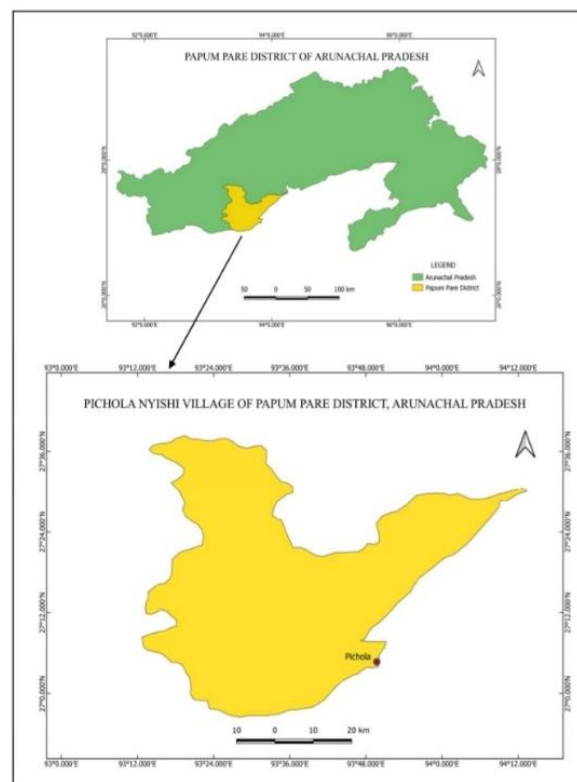
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like appearance and exceptional reverberating quality made it a favourable choice of metal to work with (Sarkar & Kakoty, 2021).

Bell metal craft is a popular art form in other parts of India as well. Sarthebari in Assam and the Bastar region in Chhattisgarh are well known for producing bell metal crafts. It is an important industry and is a major income source for the artisans involved (Jain & Chandravanshi, 2022; Saloi & Barman, 2020). The bell metal or Kansha is known as *Patte* in Nyishi. The artisans of Pichola village produce traditional ornaments using this metal that have great cultural and social significance in the Nyishi tribal society. These ornaments are used in marriages and other ceremonies. These bell metal ornaments, along with others such as various beads, are part of the tangible cultural heritage of the Nyishis, and these ornaments are a symbol of prosperity and wealth. The art form has become the primary source of income for the villagers. Most of the villagers are directly or indirectly deriving their sustenance from this business. In this study, an attempt has been made to explore the role of bell metal craft as a livelihood practice for the tribal women artisans of Pichola village in Papum Pare District, Arunachal Pradesh.

Study area

Figure 1. Study area



Source: Generated using ArcGIS 10.3 based on the administrative and political map of A.P., Census of India, 2011.

The present study has been carried out at Pichola village. It is a small village at the south-eastern fringe of Papum Pare district at the Assam-Arunachal border under Balijan circle in Papum Pare district of Arunachal Pradesh. It is located 18 km from the tehsildar office, or sub-district headquarters, Banderdewa, and 49 km from Yupia, the District headquarters.

There are about 133 individuals living in Pichola Nyishi, 60 of whom are male and 73 are females. The village has about twenty-four households. The nearest town for all significant economic activity is Banderdewa. With few basic amenities, the community is situated on the outskirts.

Aims and objectives

The present study is an attempt to highlight the practice of making bell metal ornaments by the tribal women artisans of Pichola village. It also discusses how these tribal women artisans have developed this art into a successful enterprise that is a major source of their livelihood.

Database

The present study is based on primary data obtained through field surveys. Secondary data have been obtained from various online sources such as the Indian Village Directory, the Census of India, and various literature in the form of research papers, books, journals, and news articles.

