Globalization of Indian Handicrafts: A Human Development Approach

Pradeep Kumar Jena

Introduction:

It is interesting to know how globalization has influenced our day to day life - if I will be more specific - the quality of life. There are contradictory views on this issue. While the cohorts of globalization theory view globalization as improving economic growth and quality of life indicators, the critics view globalization as accentuating inequalities, promoting poverty, and degrading the overall quality of human life. Running through this contentious debate, my paper examines how economic and cultural globalizations have influenced the overall quality of life, or in the language of developmental economists, how globalization has influenced the indicators that constitute 'human development'. However, my focus here is on the handicrafts sector of India and those millions of rural artists who have sustained this invaluable tradition/identity of this vast nation since ages.

Human development as it is widely believed is a process of enlarging the choices of the people. It can be achieved by expanding human capabilities. Without education (knowledge), good health and means to maintain a good standard of life, the humanity can't think of those choices and can't think of development. Simply speaking, without these basic capabilities human being faces inaccessibility to and unavailability of those resources that constitute human development. As defined by UNDP, "human development is a process of enlarging people's choices- the most critical ones are to lead a long and healthy life, to be educated and to enjoy a decent standard of living. Additional choices include political freedom, guaranteed human right and self respect."

Globalization of Crafts:

As India opens up her doors to the multinationals during the post-liberalization era, it is not only the economies that often meet in the global market sphere, but also the people and cultures. Talking about Indian Handicrafts, its export has reached at a commendable height. Indian economy experiences the existence of both traditional handicrafts and modern mechanised production. However, there is no universally accepted definition of the term in India. As the Task Force on Handicrafts definition (1989) puts it, 'Handicrafts are items made by hand, often with the use of simple tools, and are generally artistic and/or traditional in nature. They include objects of utility and objects of decoration'.

Since its advent in 1991, India has experienced both positive and negative impacts of globalization process. But one of the sectors benefited out of it, is the Handicraft industry. The
case of the handicrafts sector can be discussed here taking its export and employment potential. The growing opportunity for handicrafts in global market is observed when the Indian handicrafts export (including the carpets and other floor coverings) crossed Rs 1,220/ crores in 1990-91 from merely 10 crores in the mid fifties. Again it increased to Rs. 7157.64 Crores in 1998-99 and Rs 9270.50 Crores in 2000-01. It had reached at the peak of Rs. 17276.71 Crores in 2005-06. Table-1 shows the export of Indian handicrafts of several years.

Table-1
Export of Indian handicrafts excluding carpets and other floor coverings. (1986-87 to 2005-06)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Growth in Exports</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1986-87</td>
<td>387</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987-88</td>
<td>415</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988-89</td>
<td>551</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989-90</td>
<td>589</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990-91</td>
<td>713</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991-92</td>
<td>1065</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992-93</td>
<td>1412</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993-94</td>
<td>1970</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Annual Reports of Various Years, Ministry of Textiles, and Export Promotion Council for Handicrafts, Govt. of India, New Delhi.)

The Indian Handicraft Export Council has estimated that export of handicraft goods will touch Rs 32,700 crore by year 2010. Out of the total handicrafts exports, USA has been the single biggest destination having 31.35% of all Indian handicrafts exports followed by UK (11.15%) and Germany (9.98%). A detailed description of major destinations of Indian handicrafts is given in table-2.

Table-2
Major Country-wise Exports of Handicrafts and Handknotted Carpets from India (2002-03 to 2004-05)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>2002-03</th>
<th>2003-04</th>
<th>2004-05</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Handicrafts</td>
<td>Carpets</td>
<td>Handicrafts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>128.48</td>
<td>24.50</td>
<td>158.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>272.06</td>
<td>37.34</td>
<td>327.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>384.95</td>
<td>58.96</td>
<td>482.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>917.79</td>
<td>642.97</td>
<td>968.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>288.97</td>
<td>29.18</td>
<td>356.48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Another important aspect of handicrafts sector is its employment potential. The Annual Report of various years of the Ministry of Textiles, Government of India suggests that the employment in this sector in 1997-98 was 52.92 lakhs which became 58.41 lakhs in 2001-02 and 60.16 lakhs in 2002-03. In 2005-06, 65.72 lakhs people were employed in this sector. Based on the National Council for Applied Economic Research (NCAER) survey of 1995-96, of the total workforce engaged in handicrafts, 47.42% are women of which 37.11% are coming under the backward communities like SCs and STs. Indian handicrafts sector forms the second largest employment sector -second only to agriculture.

The skilled hand of the Indian craftsmen is its most important and invaluable asset. To quote D. N. Saraf, the workmanship of the Indian craftsmen is so exquisite that throughout the 18th and 19th centuries India was known to other countries on the trade route more by her crafts than by her art, religion and philosophy.'

