

A STUDY ON THE ROLE OF INFORMATION IN EMPOWERING BALUCHARI SAREE WEAVING COMMUNITY IN BISHNUPUR, WEST BENGAL

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Abstract

Purpose: Community derived information need is the key aspect in the present society to reach to the sustainable development. This evaluative study will help to identify the patterns of needs available for weavers in Bishnupur and the categories of satisfaction at different levels.

Design/Methodology/approach: This field work based descriptive research work will help to analyse the information need of the weavers in Bishnupur, West Bengal. The study comprises of interviews and content analysis of the weavers in the field work. The study involves observation method within the community to comprehensively understand these needs.

Findings: The demands of the information have always been the crucial for the community development. The study divulged that there are two categories of information need of the weavers, one is basic information need another one is professional information need. Professional information need consisted of traditional techniques and knowledge, access to raw materials, market insights and trends, financing patterns, documentation and allied details.

Practical implication: Determination of information need is essential for community appraisal and development. There are different studies conducted on the area of social, health and economic issues but the information need of the Baluchari Saree weavers have not been conducted. This study will help to understand the information need pattern of such community as well as to create network and information portal to update their basic standard of life.

Originality/value: This study would delve into the intricate web of necessities woven into their craft and livelihood. It would aim to provide actionable insights and recommendations to support and uplift the weaver community in Bishnupur, fostering their cultural heritage while addressing their contemporary challenges.

Keyword: Information Need, Weaver Community, Community Information Need, Bishnupur

1.0 Introduction

The weaver community stands as a cornerstone of cultural heritage. Weaving intricate tales through the threads of tradition and craftsmanship. Understanding their information needs becomes pivotal in preserving their legacy

and empowering their artistry. The role of available information in empowering their social and economic lives is at the crucial juncture. From the mastery of diverse weaving techniques to the historical significance embedded in their creations, uncovering their informational requirements unveils a rich tapestry of knowledge. Exploring avenues to support these artisans in accessing resources, market insights, technological advancements, and preserving traditional wisdom becomes imperative to sustainable developments.

Baluchari sarees are known for their elaborate depictions of mythological and historical stories. Baluchari sarees from Bishnupur have been granted Geographical Indication (GI) status, recognizing the unique heritage and craftsmanship associated with these sarees. This status helps protect the authenticity of Baluchari sarees and promotes the economic well-being of the weavers. The Baluchari saree weavers of Bishnupur, West Bengal, are renowned for creating exquisite handwoven silk sarees that depict mythological and historical scenes. The art of Baluchari weaving has been passed down through generations. Weavers in Bishnupur take great pride in preserving and promoting this traditional craft, ensuring that the sarees maintain their cultural significance. Bishnupur, a town in the Bankura district of West Bengal, has been a significant center for Baluchari saree production for centuries. Baluchari sarees are traditionally made from pure silk. The use of high-quality silk contributes to the smooth texture and luxurious feel of the saree. The unique aspect of Baluchari sarees is the intricate weaving technique used to create detailed motifs and patterns. Weavers employ the jacquard weaving technique, allowing them to weave complex designs into the fabric. Baluchari sarees often feature a rich and vibrant colour palette. Bright colours like red, green, blue, and gold are commonly used, enhancing the visual appeal of the sarees. Zari, or metallic thread, is frequently incorporated into Baluchari sarees to add a touch of glamour and richness. This intricate zari work enhances the overall aesthetic of the saree.

In this complex world of machine textile era the hand-woven clothes become extinct to the world of fabrics. Despite facing challenges such as changing market trends and competition from machine-made textiles, the Baluchari saree weavers of Bishnupur continue to produce these exquisite handwoven sarees, showcasing their commitment to preserving a centuries-old tradition. The availability of appropriate information to combat this competitive world, is essential for them for sustainable development and empower them to the next level.

2.0 Literature Review

Some of the literature which are related to the study are given below:

Chakrabarti (2001) explored and examined the information needs and information seeking behaviour of a marginal underprivileged tribal community namely Totos. Then author had come to a conclusion that information seeking behaviour of a community depended on various factors like psychology, social, cultural, historical, educational, economic etc.

