

Research study on
**Traditional Rural Handicraft Activities:
A Case Study of Mask Making in Majuli and
Bell and Brass Metal Works in Sarthebari, Assam**



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CASE STUDY – III

Traditional Rural Handicraft Activities: A Case Study of Mask Making in Majuli and Bell and Brass Metal Works in Sarthebari, Assam

Assam has the unique tradition of manufacturing handicraft products since time immemorial. The art and dexterity of the traditional handicraft products together with their utility not only make them a part of the life and culture of the Assamese society, but also serve as a source of livelihood to many households in villages across the state. Though Assam is mostly known for its exquisite skills in cane and bamboo products, several other crafts have also successfully made their mark in the state. In fact, each region of Assam is known for its unique forms of art and handicrafts. Two such traditional handicraft activities which have survived for centuries in the state are the mask making craft of Majuli, and the bell and brass metal craft in Sarthebari in the Barpeta district of Assam.

Mask making or *Mukha Shilpa* of Majuli¹ is an age old artform in the island which dates back to the 16th century. Mask making is one of the most famous traditional crafts still practised in Majuli which is situated in the upper reaches of the river Brahmaputra in upper Assam. The mask making craft has been an integral part of the Sattriya culture of Assam. The craft has been mainly confined to the Xatras² and individual craftsmen residing in the surrounding villages of the Xatras in Majuli. Till recent times, the demand for these masks was confined to the traditional theatres called *Bhaonas* in Assam. However, presently the masks are being made both for religious as well as commercial purposes. Several local youths in Majuli are taking a keen interest in this traditional art form which can contribute towards livelihood generation.

Yet another craft, the brass and bell metal works of Sarthebari in the Barpeta district of Assam, is indeed interwoven with the socio-cultural life of the people of Assam. It bears a distinctive mark of the artisans working on brass and bell metal. The household-based brass and bell metal units in the district are manufacturing traditional bell and brass metal utensils and

1. Majuli, a world heritage site with a 1.52 lakh population, including over 70,000 Mising tribals and with a population density of 300 per sq.km is the largest river island of the world in the River Brahmaputra in Assam. The island is formed by the Brahmaputra river in the south and the Kherkutia *Xuti*, another branch of the Brahmaputra joined by the Subansiri river in the north. As indicated, the dwellers of Majuli are mostly from the Mising tribe apart from the tribes namely Deori and Sonowal Kacharis.

Majuli is also the first riverine island declared as a district in the country. It is the 35th district of Assam formed in June 2016. In addition to *Mukha Shilpa*, Majuli, a land of organic agriculture is the bowl of unique rice production like komal saul – a breakfast cereal which can be taken after being immersed in water for 15 minutes, bao dhan – the rice that grows under water for ten months in a year, and bora saul – a sticky rice which is used to make traditional cakes like pithas. Other than agriculture and mask making, the inhabitants of the island are also into economic activities like fishing, dairy, pottery, handloom and boat making, etc.

2. Satra connotes a monastery. At one stage, Majuli had around 65 monasteries which today has come down to 22.

decorative items. This traditional manufacturing activity, spread across several villages in the district has its origin dated back to several centuries. The craftsmen who are called as *Kanhoror Orja* even now resort to the age-old tools and technologies required for burning and shaping the bell and brass metal. In spite of traditional mode of manufacturing, the craft has been providing livelihoods to many households across the villages of Sarthebari.

However, with the passage of time and open market economy, the above traditional handicraft activities are found to be facing many challenges for survival. The present case study is therefore, an attempt to capture the transition of the above two handicraft activities in a dynamic globalised economy and their resilience for survival amidst all odds. In the light of these facts, the study tries to address the following research questions:

1. What is the status of the two traditional rural crafts in the changing and competitive economic environment?
2. What are the challenges that these traditional handicrafts and the artisans involved in these activities are facing?
3. What factors are favouring the continuity of the practice of the two art forms?