**The Challenges:**

But despite the prospect for high export and employment generation in this sector, the real concern for many of us is that, can the 'local' really meet with the 'global' by truly sustaining its localness? Although Indian handicrafts have been benefited enormously many of its forms have been facing extinction in the globalized/liberalized market economy. The state of condition of the rural artisans is critical and they have been mere spectators of the developmental process. Although the products they make are becoming global, the grave question raised is how global really these artists are. If we study their socio-economic status, reports suggest that households headed by artisans in general have much lower net wealth and almost all (90%) are landless as against 36% for households headed by others. Another statistic shows that the average income derived by the craftsperson is Rs. 2,000/ per month for an average family of five members. Most of them live in abject poverty without the prospect of having a better future. Even the wages they get is much lower than the earnings of many others in agriculture. With this little resource to spare, the artisan communities barely have anything to enlarge their choices and expand their capabilities. This leads them to a situation where their human development almost becomes impossible.
The very notion of Human Development Index (HDI) is that progress and development is no longer to be measured just in terms of GDP or per capita income but also in terms of human well-being which includes a number of factors like cultural identity, a sense of security, of both one's personal safety as well as safety of one's culture and one's place in this world. In that sense, Bhutan has very high indicators of human happiness. This is due to Bhutan's flourishing craft activities, linking craft to Bhutan sense of identity. It is the traditional skill (local knowledge) of the artists which was a major basis of their identity and in post-liberalization India that identity is either getting vanished or getting diluted and the skill/local knowledge is very much influenced by the market forces as will be evident in following sections. The same is with the issue of social security as well. There is in fact not a single provision for social security scheme for the rural artisans and their situation worsens when they become old. Let me here discuss briefly about the challenges that the craft sector faces.

Globalization of crafts: The biggest problem that has been observed now in this sector is the hybridity in craft forms. For instance, the traditional appliqué products of Pipili, Orissa like Chhati (large umbrella), Batua (small bag to carry betel leaf), Bana (flag) etc are fast disappearing from the appliqué market and instead wall hangs, garden umbrellas, lamp sheds, cushion covers and letter bags, office files are now prepared as they are very much in demand by the tourists.

The Chandua makers attribute two reasons for such change in the appliqué work—changing taste of the customers and commercialization of the products. Customers want the products to be cheaper and attractive. Artisans go for more profit, at times ignoring the quality. The changes that accommodate the local art of Chandua making with that of the demands of the foreign tourists and global consumers make the product a unique and different one; in many ways different from the traditional Chandua craft therefore producing a 'global' product.

Threat to Originality/Identity: As has been said above the artists are bringing in changes in different artifacts to meet with the demands of the people. The problem is not with 'Globalization' of the products, or with its change or creativity rather with the threat to originality of craft forms-threat to its own identity. In Orissa for example, in the appliqué sector, as said above it has been observed that competition amongst the artisans, use of low quality inputs and use of readymade and machine made items have often brought down the standard and quality of the work. Some new designs in the market that may be liked by the tourists initiate change in the appliqué works.

Disappearing patron-client ties: Unlike the earlier period, during the present liberalized market system the artisans have lost their holds over the old patron-client business network and jajmani relationship leading them to increasingly depend on the middle men and trader entrepreneurs who drag a major part of the profit which should have gone to the artists. A report suggests that, there are over 25 lakh crafts persons in India, based mostly in the villages who are not used to interaction with buyers and don't have the necessary skills to safeguard their own interests. A study by Manuela Ciotti, on the 'Chamar' weaving community of Manipur in Varanasi, of Uttar Pradesh state of India shows that the actual weavers don't deal with the final customers. The weavers used to consign their products - Saris, to merchants and wholesalers, who then proceed to have the Saris polished and ready for marketing.
**Changing Occupation:** As most of the artisan communities have scarce resource and somehow manage their bread and butter, a large section of them remain illiterate. Poverty makes them become more vulnerable. As a result most of the artists are now a days choosing to shift to other professions rather than to stick into their hereditary occupation. A study by Soma Basu suggests that the weavers of Pattamadai mats of Tamil Nadu in general and women artists in particular are increasingly shifting to the profession like Beedi rolling, which is faster and easier and which earns higher returns. A UN report suggests that over the past three-four decades in India the number of artisans has declined by at least 30% with many joining the ranks of casual labourers and the informal economy. This is a clear threat to the skill/local knowledge of the artists.

**Popularization of finished goods:** It has been observed that many quotidian crafts are replaced by cheap machine made finished items these days. Now-a-days in Orissa various small scale industries have been facing enormous problems and have failed to compete with the Chinese companies who have intruded into the Orissan market with their low cost finished goods. Various factories in China as said by T. J. Scrase, now mass produce and market 'sari' cloth, based on Indian designs, therefore making a 'virtual artisan' where the craft itself survives in a hybrid form that may or may not be produced by the original workers.

