

CHAPTER TWELVE

Analysis of Data Collected for Providing Suggestions for Sustainable Commercialization of Traditional Crafts of Assam

Let every man be his own methodologist; let every man be his own theorist; let theory and method again become part of the practice of a craft- (C. Wright Mills, 1959)

12.1 The Prelude

This chapter fulfills the objective three of the study which aims to provide marketing suggestions for sustainable commercialization of traditional crafts of Assam. In this chapter, section 12.2 at first discusses the various techniques used to collect information regarding the perception of various stakeholders connected to the craft sector both practically and academically. The first subsection, that is 12.2.1, draws the findings of the tourist survey undertaken to realize the perception of tourists about crafts and their selection criteria of craft objects. Subsection 12.2.2 then ascertains the viewpoints of artisans based on FGDs regarding commercialization of the crafts and their propositions towards sustainable marketing and commercialization. In section 12.2.3, information about the market demand conditions from other stakeholders like retailers and intermediaries are taken. In the section 12.2.4, opinion of government officials, academicians and other experts are taken into account to understand their take on commercialization and notions to make the crafts sustainable.

12.2 Perspectives of the Objective

Objective three is to provide future marketing insights for the sustainable commercialization of traditional crafts of Assam. To offer the suggestions, the perspectives of various agencies and stakeholders of crafts, apart from the artisans themselves are taken into consideration. Focus group interviews with artisans are conducted to understand their attitude towards the crafts they make and their opinion to market the crafts successfully. An exploratory tourist survey is also included to understand the touristic requirements. It was thought prudent to understand how tourists perceive crafts and what types of crafts do they prefer as souvenir objects. Furthermore, information is also collected from shopkeepers, retailers and

intermediaries selling crafts to different categories of customers to understand the type of items that different customer segments prefer. Also, viewpoints of experts were sought. It consisted of academicians, government officials working in the field of handicrafts and handlooms and private entrepreneurs involved in the commerce of the crafts.

12.2.1 Tourist Survey

A quick survey was conducted among tourists during December 2014 to March 2015 to assess the requirements of the tourist customers. It was done with a view to identify the type of local crafts that this segment of customer would want to buy. It was also done with a view to identify the marketing needs for traditional crafts. In total, 200 (for justification on sample size, refer to Chapter 5, section 5.5.3.1A) refer well completed questionnaires were used for the analysis. The rationale for selection of a small sample size for the survey is discussed in section 5.5.3.1 A of Chapter 5. The questionnaire format is enclosed in Appendix 2.

A. Demographic Statistics of the Respondents

The respondents consisted of 34.5% of local tourists from within the state of Assam. 41.5% comprised of national tourists, i.e. those tourists from states other than Assam while the rest, that is 24% were international tourists.

<i>Tourist Type</i>	Count	(%)	Education	Count	(%)
Local	69	(34.5%)	Primary	4	(2.0%)
National	83	(41.5%)	Secondary/Higher Secondary	70	(35.0%)
International	48	(24.0%)	Graduate and Above	126	(63.0%)
Total	200	(100%)	Total	200	(100%)
<i>Gender</i>			<i>Occupation</i>		
Male	139	(69.5%)	Professional	41	(20.5%)
Female	61	(30.5%)	Self-employed	41	(20.5%)
Total	200	(100%)	Service holder	63	(31.5%)
<i>Age</i>			Student/Researcher	15	(7.5%)
<25 yrs	22	(11.0%)	Retiree	12	(6.0%)
25 to 40 yrs	99	(49.5%)	Home-Maker	28	(14.0%)
40-60 yrs	64	(32.0%)	Total	200	(100%)
>60 yrs	15	(7.5%)			
Total	200	(100%)			

Source: Field Survey

Male respondents comprised of 69.5% while females were 30.5% of the total respondents. The age, education and occupation wise categorization statistics of the tourists is presented in Table 12.1.

B. Travel Characteristics

It is seen that tourists primarily travel for pleasure or vacation (82.5%). Combined pleasure and business is the travel motive of 9.5% of the tourists who visited Assam. Also, 8% respondents took the trip for business. In terms of pattern of travel, tourists in the local and national categories generally undertook their trips with family. Only 27.08% of international tourists travelled with their family.

<i>Pattern of Travel</i>	Local	National	International
Travel with none	8 (11.59%)	10 (12.05%)	16 (33.33%)
Friends	10 (14.49%)	10 (12.05%)	17 (35.42%)
Family	45 (65.22%)	46 (55.42%)	13 (27.08%)
Family and friends	6 (8.70%)	17 (20.48%)	1 (2.08%)
Tour groups	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)	1 (2.08%)
Total	69 (100%)	83 (100%)	48 (100%)
Group Composition			
<i>Group Composition</i>	Local	National	International
Children below 18 yrs	1.70	1.22	0.00
Adult Female	1.57	1.67	1.35
Adult Male	1.94	1.35	0.85
Total Members	5.96	5.33	2.52
Purpose of Visit			
<i>Purpose of Visit</i>	Count	(%)	
Pleasure or vacation	165	(82.5%)	
Combined pleasure or vacation	19	(9.5%)	
Business	16	(8.0%)	
Total	200	(100%)	
Source: Field Survey			

As compared to this, international tourists generally seemed to travel alone (33.33%) or with friends (35.42%). The percentage of tourists travelling alone or with friends is lower among local and national tourists (refer to Table 12.2). Friends and families as tour companions are also high among the national tourists (20.48%). It is observed that group size is the high among local and national tourists while it is low among the international tourists. Children do not accompany international tourists. Majority of the international tourists prefer to visit natural

Preferred Sites	Local		National		International	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Historical	25	44	30	53	33	15
	36.23%	63.77%	36.14%	63.86%	68.75%	31.25%
Natural	48	21	61	22	48	0
	69.57%	30.43%	73.49%	26.51%	100%	0.00%
Religious	46	23	61	22	8	40
	66.67%	33.33%	73.49%	26.51%	16.67%	83.33%
Cultural	32	37	30	53	30	18
	46.38%	53.62%	36.14%	63.86%	62.50%	37.50%
Source: Field Survey						

(100%), historical (68.75%) and cultural sites (62.50%). National tourists are more interested in visiting natural and religious places (73.49%). Local tourists also seem to prefer religious sites (66.67%).

C. Spending Pattern

Tourists' tendency to spend can help ascertain the range within which crafts can be developed as curios. Respondents were asked to mention the amount of money they spent (open ended question) or would like to spend for buying curios during their trip to Assam. In terms of spending, results show that approximate amount of money spent or likely to be spent is highest among the national tourists at an average of Rs. 3574.78. International tourists, on an average, spent or are likely to spend Rs. 2857.67. Gender wise, female tourists comparatively spend more than their male counterparts. The upper age group of 40 to 60 spends the highest amount at Rs. 3808.69 followed by 25 to 40 year respondents at Rs. 2413.13. Tourists below 25 years for age spend the least amount.

<i>Tourist Type</i>	N	Rs.
Local	51	1788.63
National	67	3574.78
International	43	2857.67
Total	161	2817.45
<i>Gender Wise</i>		
Male	108	2292.41
Female	53	3887.36
<i>Age Wise</i>		
<25 yrs	13	1038.46
25 to 40 yrs	83	2413.13
40-60 yrs	61	3808.69
>60 yrs	4	1872.50
Source: Field Survey		

D. Tourists' Disposition to Buying Crafts as Souvenirs

The disposition of tourists towards buying of craft items as

Tourist Type	Always		Sometimes		Rarely		Never	
	Count	(%)	Count	(%)	Count	(%)	Count	(%)
Local	21	(30.4%)	27	(10.1%)	12	(17.4%)	9	(13.0%)
National	27	(32.5%)	27	(32.5%)	19	(22.9%)	10	(12.0%)
International	15	(31.3%)	21	(43.8%)	10	(20.8%)	2	(4.2%)
Total	63	(31.5%)	75	(37.5%)	41	(20.5%)	21	(10.5%)
Source: Field Survey								

souvenirs can provide necessary information to ascertain the need for developing the crafts as souvenir objects. It is observed that handicrafts are always bought as souvenir objects by 31.5% of respondents while 37.5% would prefer to buy it sometimes. Only 10.5% would rarely buy crafts as souvenirs. This suggests scope for the traditional crafts to be produced as souvenirs

E. Tourists Knowledge about Local Crafts of Assam

Tourists’ knowledge about the crafts of Assam was sought on a five point scale ranging from not at all knowledgeable to extremely knowledgeable following the scale used by (Kim &Litrell, 2001). Local tourists had the highest mean value at 3.88 literally meaning that they are more than moderately knowledgeable about different local crafts of Assam. International tourists are slightly knowledgeable with a mean value of 2.02 whereas the national category was the least knowledgeable having a low mean of 1.65.

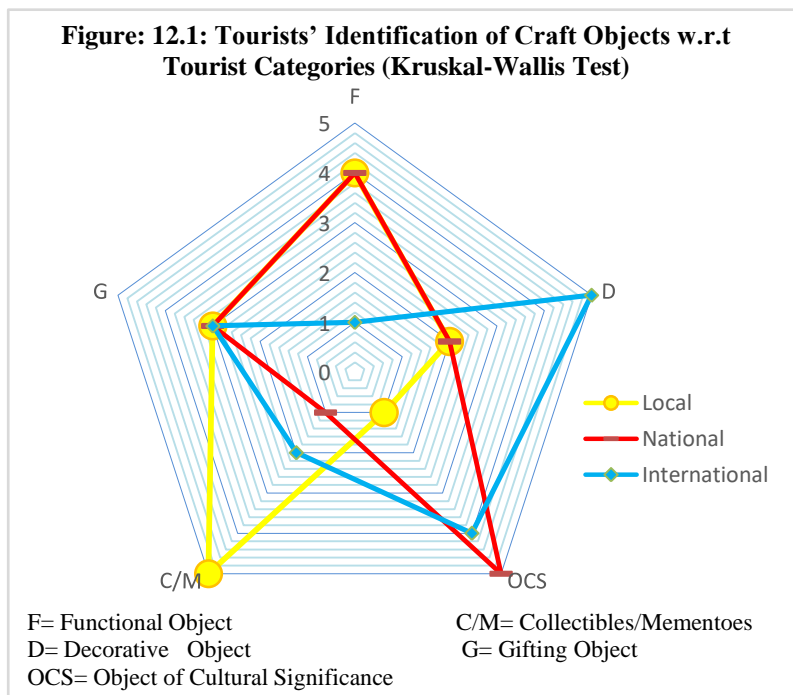
Tourist type	Mean	N
Local	3.88	67
National	1.65	82
International	2.02	48
Total	2.37	197

Source: Field Survey

F. Tourists’ Identification of Craft Objects

Identifying Crafts as:	Local	National	International
<i>Functional object</i>	108.47 (4 th)	110.80 (4 th)	71.23 (1 st)
<i>Decorative object</i>	91.64 (2 nd)	92.08 (2 nd)	127.78 (5 th)
<i>Object of cultural significance</i>	68.10 (1 st)	118.24 (5 th)	116.40 (4 th)
<i>Collectibles/mementoes</i>	133.38 (5 th)	85.86 (1 st)	78.54 (2 nd)
<i>Gifting object</i>	105.82 (3 rd)	94.91 (3 rd)	102.52 (3 rd)

Source: Field Survey, w.r.t means ‘with respect to’