The study, therefore, has been taken up with the following objectives:

- To trace the historical background and present status of the two rural traditional handicraft art forms of Assam
- To bring out the challenges faced by the traditional handicrafts in mask making and items made of bell and brass metal in the changing economic scenario
- To document a few successes stories for replication in similar traditional rural art forms elsewhere in the country.

This study is carried out using case study method. For collection and documentation of primary information, field visits have been undertaken in the locations where these handicrafts are practiced. Interviews and focused group discussions have been carried out using semi structured interview checklist. Photographs pertaining to the two crafts taken during filed visits are part of the case presentations.

Mask Making in Majuli



Majority of the Hindus residing in Majuli are followers of the Vaishnavite tradition propagated by the great 16th century neo-Vaishnavite Saint of Assam, Shrimanta Sankardeva. Rooted in faith and prayer, there is no idol worship or sacrifice in Vaishnavism. Instead, *Naam Prasangas*, that is, reaching out to the omnipresent through the medium of devotional songs and music, and dance drama forms known as *Bhaona* and *Ankiyanat* in local colloquial language, written by Shrimanta Sankardeva drawn from the Bhagawat Gita are the common practices among the neo-Vaisnavites of the island³.

Traditionally, the art of mask making in the island is infact linked to these very *Bhaonas* and *Ankiyanats*. The masks were used to bring to life the characters of the Bhagawat Gita in front of the devotees—a means which helped in bringing the Puranic characters to physical form. This artform helped the devotees to associate and connect themselves with the mythological characters and their expressions.

The Xatras in Majuli, where the art of mask making is traditionally practiced, are the pilgrimage places of Vaishnavism in Assam where young boys, the disciples of Vaishnavism are trained in mask making. Natun Samaguri Xatra and Uttar Kamalabari Xatra in Majuli have the worldwide acclaim for making exquisite traditional masks. It has been practised by the *Bhakats*⁴ here for centuries.

However, currently the masks are made both for religious as well as commercial purposes. In the Xatras, the art of mask making is mostly limited to – (a) *Bhakats* who are inclined towards mask making and have continued with the tradition, and (b) demand for masks during the time of the *Raas* festival⁵ in November and December every year when the *Bhaonas* and *Ankiyanats* are held. Mostly used in the *Bhaonas* and *Ankiyanats*, this art of making mask today has transcended the Xatras into the livelihood activities of the rural households in and around the Xatras.

3. It is the means through which prayers are offered to the Almighty.

4. Devotees of the Lord

5. It is a three day festival celebrated in honour of Lord Krishna. During the festival, *Bhaonas* and *Ankiyanats* (dance dramas) are held depicting the life of Krishna.

Mask Making – The Process, Market and Income

It is found that traditionally three types of masks are made in Majuli – (a) *Mukha* or face masks, (b) *Lotokaimukha* or masks used to move lips, eyes hands, etc., and (c) *Bor Mukha* or masks of nearly life size or even larger in special cases. Traditionally, mask making begins with the preparation of the frame for the mask which is made using bamboo, cane, water reeds, string, paper and glue, etc.

This is followed by application of plaster on the frame with mud which then is sun dried. Once the drying process is over, paint is applied on the surface of the frame and allowed to dry. Dressing of the mask is done by the master craftsmen. The individual craftsmen, mostly young boys and girls from nearby villages, are also practicing mask making as a means of livelihood. It is observed that it is the rich tradition of mask making along with the opportunity to earn a part-time livelihood is drawing the youth of the island (mostly students) to take up the artform as a part time activity.

The local markets in Majuli and demand from other Xatras in districts like North Lakhimpur, Jorhat, etc., in Assam sustain the artform in the island. Majuli being the largest riverine island has many a footfall of visitors not only from within the country but also from other countries. These visitors often search for local souvenirs to carry back home with them. In fact, many of the visitors of late have been found to have a taste for these masks.