Uhegbu (2001) discussed the impediments to rural information services for community development in Nigeria. He highlighted the nature and characteristics of a community as well as community information needs and services. Four components of community information were identified: the information itself; the sender, the medium or channel of communication; and the final user.

Seyam (2003) reviewed the recent advances in weaving industry and addresses the challenges that face the weaving industry. The paper sheds the light on how the weaving machine manufacturers and woven fabric producers might strengthen the weaving industry by further advance the technology and taking advantages of the current and new advances in weaving technologies.

Meyer (2003) investigated on how information was transferred to rural communities by making use of a training programme in maize production for small-scale farmers. The investigation indicated that people originating from an oral culture respond positively to a development project based on their particular way of information use.

Chattopadhyay and Chakrabarti (2003) observed the information need of the said community and examined the effect of information obtained from information centres like public and rural library or other belonging to this community. The study had explored that Solapith Community needed educational information for their professional development.

Dhane and Dhane (2004) identified fundamental constraints expressed by farmers in mulberry cultivation such as high labour wages, inadequate labour, inadequate irrigation facilities, high cost of manures and fertilizers, lack of guidance and lack of knowledge about mulberry diseases and pests. The authors determined that the personal and socio-economic characters of the farmers such as caste, social participation and level of knowledge in sericulture were found to have a significant association with the constraints faced by them in sericulture.

Chakrabarti and Kundu (2006) stated that most people engaged in cottage industries were very much dependent on their traditional methods to gather their required information. They strongly desired to have an information centre or rural information centre though hardly have sufficient time. The study also has found that illiteracy was one of the obstacles for collecting their needed information.

Chakrabarti and others (2008) identified the information need of the Dukpa community of Lepcha-Kha who were basically non-users of the formal information system and revealed the information needs of the villagers with their traditional information needs.

Chakrabarti and others (2009) depicted a picture about the Dhimal community of Naxalbari Block of Darjelling District covering the socio-economic condition of Dhimal community with tabular analysis considering all the aspects of their life. Overall, it was a lucid and vivid description about the peoples belonging to the Dhimal community.

Chakrabarti and others (2011) focused on the whole range of problems faced by Meches in Mahakalguri of Jalpaiguri District whether they were getting adequate quantity of food and other essential product to ensure their daily needs and what particular situations they need and immediate solution.

Mandal (2015) presented the demographic features, the socioeconomic conditions and the on the whole living condition of the silk artisans of Mouza ChakHarharia, Murshidabad. This paper realized the problems faced by the artisans and also tried to find out the possible remedies. In other words the investigator prepared a detail survey of the physical, cultural and social background of Mouza ChakHarharia.

Banerjee and Chakrabarti (2020) attempted to examine the effect that the process of globalization has made among the silk weavers of Bishnupur region in West Bengal, India. It adopts a transformational approach and uses both contextual reading and ethnographic data collected through first hand fieldwork among the aforesaid community. The ethnography describes the messy and unquantifiable relationship between local actors and the international process.

Patra (2021) attempted to study the role of the e-market in the marketing of handloom products in Cuttack district of Odisha. The research methodology followed here is based on both primary data and secondary data. The paper concluded with the importance of the E-market and how it is promoting the handloom products in the online platform, which leads to more popularity. Hence, the demands of handloom products in the technological era have a massive success for the Handloom Industry in Odisha. Thus, it may be concluded that the E-market has a significant role in the marketing of handloom products.

3.0 Objectives:

The basic objectives of the study are:

- To identify the present status of the weaving community of Bishnupur;
- To identify the different categories of information need of weavers in their professional life; and
- To provide some suggestion by addressing the factors of their information need.

4.0 Methodology

4.1. Scope and Coverage:

The researcher has physically visited the Bishnupur town and identified the areas of concentration of weavers. From the areas, the types of respondents were identified. There were big investors, small investors and laborers. Most of the weavers are practically loom-laborer. Thus, most of them are not capable to arrange for capital required for invention and modification of Baluchari products. The community needs more attention to address the intricate web of necessities woven into their craft and livelihood. Proper organizational support and other financial assistance must be arranged within the community to comprehensively recognize these needs. The study would aim to provide actionable insights and recommendations to support and uplift the weaver community in Bishnupur, fostering their cultural heritage while addressing their information needs.