The survey also focused on understanding how tourists’ identify the crafts as. Tourists were asked to state what identification they associate to a craft object that they buy. The list of identification items as mentioned in Table 12.7 were

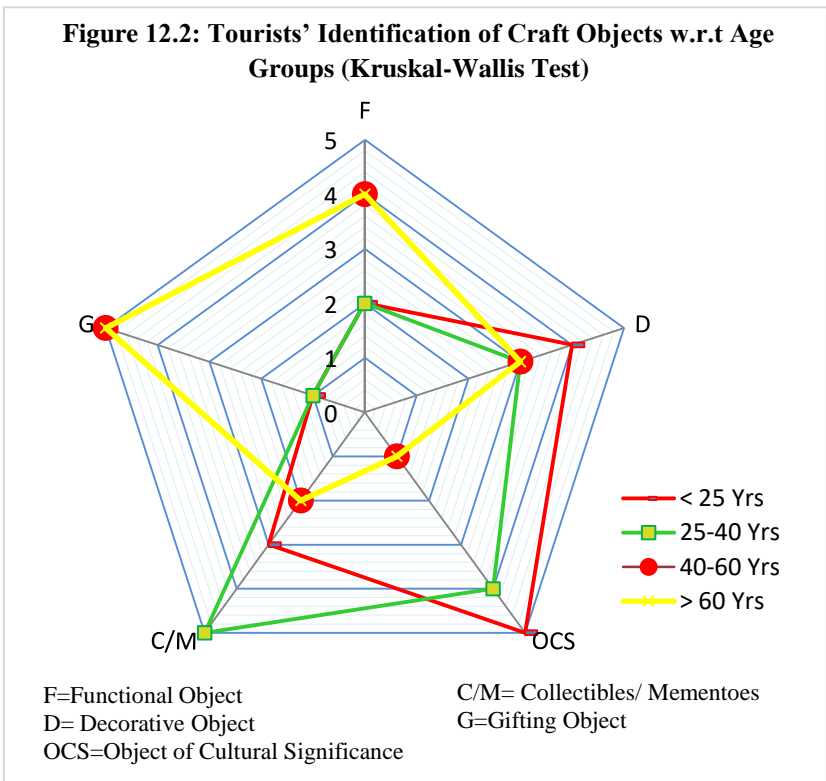
provided following which they were asked to rank the items from 1 (highest identification) to 5 (lowest identification). Translating this identification into suitable

craft items can help in developing crafts for tourists according to their preferred requirements. Hence, Kruskal-Wallis test was used for this set of ordinal data to give rank to the items depending upon their scores (Hole, n.d., Field & Hole, 2003). For highest score, lowest rank, i.e '5', was allotted (since '5' is identified with lowest identification value) to the item (ibid). Similarly, for lowest score, highest rank '1' is allotted.

Identifying Crafts as:	< 25 years	25-40 years	40-60 years	Above 60 years
Functional object	58.36 (2 nd)	85.37 (2 nd)	128.80 (4 th)	141.40 (4 th)
Decorative object	126.07 (4 th)	86.52 (3 rd)	107.88 (3 rd)	123.80 (3 rd)
Object of cultural significance	152.86 (5 th)	114.04 (4 th)	72.47 (1 st)	53.93 (1 st)
Collectibles/mementoes	114.73 (3 rd)	121.16 (5 th)	72.89 (2 nd)	61.10 (2 nd)
Gifting object	41.95 (1 st)	84.87 (1 st)	132.69 (5 th)	152.17 (5 th)

Source: Field Survey, w.r.t means 'with respect to'

It was found that local tourists generally see the craft as object of cultural significance. With a score of 68.10 (refer Table 12.7), rank '1' is allotted to the item



in case of local tourists. For national tourists, the crafts seem to be more a collectible or a memento (85.86) and then it is considered as a decorative object. In case of international tourists, craft object, at first, seems to occupy the place of functional object.

The diagrammatic representation for the ranks given by respective tourist categories in the identification of craft objects is depicted in Fig 12.1. However, there is difference between how tourists belonging to various age groups identify the crafts as.

It is found that tourists belonging to the lowest age group see the craft objects first as gift objects later followed by functional objects. Cultural significance is the lowest for this age group of tourist. Tourists belonging to the age group of 25 to 40 years also identify the crafts at first as gift items and then as functional objects. For tourists belonging to the upper age categories of 40 to 60 years and above 60 years age groups, the craft objects are objects of cultural significance followed by being collectibles and mementoes. The diagrammatic representation for the ranks given by respective age groups in the identification of craft objects is depicted in Fig 12.2.

G. Tourists' Perception about Appealing Crafts

The appealing features of the crafts are measured with the help of variables craftsmanship, indigenouness, aesthetics and ease of handling. The components used for each of this scale are presented in Chapter 5, Table 5.5 & 5.6 (also refer to Appendix 2). The tourists' perception against each variable items are measured on a 5 point Likert scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The values obtained are categorized as low (0.0-1.67), medium (1.67-3.34) and high (3.34-5.0).

Along the variable craftsmanship, it is seen that fine finishing is the highest appealing factor among international tourists (Mean Value 4.12) followed by fine craftsmanship and high quality refer to Table 12.9). Other components of the variable craftsmanship are also considered as highly appealing factors along all tourist categories with Mean Value scores above 3.34. On the indigenouness scale, tourists believe that expression of local culture in the craft and its availability only in the place of visit are most appealing features of craft. These factors are much prominently seen as appealing amongst local and international tourists. Though the item that *the craft (should be) made by prominent craftsmen* has medium score overall, it is seen as the most appealing in case of local tourists (Mean Value 3.40). Among the aesthetics variable, attractiveness in design (Mean Value 3.80) and trendiness of the craft (Mean Value 3.76) has been given more importance by all categories of tourists. Ease of packaging and carrying (Mean Value 4.19) is the greatest appealing factor for international tourists as well as national tourists (Mean Value 4.10). However, as expected, it is found to have medium appeal among the local tourists (Mean Value 2.99).

Items	Local	National	International	Total
Craftsmanship				
<i>Handmade</i>	3.57	3.64	3.48	3.58
<i>Example of fine craftsmanship</i>	3.75	3.67	4.08	3.80
<i>Fine finishing</i>	3.75	3.83	4.12	3.87
<i>High quality</i>	3.59	3.65	3.98	3.71
Total score	3.67	3.69	3.92	3.74
Indigenouness				
<i>Original</i>	3.59	3.30	3.58	3.47
<i>Available only in the place of visit</i>	3.43	3.65	3.85	3.62
<i>Makes use of local raw materials</i>	3.65	3.37	3.56	3.52
<i>Expresses local culture</i>	3.65	3.48	3.77	3.61
<i>Made by prominent craftsman</i>	3.40	3.17	3.04	3.22
Total score	3.54	3.39	3.56	3.49
Aesthetics				
<i>One of its kind (unique)</i>	3.38	3.60	3.60	3.53
<i>Attractive design</i>	3.64	3.89	3.88	3.80
<i>Attractive color</i>	3.01	3.60	3.38	3.35
<i>Traditional but trendy</i>	3.77	3.71	3.83	3.76
<i>Makes a good gift</i>	3.54	3.64	3.77	3.64
<i>Can be displayed at home or office</i>	3.52	3.53	3.60	3.55
Total score	3.47	3.66	3.68	3.60
Ease of handling				
<i>Easy to pack and carry</i>	2.99	3.84	4.19	3.63
<i>Easy to care and clean</i>	2.87	3.47	4.10	3.41
Total score	2.92	3.65	4.14	3.52
Source: Field Survey				

The ANOVA test result at p value of 0.00 also highlights that significant differences exist among the tourist groups for the variable ease of handling (refer to Table 12.10). In case where Levene's test p value is below 0.05, robust Welch Test value was considered to identify the existence of significant differences across groups (i.e. to make decision on the null hypothesis).

Variables	df 1	df2	Local	National	International	Total	ANOVA (sig)
<i>Craftsmanship</i>	2	197	3.67	3.69	3.92	3.74	.279
<i>Indigenouness</i>	2	197	3.54	3.39	3.56	3.49	.485
<i>Aesthetics</i>	2	197	3.47	3.66	3.68	3.60	.241
<i>Ease of Handling</i>	2	197	2.92	3.65	4.14	3.52	.000
Source: Field Survey							

It is found that the difference is not significant for other variables like craftsmanship, indigenouness and aesthetics for the different tourist types. With high mean scores

across all the tourist categories, it can be stated that craftsmanship, indigenouness and aesthetics have equal importance whereas the attribute *ease of handling* is more important to national and international tourists. The perception about appealing crafts among tourists also seems to differ across age groups. Fine finishing of the craft is most appreciated in the craftsmanship scale (Mean Value 3.87, refer to Table12.11) and it is the most appealed item among the 40 to 60 years age group (Mean Value 4.09). The quality of the craft being handmade is the most appealing element for the above 60 years age group tourists (Mean Value 4.53). 40 to 60 years age group also gives the criteria of being *handmade* high importance (Mean Value 4.14) after the craft satisfies as *an example of fine craftsmanship* (Mean Value 4.23). On the craftsmanship scale, the lowest age group below 25 years age scores the lowest mean value of 2.65 highlighting that they give this item medium importance.

Items	<25 yrs	25-40 yrs	40-60 yrs	>60 yrs	Total
Craftsmanship					
Handmade	2.14	3.38	4.14	4.53	3.58
Example of fine craftsmanship	2.91	3.66	4.23	4.13	3.80
Fine finishing	3.05	3.91	4.09	3.93	3.87
High quality	2.50	3.70	4.09	3.87	3.71
Total score	2.65	3.67	4.14	4.12	3.73
Indigenouness					
Original	2.00	3.36	3.98	4.13	3.47
Available only in the place of visit	2.59	3.63	3.94	3.80	3.62
Makes use of local raw materials	2.32	3.35	4.08	3.93	3.52
Expresses local culture	2.23	3.44	4.11	4.60	3.61
Made by prominent craftsman	2.00	3.02	3.73	4.07	3.22
Total score	2.23	3.36	3.96	4.11	3.49
Aesthetics					
One of its kind (unique)	2.73	3.68	3.59	3.40	3.53
Attractive design	4.14	3.99	3.50	3.33	3.80
Attractive color	3.73	3.61	2.92	2.87	3.35
Traditional but trendy	3.95	4.18	3.26	2.71	3.76
Makes a good gift	4.59	3.95	3.08	2.53	3.64
Can be displayed at home or office	2.59	3.81	3.58	3.07	3.55
Total score	3.62	3.87	3.32	2.98	3.60
Ease of handling					
Easy to pack and carry	4.32	3.60	3.42	3.73	3.63
Easy to care and clean	4.23	3.43	3.06	3.60	3.41
Total score	4.27	3.51	3.24	3.67	3.52
Source: Field Survey					

Similarly, expression of local culture in craft is the highest appealing factor among the upper age groups along the indigenusness scale (Mean Value 4.60). A craft's availability in the place of visit has highest mean value in this scale (Mean Value 3.62) along all the age groups. Attractive design (Mean Value 3.80) and trendy appeal (Mean Value 3.76) of the craft along the aesthetics scale also have high mean values among all the age groups. *Attractive design* of the craft is a high appealing element for the below 25 years age group respondents (Mean Value 4.14). Also this age group sees the gift attribute of craft as the most appealing factor (Mean Value 4.59). Trendiness in the craft has high mean value in the 25 to 40 year age group. At an overall level, aesthetics is the least valued in the above 60 age group tourists having a medium score of 2.98. In the same way, ease of handling is most favored in the lowest age group (Mean Value 4.27).