**Disappearing home market:** In the globalized/liberalized market, the traditional crafts need to be beautiful and cost effective and maintain quality to face competition. Unfortunately the home consumers are under the influence of liberal imports of cheap mill-made products and no longer use the handmade items. Since Handicrafts come under the state list, each state has set up its own handicrafts policy. The Central government through various developmental schemes plays the role by supplementing their efforts. But unfortunately most of the governmental schemes have failed to produce visible results. The states assist those crafts and artisans who have viable market and high export potential. The languishing crafts in turn suffer a lot.

**Concluding Remarks:**

Following the statistics of the handicrafts exports, it could be traced that during the present day of globalization, the local handicraft products of our country have enough opportunities in the home and global markets. But the precarious condition of the artists needs careful interventions. In my understanding, there is nothing wrong in globalization but we have to rethink the way we practice it. To quote Joseph Stiglitz 'globalization today is not working. It is not working for many of the world's poor. It is not working for the much of the environment. It is not working for the stability of the global economy..... The problem however is not with globalization, but how it has been managed'. So we can't deny globalization, it has become a reality. However the monopoly of the developed nations affecting the poor and marginal should be curtailed.

On the other hand talking about the landscape of the Indian Handicrafts, it is the time for both financial and skill based support in the form of loan/assistance and training respectively, from the government. The traditional skill of the artists has been the main source of their livelihood since it is their only asset through which they can earn their bread. A threat to their skill as well as their identity not only puts serious question to their level of human development but also gives enough space for ruining of Indian culture and civilization.

It can be said that the central government have been taking different measures to make the...
handicraft products globally competitive and the condition of the artisans better. But the policies need to be implemented wholeheartedly by the government agencies and more particularly the state governments. As said by S. S. Solanki, to bring the artisan communities into the mainstream of development the government should intervene by giving training, collateral-free loan facilities, artisans credit cards, arranging 'interaction meets' (to provide the artisans information on latest technology and market-related issues) etc. Also the intervention of micro-financial institutions and Self Help Groups (SHGs) could meet the financial paucity of the artists and small artisan entrepreneurs and strengthen their business.

In addition, various co-operatives, voluntary associations also need to put sincere efforts for the better working condition of the artists. For example, DWARAKA (Development of Weavers and Rural Artisans in Kalamkari Art), an organization supports hundreds of Kalamkari artists of Andhra Pradesh by providing loans for the education of their children and providing medical and marriage expenses. Similarly 'Dastakar' an NGO facilitates skilled artisans from different states to sell their products through its various exhibitions.

Since the production base in this sector is much unorganized and by and large traditional tools and techniques are used in the process of production, there is a need to upgrade the skill of the artists and supply quality raw material and adequate financial assistance. At the same time care should be taken for innovation but it should not root out originality/identity nor should it wipe out their skill because without these basic components, real human development of this community is impossible. Besides, the marketing and export of the products need special attention. The craftsmen should also be properly exposed to the market leaving a little room for the intrusion of the middlemen. To make the craft products globally acknowledged and commercially viable, steps should be taken together by the ministry of Information, Commerce and Tourism. Besides the Indian government could make different Memorandums of Understanding (MoU) for export of crafts goods to foreign countries while dealing with trade related agreements.

Care should also be taken to popularize crafts in home markets creating awareness among the home consumers. Handicrafts items should be developed keeping in mind the current fashion and style of the consumers, so that they will easily accept ethnic crafts with modern features. However, attention should be given to maintain originality of the craft technique.

Interestingly, multinational institutions like the World Bank, the ADB, and the UNESCO etc view to the support for handicrafts sector and cultural industries as an investment in the development rather than as expenditure. As evident from the above discussion, handicrafts have ample opportunities for employment generation and country's exports. Therefore, it has occupied a significant place in the economy and society of India. With the onset of globalization there is increasing demand for Indian hand made products in both national and international markets. But careful intervention is needed to prevent hijacking of profits, intrusion of middle men, to promote marketing and to maintain originality/identity of the products therefore ensuring high growth in this sector. This will help the artists enlarging their choices in life and expanding human capabilities, something which could lead to human development.

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Pradeep Kumar Jena lives at Room No.244-E Brahmaputra Hostel, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi - 67, India.

*Hon'ble Chief Minister Shri Naveen Patnaik laying foundation stone of Administrative Block of Construction Academy at Gopalpur, Balikuda on 12.11.2008. Shri Ananga Udaya Singh Deo, Minister, Works, Housing is also present.*