According to the census 2011, Bishnupur city has the total population of 137386. The approximate population in the municipality area is 70,000. The municipality area consists of 19 wards. In these 19 wards the baluchari weaving community is mainly concentrated in 6,7, 9, 10 and 17 wards. The total population in these wards are 16,170. The Baluchari saree weaving centers are located at different paras namely Gopal Ganja, Krishna Ganja, Barakalitala, Patrapara, Raghunath Sayer etc. Amongst them Patrapara and Krishnaganja, the busiest localities occupied by the Baluchari weavers. To conduct the study the researcher has thoroughly examined the population and chosen Morgan's sampling method. This sampling method is used when researchers access to the entire statistical population of interest and need to make a decision based on the representative sample. The Krejcie and Morgan (1970) method helps in determining the sample size needed to make accurate inference about the population. According to them for 30000 population the sample size will be 379, so in the study, the sample size was 733 which is more than the desired number.

4.2. Methods Used: The researcher has carried out some reference works in several institutions and libraries to get in touch with demographic profile, population and also the historical background of the area. The literature

relating to information need and weavers of Bishnupur, West Bengal have extensively browsed and consulted to get the categories of professional information need of weavers in Bishnupur. The work was based on descriptive survey that consists of the structured questionnaire, interviews and observation method. The preliminary research questions were structured through a brief pilot project to get accurate information. Questions were grouped according to identify the information need of the community regarding their weaving profession and livelihood. The researcher has visited the area of study. After collecting the data, different tables were prepared considering different points of view. To get a clearer understanding of weavers' need level towards their profession in Bishnupur, interviews and engaging in discussions with the weavers have directly provided valuable insights into their experiences, challenges, and factors influencing their needs. Finally, suggestions were given on the basis of the conclusion drawn after analyzing the tables.

5.0 Significance of the study:

The weavers of Bishnupur, who work day and night to create art and tell stories through their weavings on cloth, the study aims to interpret their information need as an understanding of traditions, ethics, background, and experience along with how also traditions & techniques are becoming modernized. On the other side, the pre-independent Bengal, with its muslins, brocades and jamdanis, was once one of the most important centers of handloom in the world. Among them the most famous saree, which holds its well-known name, Baluchari, is a product of exquisite design and fabulous weaving technique of Bishnupur in West Bengal. The sophistication of the weave patterns and the stories that unfold with each saree, maybe it of mythology, history, or other contemporary events. People are often unaware of their own cultural heritage and the different crafts that are native to their birthplace. There is a need for people to know about the diverse crafts of India, because they directly talk about the country and its culture, and also because they are a repository of our traditions and way of life.

The sustainable development comprises of different section of people consisting diverse nature. Baluchari saree weaving community is one such example. To develop them economically, we need to understand the categories of information they require to develop their social and economic life. This study will aim to under the different categories of information need along with their trends of the satisfaction pattern.

6.0 Findings of the Study

The information collected through interviews and questionnaire are analysed based on the information need of the weaving community. The assessment of the interactions with the weavers of Bishnupur help to understand their basic demands of livelihood and professional life. These demands may be transferred from the traditional to transformational. Specific profession-based questions have asked and responses had coded to get the broader perspective of the information need of the baluchari saree weaving community.