Variables	df 1	df2	<25	25-40	40-60	>60	Total	ANOVA
<i>Craftsmanship</i>	3	196	2.65	3.67	4.14	4.12	3.74	.000
<i>Indigenusness</i>	3	196	2.23	3.36	3.97	4.11	3.49	.000
<i>Aesthetics</i>	3	196	3.62	3.87	3.32	2.98	3.60	.000
<i>Ease of Handling</i>	3	196	4.27	3.51	3.24	3.67	3.52	.001
Source: Field Survey								

ANOVA tests were also conducted to see if significant differences exist across the age groups for the variables. Wherever Levene's homogeneity tests have failed, robust Welch test was considered to make decision on the null hypothesis. The result shows that with Welch test *p* value of 0.00 there is significant difference across all age groups along the scales of craftsmanship, indigenusness, aesthetics and ease of handling. It suggests that tourists perceive the variables as appealing differentially across different age groups.

H. Attributes that Tourists Avoid in Crafts

Table 12.13 shows those attributes which make tourists avoid buying of crafts as souvenir and curios. Among all the factors, heavy weight of the craft across all tourist groups (Mean Value 3.83) is considered as the most decisive factor in avoiding the purchase among tourists, especially among the international and national tourists. Bulkiness of the craft with a mean value of 4.21 is a highly discouraging factor for international tourists. Tourists belonging to national and international categories also avoid buying crafts the most which are fragile, and do not fit bag.

Avoid buying	Local	National	International	Total	ANOVA (sig)
a. Bulky craft	3.00	4.05	4.21	3.72	.000
b. Craft which does not fit bag	2.87	3.83	4.10	3.56	.000
c. Fragile craft	3.06	3.83	3.96	3.58	.000
d. Heavy craft	3.26	4.13	4.12	3.83	.023
e. Non-durable crafts	3.25	3.70	3.35	3.46	.030
f. Not easy to care and clean crafts	3.04	3.39	3.10	3.20	.142
g. Crafts of no practical use	2.93	3.75	3.67	3.44	.000
h. Crafts which cannot be used in many ways	2.91	3.05	3.67	3.14	.004
i. Crafts not suitable for collection	3.65	3.63	3.65	3.64	.992
j. Crafts with no price tag	3.45	3.71	3.69	3.62	.252
k. Expensive crafts	3.12	3.60	3.73	3.57	.011
l. Crafts without warranty	3.46	3.51	3.83	3.57	.170
m. Crafts without bargaining opportunity	3.48	3.86	3.35	3.60	.022
n. Crafts not culturally linked to place of visit	3.26	3.35	3.38	3.32	.905
o. Crafts not carrying any sign of authenticity	3.45	3.37	3.38	3.40	.906
p. Crafts not made by local artisans	3.42	3.41	3.50	3.44	.867
Source: Field Survey					

Crafts which have no practical use are also less considered by the national (Mean value 3.75) and international (Mean Value 3.67) tourists in comparison to the local tourists (Mean Value 2.93). Importance of having price tags is also reflected, especially among national and international tourists, with high mean scores of 3.71 and 3.69 respectively. Warranty of the crafts is the most important dimension for international tourists (Mean Value 3.83) and national tourists give more importance to bargaining opportunity (Mean Value 3.86) without which these groups would avoid buying the crafts the most.

Further ANOVA tests (refer to Table 12.13) were conducted to see if the differences across the tourist groups vary significantly. As stated earlier, wherever Levene's homogeneity tests have failed, robust Welch test was considered to make decision on the null hypothesis. It is found that significant differences exist in the mean values across items 'a' to 'e', 'g', 'h', 'k' and 'm'. Bulky, fragile, heavy craft and craft not fitting the bags are most avoided by international tourists. Local tourists are comparatively less disinterested in buying such crafts. With high mean scores of above 3.34, differences in the mean values do not vary significantly across tourist categories for avoiding the purchase of crafts without warranty or cultural linkage to

the visited place, crafts without any sign of authenticity, not made by local craftsmen and crafts not suitable for collection. This means that the items are valued by all the categories of tourists. Table 12.14 shows the mean differences across different age groups. Significant differences, as shown with p value less than 0.05 in Table 12.14, are observed across age groups along items ‘a’ to ‘e’ and ‘g’ to ‘p’.

Avoid buying	<25 Years	25-40 Years	40-60 Years	>60 Years	Total	ANOVA (sig)
a. Bulky craft	4.32	3.79	3.52	3.33	3.72	.010
b. Craft which does not fit bag	4.41	3.55	3.47	2.87	3.56	.001
c. Fragile craft	3.86	3.83	3.36	2.87	3.60	.000
d. Heavy craft	4.23	3.94	3.58	3.60	3.83	.023
e. Non-durable crafts	3.27	3.46	3.50	3.53	3.46	.854
f. Not easy to care and clean crafts	3.05	3.25	3.22	3.00	3.20	.776
g. Crafts of no practical use	4.45	3.81	2.72	2.67	3.44	.000
h. Crafts which cannot be used in many ways	3.91	3.53	2.55	2.13	3.15	.000
i. Crafts not suitable for collection	3.91	3.97	3.28	2.60	3.64	.000
j. Crafts with no price tag	2.91	3.59	3.88	3.73	3.62	.002
k. Expensive crafts	4.18	3.65	3.02	3.13	3.46	.000
l. Crafts without warranty	2.09	3.63	3.95	3.73	3.57	.000
m. Crafts without bargaining opportunity	2.95	3.92	3.41	3.33	3.60	.000
n. Crafts not culturally linked to place of visit	1.86	3.12	3.89	4.27	3.32	.000
o. Crafts not carrying any sign of authenticity	2.09	3.27	3.94	3.87	3.40	.000
p. Crafts not made by local artisans	2.27	3.36	3.84	3.87	3.44	.000

Source: Field Survey

It is seen that tourists of the lowest age group with low mean scores than the other age groups bothers the least about buying crafts which is not culturally linked to the visited place (Mean Value 1.86), not made by local craftsmen (Mean Value 2.27), not carrying any sign of authenticity (Mean Value 2.09) and not possessing any warranty (Mean Value 2.09). Expensive crafts are most avoided by below 25 years age group tourists and attributes like bulkiness, heaviness, fragility and inability of the craft to fit bags are least favored by this group while making purchase. Significant differences also exist among upper and lower age groups with respect to a craft’s practical suitability. It is observed that younger tourist groups are more likely to avoid buying crafts which have no practical use or which cannot be used in many ways. With high mean values than the upper age groups, they show significant differences with p value below 0.05. Crafts without warranty or authenticity sign are more likely to be avoided by the upper age groups.

I. Other Buying Considerations of Tourists

Apart from the appealing attributes that tourists prefer and unappealing attributes they avoid while buying crafts as curios and souvenirs, other factors were also identified which can result in tourists purchase. These are enlisted in Table 12.15 and Table 12.16 with their Mean Values based on the tourist categories and age groups respectively. Results indicate medium to high agreement for the statements measured. It is found that tourists would not mind buying innovative items produced by local artisans with essential local color, design, form and raw materials component (Mean Value 3.70, refer to Table 12.15). However, the tendency seems to more among lower age group tourists who have comparatively higher mean value scores than the upper age groups (refer to Table 12.16). Tourists also value information about the craft's meaning and its history displayed (Mean Value 3.32), more preferred by the international tourists. This item is seen to have higher mean values as the age category goes towards the upper continuum. Tourists also agree to most likely prefer buying crafts from government certified shops. While buying crafts as gift objects for friends and relatives, they also do not bother to purchase inexpensive replicas (Mean Value 3.71, refer to Table 12.15). Mean Value scores, across age groups show that younger tourists are more likely to purchase cheap replicas (refer to Table 12.16). The highest age group of above 60 years has a medium score of 2.67. Branding of the craft is likely to appeal more to the international tourists and the upper age groups than the tourists in the 25 to 40 years category and below 25 years group. The item, seeking information about the artisans who made the craft, has a medium mean value of 2.95 sought mostly by the upper age groups.

Promotions like free delivery of the purchase at home and care instructions entice international customers the most (Mean Value 3.92, refer to Table 12.15) but is equally preferred by local and national tourists which makes them more likely to purchase crafts. Likewise, attractive display and packaging entices national customers and young tourists the most. The mean value for item 'It is important to know where the objects I buy come from' is the highest for national tourists (3.89) and among 40 to 60 years and above 60 years age group customers. These results yield information about marketing and promotion related needs of the crafts as souvenirs and curios.

Items	Local	Nation-al	Interna-tional	Total
a. I would not mind buying new, innovative products made by local artisans with some traditional components like design, color, raw materials, form, etc.	3.62	3.70	3.83*	3.70
b. I would prefer to have information explaining the craft's meaning, history to be given on each piece of craft that I purchase.	3.19	3.36	3.42*	3.32
c. I would prefer to buy any craft from a shop certified by government.	3.83*	3.75	3.47	3.71
d. While buying craft items for gifting purpose, I would not mind buying cheaper replicas.	3.72	3.65	3.85*	3.72
e. I would prefer to buy a craft which has a branding.	3.50	3.27	3.69*	3.45
f. I would like to know the name of the person who made the craft object.	2.94	2.87	3.10*	2.95
g. Promotions such as care instructions and free delivery services to my home would entice me to purchase any craft.	3.48	3.83	3.92*	3.73
h. I would be tempted to buy any craft with attractive display and packaging.	3.06	3.42*	3.25	3.26
i. It is important to know where the objects I buy come from.	3.72	3.89*	3.50	3.74

Source: Field Survey, Items with Asterisk (*) Mark Indicate Highest Mean Value Recorded for Items

Items	<25 Yrs	25-40 Yrs	40-60 Yrs	>60 Yrs	Total
a. I would not mind buying new, innovative products made by local artisans with some traditional components like design, color, raw materials, form, etc.	4.45*	4.11	3.22	2.00	3.70
b. I would prefer to have information explaining the craft's meaning, history to be given on each piece of craft that I purchase.	2.68	3.10	3.70	4.00*	3.32
c. I would prefer to buy any craft from a shop certified by government.	3.00	3.63	3.94	4.27*	3.71
d. While buying craft items for gifting purpose, I would not mind buying cheaper replicas.	4.23*	3.93	3.48	2.67	3.72
e. I would prefer to buy a craft which has a branding.	2.36	3.36	3.92*	3.60	3.45
f. I would like to know the name of the person who made the craft object.	2.36	2.72	3.39	3.47*	2.95
g. Promotions such as care instructions and free delivery services to my home would entice me to purchase any craft.	3.59	3.86*	3.59	3.67	3.73
h. I would be tempted to buy any craft with attractive display and packaging.	3.82*	3.53	2.84	2.40	3.26
i. It is important to know where the objects I buy come from.	2.86	3.52	4.27*	4.20	3.74

Source: Field Survey, Items with Asterisk (*) Mark Indicate Highest Mean Value Recorded for Items

J. Tourist's Shopping Information Source and Preference for Shopping Sites

Information about shopping site preferences of the tourists and their source of gathering information for souvenir shopping can help in the proper marketing and sale of crafts. Table 12.17 shows the related information.

Survey results highlight that majority of the tourists prefer tourism guide books (61.5%) for shopping related information. Internet is also a major source of information for tourists nowadays (46%). Hotels and travel agencies as information sources are considered by 34.5% and 27.5% tourists respectively.