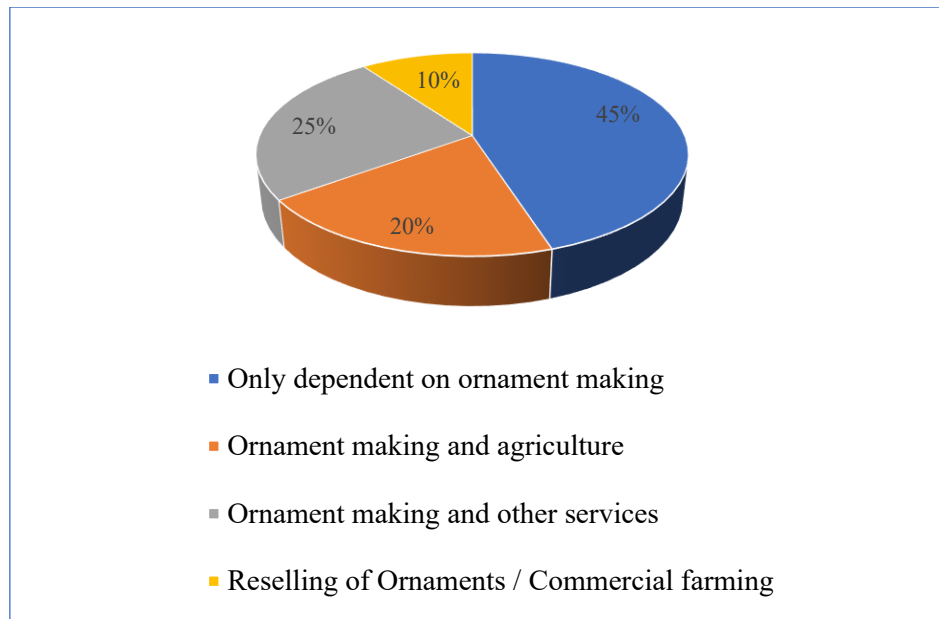
Methodology

The present study is primarily based on first-hand information on various aspects, viz., socio-economy, education, production, and sale. All the information has been collected through field surveys involving the use of schedules, personal interviews and non-participant observation methods. A total of 20 households were surveyed for the present study.

Results and discussion

It has been found that 100% of the surveyed households are directly or indirectly engaged in the bell metal craft. All of these artisans are middle-aged women having minimal formal education. Within 20 households surveyed, it has been found that 25 artisans are engaged in making bell metal ornaments. Only 1 individual has been identified to be engaged in reselling the bell metal ornaments. These artisans produce their craft individually as well as in groups. They mostly produce ornaments upon receiving orders from customers. These customers vary from tribal people who buy the items for themselves as well as for reselling, and traders from nearby markets of Harmutty, Assam.

Figure 2. Dependency on various businesses for livelihood



Source: Primary data.

About 45% of the households are solely dependent on bell metal craft for their livelihood. About 25% of households were found to be engaged in both bell metal craft and some sort of Government as well as private services. About 20% of the households practice agriculture for self-consumption, in addition to bell metal craft. Meanwhile, there is only one household that produces bell metal craft, in conjunction with commercially producing tea and lemon.

These artisans earn between 5000 and 10000 INR to 25000 and 40000 INR per month, depending on the volume of their sales and customer demand. The production process is tedious and time-consuming. It takes approximately one week to produce a single batch of ornaments consisting of about 100 units. The raw materials required for the production are wood, bell metal, wax, and clay. The metal, wax, and clay are sourced from Assam, while wood is collected from nearby areas. All of these raw materials, as well as setting up the production plant, are a costly affair. According to the respondents, it requires about 100000 INR to set up a production unit, which consists of a roofed structure with furnaces and grinding and polishing equipment.

The most common ornaments produced are large clapperless bells (*Maji*), small clapperless bells (*Junghang*), waistbands (*Hukfi*), headgear (*Dumping*), and bangles (*Kota*) (Fig. 3, p.6). These ornaments are produced using the age-old lost wax technique. In this technique, initially, a wax model of the desired artefact is made, which is then covered with a layer of clay. Once the clay is dry, the mould is exposed to heat, which melts the wax, and it is drained through the openings, specifically made for this purpose. After this process, molten metal can be poured into the clay mould, and once it cools down, it assumes the design of the cast (Chattopadhyay, 2017).

The state government has recently recognized the potential of this traditional craft and has ensured its support to the artisans by developing the village into a rural tourism destination and promoting the products through developing market linkages (Arunachal24.in, 2020). In 2015, Chief Secretary Arunachal Pradesh declared Tani Happa Village (under Pichola Panchayat) as

“Artistic Village” of the State, acknowledging the artisans and the art of making bell metal ornaments in the village (The Hindu, 2015).

Figure 3. Common bell metal ornaments produced in Pichola and artisans



Source: Field survey.

The art of making bell metal ornaments is no doubt a profitable and lucrative business for the artisans, but there are some notable challenges faced by them. The village still lacks proper connectivity in terms of roads and a bridge. There is still no provision for public transport or regular taxi services in the village. The price and availability of firewood and other raw materials are another basic challenge faced by the artisans. The availability of cheaper copies of these traditional ornaments in the local markets and nearby markets of Assam is another challenge for the artisans.

The State of Arunachal Pradesh is home to numerous tribal communities, and they happen to be very diverse in terms of their cultural practices. These bell metal ornaments are largely used and revered by the communities within the Tani clan, which includes tribal communities like the Nyishi, Tagin, Galo, Adi and Apatani, while there are other tribal communities in the region who do not traditionally use any of these ornaments. Therefore, it can be said that these ornaments have more or less a limited market.

Conclusion

Bell metal craft has become a primary source of earning for the tribal women artisans of the Pichola village. Although most of the operations are unstructured and most of the artisans lack formal education and training, the art of making bell metal ornaments has made them successful entrepreneurs and enabled them to earn a respectable living for themselves as well as their

families. The bell metal craft has proven to be instrumental in strengthening the rural economy, and particularly, it has made the womenfolk self-reliant despite many challenges.

The tribal women engaged in the craft of bell metal epitomize a strong example of economic resilience as well as the preservation of culture. This art fosters employment, generates income and promotes traditional craftsmanship. By partaking in this craft, these women are challenging socio-economic barriers, gaining financial independence, and becoming active contributors to the welfare of the community. This art is a testament to their skill and signifies the broader concepts of gender equality and recognizes women's vital role in the preservation and elevation of the cultural heritage.

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