6.1. General Information Need of the Weavers

- **Health Information:** The most common requirement to information is health related information. The emphasis has given on the access to information about preventive healthcare. Their existing knowledge about common illnesses, symptoms, and treatments are in poor condition. Thus they require proper guidance on healthy lifestyle practices and nutrition.
- **Educational Resources:** In view of their status of education, Information about educational institutions, courses, and career options for the future generations are most common information requirements. Their knowledge of access to learning materials and online educational resources. They require updates on educational policies and opportunities.
- **Financial Information:** Weavers on personal information on guidance on personal finance, budgeting, and investment. Information about banking services, loans, and credit are their personal information needs. Their financial requirements on the updates on economic trends and financial markets.
- **News and Current Affairs:** Weaver as social elements require timely and accurate news updates on local, national, and international events. The information about politics, economics, science, and technology is their prime choice. Awareness and developments that may impact their communities.
- **Legal and Rights Information:** The legal knowledge of weavers is limited. Thus, they wanted to have knowledge about legal rights and responsibilities. Information about local laws, regulations, and legal procedures are the primary needs of information. They also interested to know about access to legal aid and resources for dispute resolution.
- **Community and Social Information:** Baluchari weavers as social element require updates on community events and activities and information about local services, facilities, and resources. Therefore, the awareness of social issues and opportunities for community involvement is the basic

requirement.

- **Technology and Innovation:** Technology in the present shape is the basic awareness that need to spread among the weavers. Information about new technologies and innovations and updates on tech trends and digital tools is the basic need. The also wanted to have guidance on using technology for personal and professional purposes.
- **Cultural and Recreational Information:** Information about cultural events, festivals, and entertainment is the basis for entertainment information need. They also expected to get recommendations for books, movies, music, and other recreational activities and updates on local cultural heritage and traditions.

6.2. Professional Information Needs: Weavers often have diverse information needs that span various aspects of their craft, business, and creative pursuits. These needs can be categorized into several areas. Understanding and catering to these various information needs can significantly support the growth and development of weavers in their craft and business endeavors.

- **Traditional Techniques and Knowledge:** Understanding the traditional weaving techniques specific to Bishnupur weavers, their historical significance, and the preservation of age-old methods is crucial.
- **Access to Raw Materials:** Exploring their requirements for high-quality raw materials, such as specialized threads and dyes, and the challenges they face in sourcing these materials sustainably and affordably. How effectively they can get such information about middleman, and fairs are their common information need.
- **Market Insights and Trends:** Investigating their need for market insights, including consumer preferences, emerging trends, and demands both domestically and internationally, to help them adapt and thrive in a competitive market. This will include both online and offline markets.
- **Design and Creativity:** Weavers often require inspiration and guidance in designing patterns, motifs, and colour combinations for their textiles. Information on trends in textile design, historical references, and creative sources can be valuable. In this regard the role of the government and private organisation is worthy to note. The weavers understand these are the important areas for the betterment of the saree. They keen to know in those areas.
- **Technological Advancements:** Assessing their interest and accessibility to modern weaving technologies, tools, and equipment that can enhance productivity without compromising their traditional craftsmanship. How the modern technological tools can be used to get more productivity is the prime area of interest.
- **Financial and Business Support:** Understanding their financial needs, access to credit, business training, and marketing assistance to help them grow their businesses and improve their economic sustainability. Finances in terms of loan as capital and the rate of interest is also an area of interest.
- **Documentation and Preservation:** Recognizing the necessity to document and preserve the history, stories, and evolution of Bishnupur's weaving culture for posterity.
- **Skill Development and Education:** Continuous learning is vital in any craft. Weavers might seek information on workshops, courses, or educational resources that can help them enhance their skills, learn new techniques, or stay updated with industry developments.
- **Community and Networking:** Weaving communities and networks offer support, advice, and opportunities for collaboration. Information about local or online weaving groups, forums, or events where weavers can connect and share experiences is valuable.
- **Infrastructure Development:** Improving the infrastructure related to handloom weaving, such as setting up common facility centers, weaving clusters, and modernizing weaving units, can enhance productivity and overall efficiency.
- **Technological Integration:** Introducing modern technologies and tools can help increase the efficiency of the weaving process. This includes the use of power looms, improved dyeing techniques, and innovative designs to meet contemporary market preferences.
- **Quality Control and Certification:** Assistance in maintaining quality standards and obtaining certifications can help weavers build trust with consumers and enter premium markets.
- **Social Security and Welfare Measures:** Implementing social security measures, health insurance, and other welfare programs can improve the overall well-being of weavers and their families.
- **Promotion of Handloom Products:** Government initiatives and support for the promotion of handloom products, both at the national and international levels, can contribute to increasing the demand for traditional handwoven textiles.
- **Preservation of Traditional Designs:** Efforts to document and preserve traditional weaving designs,

motifs, and patterns are essential to maintain the cultural heritage associated with handloom weaving in West Bengal.