Main Shopping Information Source	Tourist type							
	Local (%)		National (%)		International		Total (%)	
<i>Acquaintances</i>	38	(55.07%)	21	(25.30)	4	(8.33)	63	(31.5)
<i>Travel agencies</i>	21	(30.43%)	30	(36.14)	4	(8.33)	55	(27.5)
<i>Tourism information guide book</i>	41	(59.42%)	46	(55.42)	36	(75.0)	123	(61.5)
<i>Internet</i>	35	(50.72%)	41	(49.40)	16	(33.33)	92	(46.0)
<i>Recommendation via social media</i>	15	(21.74%)	12	(14.46)	5	(10.42)	32	(16.0)
<i>Airlines</i>	2	(2.90%)	4	(4.82)	6	(12.5)	12	(6.00)
<i>Hotels</i>	20	(28.99%)	27	(32.53)	22	(45.8)3	69	(34.5)
Shopping Sites								
<i>Any souvenir shop</i>	23	33.33%	34	40.96%	18	37.50%	75	(37.5%)
<i>Govt. authorized shop</i>	45	65.22%	39	46.98%	31	64.58%	115	(42.5%)
<i>Shops near tourist site</i>	41	59.42%	31	37.34%	25	52.08%	97	(48.5%)
<i>Artisan's workshop</i>	26	37.68%	22	26.50%	24	50.00%	72	(36.0%)
<i>Nearby shops where tourist stay</i>	25	36.23%	21	25.30%	10	20.83%	56	(28.0%)
<i>Duty free shops</i>	2	2.89%	1	2.08%	19	39.58%	22	(11.0%)
Source: Field Survey								

With respect to shopping site preferences, it is found that majority of the tourists (48.5%) prefer to buy curios from shops located at tourist sites. Government authorized shops are sought by 42.5% of tourists. Artisan workshops are preferred by 36% of the tourists. 39.58% of international tourists would also buy from duty free shops at airports.

K. Awareness about Originality Mark or Logo on Crafts

Regarding awareness about originality mark or logo, it is found that only 41.92% of the tourists are aware about such marks. Local and national tourists are found to be less aware of such marks. Such data brings in the importance of circulating information related to originality marks promoted by central and state agencies for handicrafts.

Tourist Type	Awareness		Total (%)
	Count	(%)	
Local	20	28.99%	69
National	23	28.40%	81
International	40	83.33%	48
Total	83	41.92%	198
Source: Field Survey			

L. Perception Regarding the Importance of Authentication Mark or Logo on Crafts

The importance of having an authentication mark or logo on craft objects was measured on a 7-point Likert scale from ‘not at all important’ to ‘extremely important’. The mean scores were then grouped into ranges based on illustrations by Vagias (2006) and Brown (2010) as shown in Table 12.19.

Mean Score	Importance
1.00 - 1.40	Not at all important
1.40 - 2.80	Not important
2.80 - 4.20	Unsure
4.20 - 5.60	Important
5.60 - 7.00	Very important

At a total mean value higher than 4.20 (refer to Table 12.20), it is found that tourists

Tourist Type	N	Mean	Std. deviation
Local	69	4.88	1.833
National	83	4.45	1.927
International	48	4.90	1.882
Total	200	4.70	1.888

consider authentication mark or logo on crafts to be important. It is also found that likelihood to buy crafts as curios increases among tourists with authentication mark, especially among

the international tourists (69.57% refer to Table 12.20). Among the national and local category tourists, 39.76% and 50.72% respectively are more likely to buy crafts with such marks.

Tourist Type	Table 12.21: Likelihood to Buy a Craft with Authentication Mark						Total
	Yes	%	No	%	No answer		
Local	35	50.72%	13	18.84%	21	30.43%	69(100%)
National	33	39.76%	16	19.28%	34	40.96%	83(100%)
International	32	69.57%	6	13.04%	8	17.39%	46(100%)
Total	97	48.99%	47	23.78%	54	27.27%	198(100%)

Source: Field Survey

Tourist Type	Table 12.22: Outright Display of Authentication Mark						Total
	Yes	%	No	%	No answer		
Local	38	55.1%	6	8.7%	25	36.2%	69(100%)
National	41	49.4%	10	12.0%	32	38.6%	83(100%)
International	30	63.8%	2	4.3%	15	31.9%	47 (100%)
Total	109	54.8%	18	9.0%	72	36.2%	198(100%)

Source: Field Survey

Also, above 50% of tourists also believe that such logos should be displayed outright on craft items (refer to Table 12.22). It is also found that 67.17% of the tourists

believe that there must be first hand information about the local crafts available in the place of visit.

Tourist Type	Table 12.23: Tourists Agreement to First Hand Information						Total
	Yes	%	No	%	No answer		
Local	45	67.16%	7	10.45%	15	22.39%	67(100%)
National	55	66.27%	11	13.25%	17	20.48%	83(100%)
International	33	68.0%	12	25.0%	3	6.25%	48(100%)
Total	133	67.17%	30	15.15%	35	17.68%	198(100%)

Source: Field Survey

12.2.2 Focus Group Discussions with Artisans

Focus group discussions were conducted with artisans engaged in craft practices considered in this study to understand their views regarding the modification of their traditional crafts. It is also done with a view to take artisans' opinion for sustainable production and marketing of the crafts. The artisans are engaged in the respective craft activity at least for a period of five years. The list of participants for each of the craft categories is enclosed in the annexure. The number of participants for each group varied between 6 and 10. The numbers of focus group conducted were: 2 for pottery & terracotta, 1 for bell metal, 2 for brass metal, 2 for bamboo, 3 for *eri* and 1 for *pat & muga*. The list of respondents who took part in the focus groups is enclosed in Appendix 6. The summary of the focus group interviews is presented below.

A) Summary of Focus Group Discussion for Pottery & Terracotta Artisans at Asharikandi

i. General Viewpoint on Craft Modification and Commercialization

Pottery and terracotta making is the primary occupation for the artisans at Madaikhali village, in Asharikandi. The artisans have been traditionally making conventional utilitarian products apart from terracotta objects. However, the conventional product line has reduced due to lack of demand of the products among the modernizing customers of the region. As one respondent said, 'In the age of China Clay who will buy our products?' This resulted in artisans modifying their conventional objects to new functional requirements added to which a large number of new functional and decorative products were also included. Artisans are of the opinion that change is must for the survival of the craft and craftsmen at Asharikandi. According to the artisans, there is no point producing a craft which does not have any demand in the market. Utilitarian items and traditional toys which have been seeing decreasing

customers, even in rural markets, are no longer profitable to produce. According to them, conventional products should be fit into new uses. Artisans also welcome the idea of innovation in the product line. For them pottery and terracotta making is simply an art and hence newness is not departing away from tradition. Features can be added or subtracted based upon the suitability and aesthetic requirements of the item. But according to the artisans, it is important to upkeep the typical identity of the craft that which makes it a product of Asharikandi. For example, it is important to keep the *hatima putola much mandal* (facial feature of *hatima* doll) intact. They worry that many of their traditional items would die if not developed soon for other uses. Most of the time, it is the master artisans of the village who bring in modification and the rest simply imitates the products slowly. Artisans do not see the traditional occupation to be dying soon in near future if properly remunerated. But their children do not willingly pick up the occupation and neither do they want them to continue due to lesser remunerative nature of the business.

ii. Problems Faced and Opinions to Resolve the Issues

Artisans understand that it is impossible to push conventional items used in the rural economy, which itself is seeing abandonment. However, the problem lies with the fact that not many are able to come up with innovative items. Most of the artisans fail to successfully imitate the decorative pottery and terracotta products made by the master artisans of the place. And those who do take a long time to replicate with equal precision. Moreover, only early adopters or innovators are able to earn benefit. Majority of the artisans are not getting fair prices for their products as they are not able to sell their produce directly in the large markets. The local market in the vicinity of their place is very small like the weekly markets and occasional fairs. As a result most of the artisans cater only to rural base in their locality. To reach the larger markets of the towns and the cities, artisans have to dispose their produce to the local intermediaries who buy the products at very low price and sell it later at higher prices. Another reason for this quick dispensation to sell the items at lesser price is due to the dearth of proper warehousing facility. Government agencies like IIE and DC (Handicrafts) and some NGOs like NECARDO give some opportunities to artisans to exhibit their products through exhibitions held at different parts of the state and the country. But not every artisan could become a part of such programs. Most of the time, it is the same individual or master artisan of the place who get the benefit. In

such situations, the majority of the artisans are dependent on the local intermediaries. The artisans seek a dispensation mechanism where their products are bought by government agencies at fair prices. Another issue faced by artisans is the offloading of innovative terracotta and pottery products from West Bengal, which are superior in quality and aesthetics. There is no segregating mechanism by which terracotta and pottery products of Asharikandi have a distinctive advantage of being traditional products of Assam. Artisans believe that there is lack of promotion which restricts the clay craft market of Asharikandi within the region. Once the products reach the markets, it loses its distinctiveness. According to them, it is important to promote the items as traditional Asharikandi *putola* (toys) and as Asharikandi products. For most of the artisans of Asharikandi, quantity determines income. Hence, they want government to provide some technologies which speed up production, say for example, tools for kneading the soil and surface designing. Artisans agree that they do not have proper information about the kind of products sought in the market place other than the local ones. Few well-informed artisans having connections with the government and private agencies and having direct access to markets are reluctant to share the market with their fellow artisans. As a result the diffusion of market related information is also very slow. Artisans want inputs from market and training to develop new products. Some sporadic training programs are organized under government schemes like *guru-shishya pramapara* (teacher to disciple programme) as well as through autonomous organization like IIE.

However, the link to the market thereafter for the trained artisans is difficult to establish. Raw material sourcing has also become difficult in present times. Artisans rely upon local intermediaries for clay from river banks which was available earlier in abundance. Apart from that, fuel to fire the kiln for turning raw clay objects into pottery and terracotta has also become costly. Electric kiln and furnace needs as well as provision of clay and other raw materials at reasonable cost are sought by artisans to cut down on cost of raw materials.

B) Summary of Focus Group Discussion for Bell Metal, Sarthebari

i. General Viewpoint on Craft Modification and Commercialization

In Sarthebari, artisans primarily make items that are of religious and utilitarian need. However, some of the traditional items have ceased in production as it is no longer

used by public. It is also because artisans do not want to invest time in producing articles which require more time and has limited use in the society. Besides that, artisans have forgotten particular technique of production of those items. But there are items which are still in production since ages have demand among local and intermediate customers and also among some sections of the external audiences. However, these articles are modified slightly. The major change is in the designs carved on the surface of the items. According to the artisans, the change in design is necessitated to compete with fellow artisans. It is also important to engage the customers by offering new elements according to the requirement and need of the occasion. It is observed that artisans do not see the modification in the design elements as loss of tradition but instead take it as an addition to the design line.

Innovation in the product line as seen to be practised by some artisans is also welcomed in the artisan society. The artisans believe that each product line, i.e. traditional and decorative, has their individual set of customers and the uses are also different. Innovation in product line, according to artisans, can sustain the metal crafting tradition since it is more remunerative. However, they do believe that innovative products in bell metal are a separate line of product. Modification in the original item, within the main structural feature of the item, is not considered a dilution in the traditional craft. Hence, the artisans believe that the sector may not necessarily degrade in recent future.

ii. Problems Faced and Opinions to Resolve the Issues

The major problem faced by the artisan in the bell metal sector is the insufficient supply of quality raw material. It is majorly controlled by the local *mahajans* who often create artificial scarcity by restricting the supply. ACBMUMSL, a co-operative society for bell metal artisans of Sarthebari, can fulfill only 18% to 20% of the raw material requirement of the artisans. The artisans, as a result, have to depend upon scrap metal instead of proper metal sheets. Added to that, there are problems related to high price of fuel such as charcoal and coke which impacts the income. This also results in the high cost of the finished product.

Apart from this, another major trouble faced by the artisans is the competition from machine made products imported from places like Moradabad and West Bengal. The traditional bell metal items are replicated in the factories with better finish. Since

machine made, these products are lightweight and much cheaper than the traditionally made items. Customers, especially intermediate and external audiences have hard time knowing the difference between the traditional and machine made. As a result, customers tend to buy imported products due to its light weight, superior finish and look. Those intending to buy inexpensive ones also settle for the machine made ones.

According to artisans, the problems with heavy weight and poor finish can be sorted out if they are provided with small tools and machines. Traditional artisans in order to maintain quantity of produce overlook the finish of the designs. Chipping designs with simple chisel and hammer eats up large amount of their productive time. Due to this, artisans have simplified the traditional designs and have also introduced new designs which are easy to chip and create. Though artisans believe that it is not impossible for them to chip traditional designs but has given away doing so due to lack of time. They opine that given them proper chiseling tools, they would chip old designs too in its entirety. However, modified motifs and new designs are also not condemned by them.

Similarly, artisans find difficulty shaping lighter items by hammering the sheets as it has high chance of getting damaged. Simple machines can help them produce items even with light metal sheets. This will also help them to produce miniaturized replicas of their traditional products for a growing customer base. They believe that some of the products like *jari lota*, *owkhulia bota*, *tema*, etc. which is no more produced now can be revived when it can be converted into miniaturized curios and aesthetic objects. The artisans agree that the technique to produce the items is almost lost but somehow can be revived if training is imparted to the young artisans. Young generation picks up the occupation of their family only because no other earning option is available. The tendency is however to forego the craft since it is laborious. Utilization of small machinery and tools, according to the artisan respondents, will reduce the amount of hard labour, increase quantity and motivate young artisans to willingly pick up the craft.

The bell metal artisans of Sarthebari are also fighting competition with the brass metal artisans of their place, who, happen to imitate the designs made on their bell metal products. The brass metal artisans have also come out with some of the products earlier made only in bell metal. Since brass is cheaper than bell metal, customers

again tend to sway towards buying the products made in brass. In order to safeguard their craft, bell metal artisans want a provision where customers are can identify the traditional from the new. Customers are unaware of the fact that *bhatkhuwa kahi* (meal dishes) were items produced only in bell metal. Again, to mark a distinction between the Sarthebari bell metal and imported items from places like Moradabad, artisans believe that information should be made available to the customers. Customers should know which product is handmade and which one is imported and machine produced.

Artisans also agreed to consensus that government must ensure that their products and designs are not allowed to be replicated. Trademark which had being allotted to bell metal products of Sarthebari, was discontinued since it was not benefitting the artisans. The embossing could be easily replicated by the imitation item manufacturers. Artisans believe that more than simple logo or trademarks, it is important to inform customers about fake, machine made and handmade. They want proper promotion of their bell metal products to external audiences through designated government agencies. Besides this, artisans also believe that promoting information about the health benefits of dining in bell metal products can help the industry and make traditional bell metal crafts sustainable.

Artisans believe that bell metal craft and its items can be made to sustain when items are produced for different categories of customers. Local customer requirements of bell metal products for religious and social needs are different than that of curio hunters as well as intermediate audience who buy the products for gifting and decoration. Each segment has a separate requirement. According to artisans, design and products are necessary to be produced accordingly. Artisans still find that their craft has future provided that problems and needs of the sector are addressed in time. An important dimension to be looked at is the market availability for the finished products. Artisans state that for major part of their sales, there is dependence on the middlemen and local intermediary. Apart from cooperative society like the ACBMUMSL, which operates through several of its centers at various locations, artisans also wish for a separate government mechanism through which they can sell their products at proper prices. They seek collection centers for their crafts.

C) Summary of Focus Group Discussions for Brass Metal Craft

Sarthebari

i. General Viewpoint on Craft Modification and Commercialization

Brass metal craft of Sarthebari is famous as *xoraishilpa*. Apart from the *xorai*, artisans are also producing other traditional utilitarian items. Similar to bell metal crafts, brass metal items have also seen structural and design modifications. Artisans have inconspicuously added or eliminated some features from the objects to fit new requirements of customers. Artisans believe that such modifications in tradition are necessary to stay competitive and make profit. According to them, even with modifications the craft shall remain indigenous and traditional. They also welcome new innovative product line when brought about by young artisans of the place since it gives access to bigger market. They believe that traditional and innovative products have different customer segments and hence each artisan segment has his place in the market. Innovative and decorative products, according to them, do not challenge the sustainability of the traditional crafts but in fact, build interest among artisans. However, in doing so, they do not want to sacrifice the essence of a traditional craft item represented through its unique design and structure.

ii. Problems Faced and Opinions to Resolve the Issues

The artisans posit to facing strong competition from imported imitation items from other states like Uttar Pradesh. Exact copies and often highly polished replicas of their exclusive traditional items are taking away market share. These machine-made and miniature versions are sold in the markets as traditional brass metal works of Assam often at a lower price. Artisans believe that this is due to their inability to supply the same as they have to depend on age old laborious method of working with conventional hammer and chisel. Related health hazards are also a matter of worry for its sustainability. It is understood that artisans find the craft promising in economic terms provided that problems like unavailability of raw materials, market access and pricing related issues are addressed. Artisans want the government to set up brass sheet manufacturing unit at Sarthebari for uninterrupted raw material supply at low cost. Like bell metal artisans, brass artisans also believe that access to small mechanized tools for shaping of the brass sheets into suitable product, polishing of surface and chiseling of designs can ensure higher quantity and better quality which

might result in higher profit. Artisans are aware of the fact that local markets are flooded with miniaturized products based on traditional molds and decorative pieces from Moradabad. Not many artisans are able to produce such objects in spite of demand for traditional and handmade ones. But they are willing to produce such items if their needs for small tools and machines are taken care off. Artisans stated that some traditional brass works like *thal*, *mathia kalah*, etc. are yet to be miniaturized and must be developed as curio products for different segment of customers like tourists.

Artisans believe that it is important to increase the belongingness and pride of the local and intermediate customers for the local crafts. Artisans think that ‘creating a sense of helping the traditional artisans by buying traditional handmade crafts’ among the customers can benefit the metal sector. They want government bodies to undertake this responsibility of informing customers about the importance of the crafts. They want the products to be categorized and labeled as handmade and machine made before it is made available to customers. Doing this, they believe, will help customers to make proper choice. Customers, especially local and intermediate ones, have inclination towards Sarthebari metal crafts which can become an added advantage. Artisans also opine that labeling the products as from Sarthebari can help in more sale. Also they suggest that orders for institutional requirements, especially from the government agencies for particular celebrations and functions, must be placed directly with the artisans.

At present, majority of the artisans submit their products to local intermediaries and middlemen who buy the products from the artisans at low price and sell it at higher cost in the market. Artisans want this to be checked. They want a mechanism to affix MRP (Maximum Retail Price) on the products and an association who can control the price and quality. Other than this, they also seek a government monitored buying agency for their crafts.

Hajo

i. General Viewpoint on Craft Modification and Commercialization

The artisans of brass metal craft at Hajo produce conventional utilitarian items. Throughout centuries, their products have remained the same. They believe that their

products have demand among local customers for religious and social purposes and will remain so in the Assamese society and culture. Over the years, they opine that their product demand has steadily increased. But its functionality has changed from utilitarian objects to customary gifts and functional objects. However, in spite of the rise in demand, their income from the craft has remained low due to their dependence on intermediaries for raw materials and sell of finished products. Some structural modifications are introduced in items like *kalah*, *soria*, *tow*, etc. to increase the aesthetics of the craft. The changes are not considered by the artisans as damaging the iconic image of the crafts but are considered necessary as per emerging need and customer requirement. Artisans believe in maintaining the *arhi* (original mold) of the craft which according to them is still preserved. Artisans are also enthusiastic about developing innovative items which they have not succeeded in yet.

ii. Problems Faced and Opinions to Resolve the Issues

The artisans of Moradabad have copied many of their items. They find strong competition from these imported products due to its superior finish, lesser price and glaze. Brass artisans of Hajo want to learn producing new items. But state that they cannot sacrifice their productive time learning to make decorative items unless their income need during the period of training is addressed. They also want government agencies to provide training beyond mere sponsored visits to successful metal craft clusters like Moradabad. They want training in designs and new product development. Like the artisans of Sarthebari, the requirements of the artisans are also small mechanized tools for efficiency in production. They are aware of the fact that designs chipped on the surface of the articles by their ancestors are etched no longer in the products they make today. Yet again, the reason cited is the inability to invest more time and the failure to procure more prices due to the middlemen issues. Artisans are unable to gain grounds in the miniaturized gift items segment due to difficulty in shaping the metal sheets with hammer and chisel. The beating of the sheets is a tiring process and consumes unnecessary time for which artisans, in general, abstain from producing small objects.

Artisans believe that being able to produce innovative items during off season, i.e. the period during which their production is less, will help them enter new market segments. The production is high for 6 to 7 months during the marriage season in

Assam. The production falls during the months of April to June and October to December. At present, the artisans produce certain quantity of conventional items as per assumed demand in the market. Besides this, they also get information from middlemen and local intermediaries about the type of the utilitarian metal crafts in demand. The market of their products is also limited mostly within the region. Artisans state the need of an informative mechanism and marketing agency that can provide them new markets at fair prices. Artisans believe that customers should be informed about the history and heritage of traditional brass products of Hajo. This will generate more interest among customers to buy traditional crafts.

D) Summary of Focus Group Discussions for Bamboo Craft Artisans of Nalbari

Two focus group discussions were conducted for bamboo crafts. The focus group interview at Mugkuchi village was with artisans traditionally engaged only in the production of *japi*. Kaithalkuchi village produces traditional bamboo crafts other than *japi* also and has been engaged in producing innovative bamboo items.

i. General Viewpoint on Craft Modification and Commercialization

Introduction of the *phulam japis* have brought in many modifications in the *japi* art. However, the *japi* artists consider the changes necessary. The market for *haluwa japi* is rather very limited in the local markets used mostly by the farmers and tea laborers and it has no demand in the intermediate and external ones. But decorative *japis* are sought after items for household decoration and other functional and aesthetic needs. Hence it was imperative for artisans to consider producing the *japi* for other segments and they see no harm in doing that. According to *japi* artisans, the change in the use of raw materials in the production of *japi* has been due to introduction of new decorative raw materials. As old raw materials went out of market, artisans had to resort to new ones. The elderly artisans have tried and tested many designs of which the triangular patchworks have become the most iconic and sought after ones. The present artisans believe in producing *japi* cutting across design line since it gives them freedom to express their creativity. However, they believe that older patterns and designs of the *japi* must also be kept intact to upkeep the cultural dimension of the product where *japi* is produced as a cultural symbol of Assam.