6.3. Factors to ascertain the pattern of satisfaction of weavers in Bishnupur:

Understanding the satisfaction of weavers in Bishnupur, a place known for its rich tradition of weaving, involves various factors that contribute to their contentment or discontentment.

- **Market Demand:** Satisfaction often correlates with the demand for their woven products. Weavers feel content if there's a consistent demand for their crafts, leading to steady income and recognition.
- **Economic Stability:** Factors like fair wages, timely payments, and stable income can significantly impact a weaver's satisfaction. Issues related to payment delays or insufficient compensation led to dissatisfaction.
- **Skill Development and Training:** Access to training, modern techniques, and skill development programs might influence their satisfaction. Weavers who have opportunities to enhance their skills and learn new techniques tend to be more satisfied with their work. But most of them are unaware of these stable courses except the workshops often organized at their place.
- **Working Conditions:** Comfortable and conducive working environments contribute to satisfaction. But inadequate workspace, improper lighting, and old -age equipment affecting the way how weavers perceive their work.
- **Support and Recognition:** Recognition of their art, both locally and internationally, can positively impact their satisfaction. But Support from the government, NGOs, or other organizations in preserving traditional weaving practices are not that much satisfactory.
- **Quality of Life:** Overall quality of life, including access to healthcare, education for their families, and basic amenities, can influence their satisfaction levels.
- **Challenges and Concerns:** Addressing challenges such as competition from mass-produced goods, lack of raw materials, or cultural shifts impacting traditional crafts is crucial in understanding their satisfaction.
- **Community and Culture:** Weavers' satisfaction might be intertwined with the preservation of their cultural heritage and its significance in their community. The weavers are not much sure about the preservation and stability of their rich cultural heritage weaving.

7.0 Conclusion

Supporting the information needs of weavers in Bishnupur can significantly enhance their craft, market reach, and overall satisfaction. By addressing these recommendations and aspects of information needs, weavers in Bishnupur can improve their craft, adapt to changing market dynamics, and find avenues for sustainable growth while preserving their rich weaving heritage.

8.0 Suggestions

Following are the basic suggestion towards the sustainable development to Baluchari saree weaving community:

- **Access to Technology and Information:** Provision of training and access to technology, such as the internet and smartphones, to help weavers access market trends, design ideas, and online selling platforms. Establishment of community centers or workshops with internet access for information dissemination.
- **Skill Development Workshops:** Organizing regular workshops on new weaving techniques, design trends, and sustainable practices. Collaboration with skilled artisans or designers to impart specialized knowledge.
- **Market Research and Trends:** Offering support in conducting market research to understand consumer preferences and emerging trends. This information can help weavers align their products with market demand.
- **Financial Literacy and Management:** workshops on financial management, pricing strategies, and accessing financial resources or micro-loans to support their businesses.
- **Access to Raw Materials:** Assistance in sourcing quality raw materials at reasonable prices. Collective buying or partnerships with suppliers can help in acquiring materials more affordably.
- **Marketing and Branding Support:** Offering guidance on branding, packaging, and marketing strategies to promote their products locally and globally. The area will help them utilize social media and online platforms for wider reach.
- **Networking Opportunities:** Facilitation of networking events, craft fairs, or exhibitions where weavers can showcase their work, interact with buyers, and network with other artisans or businesses.

- **Legal and Regulatory Support:** Assist in understanding and complying with regulations related to the weaving industry, ensuring they have necessary licenses, and helping them navigate legal complexities.
- **Preservation of Traditional Techniques:** Supporting initiatives that focus on preserving and documenting traditional weaving techniques, ensuring their continuity for future generations.
- **Community Collaboration:** Fostering a sense of community among weavers by creating platforms for collaboration, knowledge-sharing, and collective problem-solving.
- **Government and NGO Partnerships:** Collaboration with government bodies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to create programs or initiatives that specifically cater to the needs of weavers, offering financial support, training, and infrastructure development.

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