The artisans of Kaithalkuchi also state that modification is required in products in order to create interest among customers. Since bamboo is a traditional craft practised almost in every household in villages across Assam, the demand for the conventional items is generally fulfilled at household levels or locally. However, as artisans state, the decorative markets offer ample scope. Hence, artisans seldom mind modification and innovation in products as it gives them opportunity to earn more. According to the artisans, conventional items have a different purpose to serve and decorative ones have different function. Converting conventional items to decorative items can help to cater new market. Similarly, innovative items are also welcomed. Artisans believe that as long as rural economy, agriculture and social customs prevail in society, conventional items shall be produced though its quantity might reduce with time.

ii. Problems Faced and Opinions to Resolve the Issues

According to *japi* artisans, the demand for the decorative *japi* has been growing day by day. However, the price earned per piece has not improved. This is because most of the artisans resort to selling their produce to middlemen and local intermediaries who buy the product at very less price. The artisans producing other conventional and decorative crafts in bamboo also face the same issue. A major issue cited by the artisans is the failure of government sales agencies like Purbashree and ARTFED to procure the products directly from the artisans. These agencies also rely on the intermediaries. Artisans complain that they buy only from one or two chosen artisans of the villages and show in their records as to have bought from several artisans. The artisans complain that, these agencies mostly buy products from individual workshops operating in cities like Guwahati. Artisans want government agencies to buy their products directly at fair prices.

Like other artisans, bamboo craftsmen of Nalbari also face competition from artistically far better quality products from neighbouring states like Tripura and Nagaland and even from its neighboring district like Barpeta. They want training on production of innovative bamboo products. Besides that, they would also like to make the production mechanized to increase speed and quality for which they seek government support. Another problem holding the artisans back is the lack of information regarding customer demand. Artisans often try to produce things based upon the decorative products from other states which hold them back from being

innovators. However, they want designing solutions to convert their conventional crafts to other functional and aesthetics products. For giving a distinctive image to the bamboo crafts in Nalbari, some even suggested to label the crafts as being handcrafted in Nalbari.

As far as sturdiness and quality of the *japi* is concerned, artisans believe that *japi* made for agricultural works, as head gears, are still made rough and sturdy. But since *phulam japi* is for decorative purposes, the strength of the item is compromised on many fronts. The reason, as mentioned is to increase the quantity to sell more. It has come out from discussion that new artisan also sometimes compromise on quality front. Artisans producing other bamboo crafts also raised similar issues. Artisans suggested that procurement policies and price determination should be based on product quality. Doing this will automatically force artisans to maintain standard of the product.

E) Summary of Focus Group Discussions for *Eri* Artisans of Kamrup

Three focus group discussions were conducted among *eri* artisans to ascertain their viewpoints on commercialization and modification of the craft, and their opinion on making the crafts sustainable. The first focus group was conducted at Jiakur village in Rampur Block where artisans produce only conventional products in *eri* and sell their products on their own. *Eri* artisans of Duamari Hohua and its neighbouring villages are into the production of decorative *eri* products and sell through local intermediary and middlemen. At Pyranga village in Boko, government program for training the artisans were conducted with the help of IIE. The craft has remained a traditional occupation among the artisans in the mentioned areas.

i. General Viewpoint on Craft Modification and Commercialization

Women artisans at Jiakur identify the craft with their age old tradition and view the production to not have disintegrated even today. Elderly artisans as well as young artisans still can be found hand spinning *eri* yarn for their conventional products mostly plain sheets of *barkapor*. They do not see any decrease in the volume of the production of the plain fabrics. Artisans producing the conventional fabrics state that the products are very much in demand in neighbouring hill country like Bhutan and Nepal where handspun fabric is still preferred and other regions of India like Uttar

Pradesh and Bihar. However, mill spun *eri* is nowadays used by the young *eri* artisans against the traditional handspun yarn which is coarser but had its own texture. As a result the art of spinning *eri* is getting shunned. The resultant fabric made of mill made yarn is smoother and speeds up the production but the art of hand spinning *eri* yarn is slowly being shunned.

Artisans believe that new designs are a result of change in customer taste but would like the old designs to continue along with the new ones. In villages where artisans are engaged in decorative and innovative *eri* fabric making, they regard modification as simple changes in the size and structural dimension of the original products. They would like to produce innovative products and engage in design modification as changes pertaining to customer demand yield more benefit in monetary terms. They do not consider dimensional changes in the fabric and any change in weaving technique to improving the texture of the fabrics improper. Since *eri* in its conventional form is used as winter clothing, artisans welcome the idea of making it suitable for regular use.

ii. Problems Faced and Opinions to Resolve the Issues

As with other craft makers, *eri* artisans also do not consider introduction of new motifs and designs to be detrimental to survival of the old designs. According to them, old designs still have demand among particular sections of customers like elderly and aristocratic people. Hence, traditional designs are still woven. However, some old patterns are no more produced. Moreover, artisans also state that new artisans are increasingly getting influenced by modern garments and designs which is also the reason for change. Apart from that, intermediaries regularly bring new design orders. Artisans believe that old designs should be promoted among customers as traditional designs. Artisans, generally those working for local intermediaries and middlemen, have been increasingly using *eri* with synthetic yarns which they admit to do for cost cutting and to the wishes of local intermediaries. However, artisans want their crafts to be categorized as pure *eri* products and blended types. Doing this, artisans agree, can help customers to decide properly about the purchase they want to make.

Spinning *eri* with hand held tools and utilizing it for making fabrics is considered more time consuming. As a result, many artisans have started procuring mill made threads. According to artisans, the art of hand spinning *eri* will not survive for long.

On economic considerations, mill yarn is more viable. Hence artisans want government to provide them with spinning devices to make the production fast. This can also ensure uniformity of the yarn dimension for better quality of fabrics. It is found that *eri* artisans, who are mostly rural women, have no issues using traditional looms. However, they want that their product labeled as traditionally hand-woven and are paid well. Getting fair prices, they argue, shall bring interest among other young artisans. Their woe is with respect to the machine made *eri* products found in the market yet sold as handmade.

Most of the artisans have complaint regarding lack of information about the type of products demanded in market. The artisans residing in far off villages like Duamari and Pyranga cited troubles with selling the products through intermediaries. In Duamari, artisans are not paid properly for their produce. The selling price received for the items do not justify their labour and time input in producing the craft. Similarly, Pyranga weavers, most of the time, have problems arising due to unsold products. Though they were provided training on natural dyeing and product diversification, lack of information about market requirement and dependence on intermediaries are huge issues for them. Lack of fixed prices of the products also creates situations where artisans sell the products at very low prices. Artisans want proper fixing of the prices for their products based on the size, type and quality aspects.

F) Summary of Focus Group Discussion for *Pat* & *Muga* Artisans of Sualkuchi

i. General Viewpoint on Craft Modification and Commercialization

Pat & *muga* artisans are of the opinion that commercialization has been helping artisan families earn better income. Modification in designs has always remained a notable feature of the craft. Traditional designs, according to the artisans, are produced and reproduced with additional elemental features or simplified according to its demand among the customers of the craft. New designs shall keep on entering the design line as aesthetic needs keep on developing and competition keeps growing. However, artisans believe that the traditional designs also have separate category of customers. As a result, those designs are produced from time to time. Old designs, according to artisans, do not perish but simply take new form in new products.

Artisans identify addition of new products as offering opportunity to diversify customer base. However, they give importance to producing the diversified products in silk with traditional design elements to give the touch of silk tradition of Assam. If diversifying silk into new functional products is yielding benefit to artisans it must be practiced. Again, artisans admit that traditional clothing line in *pat & muga* shall always remain in demand. Little structural and dimensional modification is adjusting to modern requirements but not giving away to modernity. According to artisans, commercialization in fact, is reinvigorating the natural dyeing practice though its growth is very limited.

ii. Problems Faced and Opinions to Resolve the Issues

During the last few decades, there has been large scale transformation in the design and form of the craft. Due to growing demand of silk textiles, artisans are giving way to compromising with the intricacy of the motifs and designs. The techniques of production have changed. The quality of the woven design is varied according to the price of the fabric. This brings in the issue of quality upkeep. Artisans believe that more than income orientation, the impetus should be on maintaining the intricacy in design and quality of the product. Artisans find the laboratory set up in Sualkuchi to test the authenticity of the silk used a good step but worry if all artisans would oblige to let their silk products tested. Artisans want that customers are informed more and more about this. The application of Silk Mark, according to artisans, shall only succeed when every person engaged in production and selling of the silk products is bound to follow the rules strictly. Artisans believe that the system will ensure healthy competition through which genuine artisans will profit. Quality check of every silk product, as per artisans, is necessary before the products are sold in the markets. Sustainability of traditional *pat* and *muga* silk craft, as per artisans, also rest upon authoritative check on the unscrupulous sell of machine made silk products of Banaras at lower prices.

According to artisans, it is on part of the state government and individual entrepreneur or designers to market and promote the brand name of Sualkuchi products. Creating a brand image will help the sector to grow and will make it sustainable. Artisans wish that the customers of the silk products are informed about Sualkuchi products. It is important to categorize designs as traditional and non-traditional for the benefit of the

customers. This will yield customers the choice to choose accordingly as there are different categories of customers with different preferences. Artisans believe that young artisans must be informed about the history and culture of the craft. Training programs organized by government and non-government agencies should focus on reinvigorating the old motifs and techniques. Artisans state that they are not very much aware of the market realities. They want direct access to market related information. No doubt they experiment on designs, material choice, and color combinations. However, artisans believe that proper and timely information on these factors can help them gain further ground among the customers from other states of the country as well as internationally. Artisans also seek support with respect to sale of their products. Most of the artisans sell their products through cooperatives, intermediaries and middlemen which restricts their profitability. Artisans believe that creating direct access to customers can be beneficial.

12.2.3 Information Obtained from Shops and Persons Engaged in Selling of Crafts

Informal interviews were also conducted among shop owners, sales personnel, intermediaries, individuals and agencies dealing with the selling of handicraft items. This was done to ascertain the type of products demanded by various segments of customers. This list of the shops visited and the persons approached for informal interviews is enclosed in Appendix 7.

Summary of the Interviews

Based on the interviews, it is understood that aesthetics and decorative craft segment offers a huge scope for traditional crafts. The growth of home furnishing sector, demand for functional items and curios has given rise to growth in demand of craft items. There are different categories of customers with different requirements and demand and each of these segments offers ample scope to the artisans.

The demand for crafts among the locals differs from that of the non-locals. It differs among city dwellers, aristocratic classes and the rural populace as well as between the young and the old. For aesthetic needs, customers seek more polished and quality products. In case of pottery and terracotta crafts, *hatima* figurines, pots and vases are bought by city dwellers constituting of the intermediate audiences or customers. The products are not much fancied by external audiences like tourists due to its heavy

weight, poor finish and quality. Local intermediaries state that local buyers or the internal audiences and customers from rural areas mostly buy conventional pottery products and pots for regular. For aesthetic requirements, they also buy decorative clay items. However, the quality concern among the local audiences seems to be lesser in comparison to external audiences. The exporters of handicraft items state that pottery and terracotta products from Asharikandi are not done because clay products from other parts of India are far superior and much demanded and Asharikandi products still need to find ground in the area.

Miniaturized products in pottery and terracotta and metal such as brass *japi*, *xorai*, *bota*, etc. are regularly sought among the tourists. But such miniaturized products are not amply produced. The available products yet again lack the finish that machine made imported products have. Some local customers from towns and cities of Assam seek products like bell metal glass which is not produced by the artisans today. Foreign tourists appreciate the metal products but decline buying these items due to weight, size and quality issues. As a result, traditional handicrafts of Assam are losing out to imported products. However, sellers state that when being informed, these customers always show their disposition towards handmade and hand crafted products. In case of pottery and terracotta products, the weight of the product also restricts its sale among tourists.

The sellers also agree that customers search for less expensive products when seeking products as curios. They are not willing to pay more for miniatures bought as souvenir and gifts. Yet again, international customers seek products with local flavor and touch. Anything representative of Assam, for example, rhino, Kamakhya temple replica, a combination item *engulfing japi*, *pepa*, *dhol*, and dance performers, etc. attracts their attention. However, the international customers generally worry about the treatment of bamboo products. They have a preconceived notion regarding insects and pests related issues due to which they generally abstain from buying small *japis*, *baskets* and other bamboo products. However, tourists from other states of India buy small *japi* and other bamboo products as they are less concerned about pest treated products. They prefer buying functional items like bamboo hand bags, file folders, etc. Local artisans from the villages rarely treat or know how to treat bamboo products. The shop owners state that this factor inhibits them from buying bamboo

products from village artisans. In majority of the cases, they buy only from designated artisans and from workshops located in Guwahati. Artisans from villages do not maintain quality standards and specifications which also limit the purchase of the products by the major shops and handicraft selling stores.

For intermediate customers situated in towns and cities of Assam, weight is generally not an issue but quality and finish is certainly the criteria to purchase. In case of handicraft items of bamboo, clay and metal, dismantling and packaging of the item are other issue that discourages the purchase among the external customers. But, for local customer and intermediate audiences, sellers do not find botheration. Products like *japi* are having huge acceptability and demand among the local and intermediate customers. *Japi* designs of all kinds are sought after items for home decorations. The local customers of Assam, as per the sellers, usually get attracted to any new design on the *japi*. However, round shape of the *japi* is the most preferred one. The shop owners also mention that bamboo crafts, especially from the villages of Nalbari are not of high quality and product diversification is also limited. Most of the time, the products are brought from states like Tripura as its products are of high quality and aesthetically brilliant.

Sellers state that traditional metal crafts still possess huge potential among locals and intermediate audiences. For decorative purposes, these customers prefer to buy the imported brass wares due to its lesser price. However, traditional brass and bell metal products made in places like Sarthebari and Hajo are usual preference for religious and personal household needs as well as gifts during marriages and customary celebrations. On the design front, those customers who seek less expensive products buy simple chipped metal items. Heavy bell and brass metal items, chipped designs and new patterns are always welcomed and preferred by those who can pay more. For local customers and intermediate customers who buy bell metal objects for personal use and also at times as gifts for marriages and special gifting, heavy weight of the object is often seen as the reflection of genuine metal craft. Elderly customers still go for traditional designs. Nowadays, especially the intermediate audiences, residing in towns and cities also buy innovative products for decoration and gifting purposes exclusively made in the traditional craft villages. Traditional metal items also have good demand in Buddhist countries like Bhutan, Sri Lanka, other South Asian

countries and Nepal. The products are generally purchased for socio-religious purposes and as antique pieces. These are also purchased in places like Delhi as age old products. Hence, its usual heavy weight is considered for purchase and traditional designs are also sought.

Sellers of handicrafts state that information about the traditional crafts of Assam is very limited among the external audiences. These customers seldom have much idea about crafts like terracotta of Asharikandi. In bamboo as well as brass metal too, the customers seek innovative products but rarely ask for culturally symbolic craft items like *japi*, *bota*, *xorai*, etc. On most occasions, customers end up purchasing innovative products which were never a part of the traditional product line. However, in case of handloom products, *pat*, *muga* and *eri* silk are well known. Yet again, the external audiences seek for items which can be of use to them (functional item). They purchase items like stoles, mufflers, *kurta*, shirt, bags, etc. and ask for products like wrappers, curtains, pillow covers, etc. This trend for functional products is also seen among the young customers. Products like jackets are mostly sought by local customers and tourist from different states of India. The sales personnel state that *mekhela chadar* are sought only by the people of Assam whereas with few exceptions, customers from other places ask for saris, *duppattas* and fabrics for *kurta pyjamas* and home furnishings. External customers are generally concerned about the originality of the product, genuineness and organic attribute which, as per the sellers and intermediaries, is very rarely noticed among internal audiences and intermediate customers. The external customers are much concerned about the texture of the silk fabrics. They like buying fabrics with different textures whereas local customers and also intermediate customers are less bothered about the variety in texture. In case of exports too, shop owners state to have high demand for diversified silk products.

Regarding design and color preferences, sellers see vast differences in customer tastes across different segments. They observed that external customers always sought for traditional motifs and designs. According to these customers, motifs which are small in size placed in geometrical patterns, consisting primarily of flowers, creepers, petals, birds and animals are traditional and tribal patterns of Assam. Of late, these customers have also started endorsing instrument and jewellery motifs as well as *japias* traditional motifs. However, the intermediaries and sellers of the crafts state

that local customers and young customers prefer fancy motifs and larger designs. They seek much spread ornamental works on the silk fabrics. But among the older customer base of the cities and at local areas too, smaller motifs are considered traditional. Similarly, with respect to colors, customers differ greatly. Though silk is preferred mostly in its original hue, in case of color preferences, milder hues such as lemon yellow, olive, ash, lighter shades of grey, etc. are preferred by external audiences. These customers seek ornamentation done on *muga* particularly, in traditional red and black yarns. In case of *pat*, gold colored thread works are highly sought. For example, exporters selling *muga* saris state that customers of Bangalore and Calcutta prefer the natural hue with ornamentation done in green, red and black hues. These customers also seek silk handlooms which are naturally dyed which they generally seek as organic. More or less, the preferences of the economically upper class and older customers are also same. However, local customers, especially the younger generations, are drawn towards bright and dark hues and contrast colors. Shop owners and sellers state that demand for some items is also season specific. During the *Bihu* season, demand for *phulam japi* and innovative metal *japi* in brass goes up than the rest of the year.

Sellers state that customized fabrics can open up new opportunities for the local artisans. One exporter of silk products stated that he was asked for silk products in African motifs like giraffe and other animals for some African country. Sellers highlight that customers seek silk fabrics in different price ranges. This offers scope for silk fabrics of different quality through intermixing for silk yarns of different price and quality. Local customers and customers falling in middle income groups among intermediate audiences generally seek products which are less priced. In these cases, customers mind little buying items made with mixed raw materials. Those customers who seek less expensive products, for example in *japi*, would buy the craft ornamented with velvet papers and other inexpensive raw materials. Similarly, sellers state that handloom buyers also purchase products which are produced with mixed yarns and are comparatively less quality oriented. *Kesa pat* made handlooms are one such example. Cotton and polyester mixed with *pat* and *tasar* mixed with *muga* are such examples. However, the shopkeepers agree that customers must be informed well in advance about the product quality.

12.2.4 Analysis of Interviews with Government Officials and Experts

Officials of the government and semi-government handicraft production, promotion and marketing bodies, experienced people associated with cooperative societies, academicians and private entrepreneurs engaged in the development of handicrafts sectors are approached for their opinion on making the traditional craft sector sustainable. The list of people interviewed is enlisted in Appendix 8.

i) General Viewpoint on Commercialization

Commercialization, according to the interviewees, is a positive force which gives handicraft sector an opportunity to flourish beyond its traditional markets. Government agencies and renowned entrepreneurs working in the craft development sector emphasize the commercialization of traditional crafts for the economic sustainability of the craftsmen. Officials and private individuals engaged in the development of traditional crafts state that commercialization should be to the extent that craft remain recognizable as a craft object. Engagement of simple technologies in the production process to the extent of minimizing the time consumption in the initial phase of production must not be seen as a regressive force.

However, the dexterity of the artisans in carving, shaping, ornamenting, etc. should be given more importance in commercializing a craft. Commercialization, in this manner, act beneficially for the artisans. Diversification of the traditional product to production of items for new uses is also seen as essential part of the commercialization. However, emphasis of government organizations on cultural preservation entails to clinging to indigenous components of the craft like design, raw materials and form. Apart from changing the functional dimension of the craft through modified structure and form, innovation in product line is more prominently emphasized by private individuals. However, nodal government organizations like IIE also emphasize on product innovation for more share in the crafts market.

Some individuals engaged with development of crafts, however, expresses discontent with excessive commoditization of the traditional crafts which results in complete loss of aura of the craft. Eminent academicians like Prof. Birinchi Medhi identify the cultural code embedded in traditional crafts and designs as the core and kernel which must be preserved at any cost. Modification is necessary for development of the craft

but not compulsory. It is more important to upkeep the meaning of any motif and design and crucial to keep intact the use of original technique of production. For example, the display of loose threads on the back side of a fabric piece created through the weaving of designs with extra yarns shows fading of weaving technique of the past. Likewise, the meaning of a design is distorted when irrelevant things are added to the primary form. However, he believes that culture is dynamic and evolutionary and in an era where artisans have to sustain themselves economically, commercialization is indeed necessary. The craft culture, according to Prof. Medhi is a case of diffusion. When the integrated meaning and its goodness are adopted, it should never be considered as a loss of tradition or departure from cultural elements.

ii) Opinions for Making the Traditional Crafts Sustainable

According to the government officials, organizations have important role to play in ensuring the sustainability of traditional crafts. In order to upkeep traditional craft practices, officials emphasize on ensuring the production of traditional crafts and old designs. Government agencies like Khadi Gram Udyog Board (or Khadi Village Industries Board) state that modification in design but within the purview of original name and characteristics is important. Similarly, NEHHDC (North East Handicrafts & Handlooms Development Corporation) also agree to certain alterations in traditional components. However, they believe that changes, especially in case of motifs and designs, should be made under the guidance of expert designers who understand the market requirement.

Academics stress on importance of meaning and composition of each element of the design. To sustain and nurture tradition, it is absolutely necessary to differentiate between what people like and what people should like. Every indigenous design carries meaning drawn out of social and environmental surroundings. Hence, experts studying such dimensions and designers by working together can preserve the integrity of a motif or design. For example, a *miri* motif (refer to Plate 10.14, Chapter 10) also known as *pushpita* shown by the depiction of two birds sitting under a fully laden tree depicts young girls under the protective umbrella of the family. The fully laden tree represents the puberty phase of girls whereas the birds describe the fickle minds of young girls ready to fly on becoming grown up. Young girls during old times were married off by force through capture or elopement. The motif reflected the

social situation of those times. Placement of flowers instead of the pair of birds, as found in the design presentation today, alters the entire meaning of the motif. Similarly, the original shape of an object is also important to give it a distinctive name. The integrity of a *japi* exists only when it is round because it is its original structure. Maintaining of symmetry in both motifs and the product is necessary.

In the same manner, preserving the sacrosanctness of a craft is also essential. Certain products or designs of religious nature should not be haphazardly introduced on anything and everything. For example, *podum* (lotus) motif produced on *gosain kapor* should not be instilled on women's *mekhela* or its sanctimonious aura is lost. Academicians do not disapprove of enlargement, miniaturization or improvement but within certain traditionally scripted realms. Haphazard modification without preserving the soul and substance of a craft or motif for its commercialization is harmful, which must be avoided through proper training and dialogue among artisans who are also the preservers of tradition. Crafts without original meaning should not be classified as traditional craft but must be marketed as locally produced handcrafted object based on traditional forms.

Individuals, organizations and agencies engaged in the commercial sphere, however, are not very rigorous regarding the meaning and integrity of designs and forms. In their opinion, modification either through elimination, addition or substitution of some minor or major elements but within a recognizable original shape or form is permissible and useful. It adds freshness within the traditional dimension. However, they stress upon the need to engage experienced and elderly craftsmen in developing designs based on traditional motifs. This will ensure that original elements survive in the modified forms. Training on designs and other indigenous aspects of the craft should be provided to young artisans to retain tradition even while producing crafts for modern consumers. For successful and sustainable commercialization, they suggest balance between traditional and contemporary aspects. There is always a niche market for un-altered and unadulterated traditional products but contemporary market also demands some newness in the old. It is suggested that traditional products are re-launched as objects which can satisfy new needs with innovative marketing techniques. Also, it is important to foresee the market dynamics which demands products either down-the-line or expensive ones. For some experts, if crafts are to be

preserved in toto, it is possible only in the museums. This will also ensure that the traditional prototypes are preserved for future reference.

Officials believe that maintaining catalogues on old designs and products can be one way to preserve tradition upon which judicious modification, if required, can be done. However, restricting innovation and diversification in craft is never thought as a solution to safeguard tradition. The art has to survive to sustain the craft.

According to individual entrepreneurs working in the direction of craft commercialization, one way towards sustaining traditional components is through sensitization of customers and let them decide about the kind of products they want to buy. They also suggest that designers should research on old products and forgotten designs and reinstate them for the modern world. At the same time, innovative designs and modified forms combining both tradition and modernity is presented as an efficient way to address the needs of different segments. It is suggested that artisans, at first, must find crafting economically beneficial which is possible only when they receive demand for their products. Hence, there is need to ensure that the production is by the masses for few. The emphasis is on production of crafts based on the need and preferences of different segments of customers but with essence of tradition. Some government officials suggest that story telling through designs can be helpful in creating more demand for traditional crafts.

Rural artisans are unable to compete in quantity and quality terms in the mass produced imitative crafts and imported products market. In this regard, provision of power based tools for pre-production stages is seen as an option to accelerate production. Craft production units under government bodies like Khadi Village Industries in Assam provide their artisans with power based spinning tools to speed up the production of the yarns. The reach of these technologies and some others like bamboo splitting tools, soil kneading machines, etc. is yet very limited at village level. Similar views are also asserted by private individuals for speeding the production of crafts. However, the emphasis is on the handcrafting of the items which ensure that manual production is sustained. It is also suggested that government as well as private sellers buy handcrafted items for their shelves. Assam emporium, a shop under the State Government of Assam, encourages only traditional crafts in their stores.

Handicrafts produced by the rural artisans lack the quality finish sought in outside markets. Apart from this, it also faces issue of standardization. There is need for training artisans to produce quality and standardized items. It is argued that skilling of handicraft artisans under the government's newly launched National Skill Development Council can be helpful in this regard.

Policies are needed to be directed at instilling pride among artisans as preservers of culture and heritage for which recognition should be provided. It is important to ensure that artisans come and join government bodies working in the direction of craft production. More number of artisans should be brought into the fold where they produce directly for government production units. This can help in providing a regular income to artisans thereby motivating them continuing with their ancestral occupation. Doing so can also minimize the exploitation of artisans at the hands of middlemen. Some experts suggested providing higher income for artisans. As per Khadi Gram Udyog Board, it rests upon government both at centre and state to ensure that craft products are brought for use in government establishments. Government should also ensure that common public is encouraged to use and wear handmade crafts. These measures, officials believe, can help increase handicraft production and thereby benefit artisans who would feel encouraged to sustain the craft's production. There is also the need for further decentralization of training centers into craftsmen inhabited areas. Again, training is offered to very limited number of individuals who apply. According to officials, out of many applications placed only few are selected. This number should be increased.

Government agencies are aware of the shortage and higher price issues of raw materials. In many instances, artisans abandon their hereditary practice due to their inability to purchase the required raw materials. In case of silk, yarn is provided to artisans through yarn banks but the supply is though not very adequate. Artisans generally depend on regular markets and intermediaries for the raw material. Metal artisans, bamboo craft makers, pottery makers, etc. also face similar difficulties. It is important to address their requirements too. On the use of new raw materials, experts opined that application of available new resources is justified and must be promoted as long as the base material is the original kind. For example, ornamentation work done on *japi* with new materials can help in generating freshness in the product and

demand. Similarly, if the original plaiting of the traditional bamboo baskets be introduced in traditional brass and bell metal, it is a restorative work. Localized variation of a traditional aspect can safeguard tradition and help in sustainable commercialization.

12.3 Wrapping up the Chapter

The main aim of this chapter was to generate data regarding perspectives of various stakeholders and agencies with respect to the commercialization of crafts. It also focused on gathering opinions of artisans, entrepreneurs, marketers, sellers, academician and government officials for making the local crafts sustainable in the face of modifications arising due to the commercialization of crafts. A tourist survey was also conducted to study the need of this customer segment for successful production and marketing of crafts as curios. It was found that 31.5% of tourists always prefer to buy local crafts as souvenir objects while another 37.5% would buy sometimes offering a huge scope for converting this percentage into regular buyers. The survey highlighted that local, national and international categories of tourists identify crafts differently. For local tourists, crafts are objects, at first, of utmost cultural significance. In case of national tourists, crafts are at first collectibles and mementoes followed by its decorative aspect. International tourists identify crafts at first as functional object while it is seen as an object of cultural significance in the fourth place. Similarly, national tourists also identify craft as cultural object in the fifth place. These differences with respect to identification of the crafts also exist across different age group with young tourists primarily in the age group of below 25 years identifying the crafts as gifts and functional objects. The upper age groups belonging to 40 to 60 years and above 60 years age groups recognize the crafts as cultural objects and mementoes.

With respect to a craft's attributes, it was found that fine finishing is the greatest appealing factor among all tourist types but more among international tourists. On the indigenusness scale, a craft's availability in the place of visit appeals most whereas within aesthetics, attractive design is the most likeable attribute. Ease of handling concerns mostly the international and national tourists. Similarly, differences in perception with respect to appealing and unappealing attributes are also found across age groups. Some of the most avoidable attributes in crafts are its bulkiness, weight,

fragility, inability to fit bag, etc. International and national tourists generally found to be mostly avoiding buying such crafts. Expensiveness is a factor that matters the most to the young tourists who avoid buying crafts due to its price. It is found that bargaining opportunities are preferred mostly by national tourists. Innovative products made by local craftsmen with traditional components are highly acceptable to all tourists. However it is somewhat moderately accepted by the highest age group tourists.

Tourists, generally from upper age groups and international category, would also prefer information about the history of the craft along with it. Likewise, name of the maker of the craft product is also sought more by this group. Tourists would prefer buying crafts from government authorized shops and appreciate promotions like free delivery of the purchase. However, attractive display and packaging moderately affects the purchase decision of tourists belonging to the upper age groups. With respect to shopping information sources, tourists mostly like to rely on tourist guide books and internet and shops near tourist sites is most favored shopping site. Some 11% international tourists also consider duty free shops. Tourists also considered authentication mark on crafts as important (48.99%) which would increase their likelihood to buy such crafts, especially among international tourists (69.57%). Majority of the tourists believe that there must be outright display of such marks on craft objects.

FGDs with artisans highlighted the general viewpoint of the artisans regarding commercialization of the crafts. It is found that craftsmen hold positive opinion in this regard as it gives them opportunity to cater to customer segments other than their regular customers like the local populace, especially of the villages. Artisans producing traditional pottery and terracotta product, metal objects, bamboo, *eri* and *pat & muga* crafts also like to diversify their crafts for aesthetics and other functional uses. Transforming utilitarian objects into objects of beauty and other functional use, they believe, can help save traditional products from dying. However, these artisans emphasize on government assistance for small mechanized tools to reinstate the old designs and products produced by their ancestors in less time. Artisans prefer not investing their productive time into more time consuming designs and product making which is generally done by hand held tools like hammer, chisel, traditional wooden

tools like *pitani* in case of pottery, etc. Simple mechanized tools for chiseling, soldering, spinning, etc. can help them in saving time and effort besides helping them increase quantity of produce. This will also help them fight quality, price and finishing issues arising due to the mass flooding of high finished machine made crafts.

Master artisans are generally engaged in the innovation of new products in the traditional product line. However, artisans also want assistance with respect to getting information about new demand and new market trends to compete with imported products. Artisans want proper marketing of their handmade crafts as traditional crafts objects of their respective places. In majority of the cases, it is seen that traditional objects lose its distinctiveness in the market due to imitations and replicas from other places of the country. Customers, though willing to buy traditional objects, are lost in confusion between locally handmade and machine made crafts. Artisans want government marketing agencies and other functionaries to promote the health benefits of wearing and dining in traditional craft objects. They require training on innovative crafts and assistance for uninterrupted supply of raw materials. Apart from that, they seek proper pricing and produce procuring mechanism to reduce the influence of local intermediaries and middlemen.

From informal interviews with shop owners and sales person engaged in the selling of crafts, it was understood that demand for craft products vary according to the customer type. Local customers of the craft producing area generally seek crafts for day to day purposes and generally tend to buy products which are locally made. However, for aesthetic needs, they also prefer finely polished and less expensive objects. This is mostly in case of crafts like bamboo, metal and pottery & terracotta. The intermediate audiences or customers, which are customers belonging to the community of the artisans but residing in different parts of Assam or people who are non-community members but belong to the culture of Assam also prefer local crafts over imported ones. *Hatima* figurine, decorative bell and brass metal objects, etc. are brought by these customers basically for home decoration. In case of silk textiles, local and intermediate customers are found to have more inclination towards fancy designs, contrasting color combinations and more aesthetic aspects. Yet again, sellers stated to have distinction in taste of the aristocratic customers of the cities and the

general populace. The elderly and upper classes seek simple designs representing aspects of traditions.

External audiences, generally tourists, seek functional products and miniaturized replicas of good quality and design which are not amply produced by the local artisans of the craft villages surveyed due to which the market is lost to imported imitations from places like Moradabad, and West Bengal. Anything representative of local flavor of Assam, for example, even a rhino made in bamboo or wood is likened and bought by tourists as handicraft of Assam, though it does not form a part of local craft tradition. However, customers, especially international tourists, are wary about the pest treatment of such products. They also seemed to be unaware of what is traditional and what is not. Nature dyed textiles and other crafts are generally sought and geometric patterns with small motifs are considered traditional by these customers. Sellers and intermediaries explain the need for developing different category crafts for different customers based on preferred price, utility and design, form & color quality of the product, and based on customer type.

The interviews with experts consisting of government and semi government officials, experienced people engaged with cooperative societies, academicians, and private entrepreneurs gave insight into the issues confronting the sustainability of traditional crafts. They emphasized on the need for maintaining a balance between traditional and contemporary outlook though training of the artisans. The suggestions also focused on preserving the meaning and integrity of the old elements by sensitizing both artisans and customers. Diversification and innovation within cultural realms is also argued as a means for successfully commercializing the crafts in markets comprising of different customers with different needs and requirements. Apart from that building old design and craft object repository for future reference and creating catalogues for is also suggested as a proper option for preserving information on old crafts. For competing in quantity and quality terms, importance was stressed on use of power based equipments especially for pre-production stages, provision of raw materials and up-gradation of artisans' skill. Procurement of only handcrafted crafts at shops and offices and bringing more number of artisans under organized fold was also suggested.