This is changing the context of mask making in the island from being only an artform governed by religious context to an art form driven by market taste and preference. In addition to making the religious masks for *Bhaonas* and *Ankiyanats*, a few of the artisans and



youth today are making the masks in the requisite size and shape as per the taste of the customers. This has opened up a livelihood avenue for the youth taking the artform in the island. The youth involved in mask making as a part time activity are earning an average income of Rs. 300-500 for every two days. However, for the artisans with dexterity, the average income per day ranges from Rs. 400 to Rs. 500.

Mask Making – The Challenges

The local restricting factors which are found to negate flourishing of the art among the youth in the island are mostly lack of family support and competition from non-artisans. But what is more lacking among the traditional artisans and the youth involved in mask making in the island is lack of exposure – exposure to quality products, diversified products, new tools and technology, art of packaging, and lack of knowledge on market linkages and dimensions of outside market. Simple hand tools like the *dao*, knife and hammer are used in making of the masks. With no proper worksheds and technology infusion, this art form is mostly practiced in open and therefore, is governed by vagaries of nature. During monsoons, the artisans cannot practise the art of mask making as the masks are to be dried under sunlight. This has restricted the livelihood activity of mask making in Majuli to only few months of the year.

Mask Making – The Way Forward

Mask making, an indigenous craft, is deep rooted in the tradition and culture of Majuli. Promotion of making masks with all seriousness will effectively strengthen the livelihood opportunities for the youth in Majuli. Given the challenges in mask making, both soft and hard interventions in the form of giving exposure to training in modern technology and quality management, training on new product development and product promotion, development of sales outlet, inculcation of market intelligence through participation in domestic and international fairs, provision of credit linkage and provision of worksheds and common facility centres, etc., can go a long way in making this rich traditional artform of mask making in Majuli a sought after livelihood activity among the youth in Majuli.



Successful Cases

Case 1: Haren Goswami, is an artisan of Mukha Shilpa (mask making) in the Natun Samuguri Xatra of Majuli. Born and brought up in a family where the art and dexterity of mask making has been passed on from generation to generation, Shri Goswami is no exception. At the age of 42, Shri Goswami is also into training and conducting workshops on mask making for the youth of Majuli.

Two young students - Ananta Kalita and Pranjal Das - have undergone training in the art of mask making under Haren Goswami. Ananta Kalita is a vocational arts student and Pranjal Das is pursuing his higher secondary studies. It is the passion for learning the beautiful artform made them to undergo training in mask making with Haren Goswami and Hemchandra Goswami (Guru of Haren Goswami). Having successfully undergone training, they have taken up the artform as a part time income generating activity. For almost a year now, it is after college hours that they join Haren Goswami and Hemchandra Goswami in mask making.

They make the traditional mukhas during the Raas festival as well at other times. Usually, it is the Xatras located in other parts of Assam like Jorhat, Titabor and Lakhimpur, etc., that generate the demand for masks during the Raas festival. During the rest of the seasons, they make the masks for the tourists visiting the Xatras of Majuli.

Mostly dependent on nature, the artform suffers during the monsoons. Since the craft needs sunlight to dry and is made in the open, it is the boys who are bereft of this part time activity during the rainy season. The basic raw materials like bamboo, cane and a reed called kuhila⁶ or cork-wood required for the making the caricature of the masks are grown and nurtured in nature. Besides, cow dung, clay, cotton cloth, glue, string, paper, paints made from hangool and haital⁷, brush, etc., are used in making the masks.

6. Kuhila or cork-wood grows abundantly in the paddy fields of baodhan – a variety of deep water paddy

7. Hangool and haital are medieval products of Assam used as paints. Infact, many of the manuscripts written during the medieval period contain paintings using hangool and haital.

The masks made, as mentioned earlier, are of traditional mythological characters like Hanuman, Ganesha, Brahma, Garuda Pakshi, Ram, Sita, Lakshman, Ravana, Narasimha, Asura, Surpanakha, Dushasan, Putana Rakshasi, Jatayu, Kumbhakarna and Kali Sarpa, etc. These masks of varied sizes are made to stage Bhaonas and Ankiyanats or plays during the Raas festival. During other times, the same characters are made into mukhas but of much smaller size – a size that can be carried back as a souvenir by the tourists.

A distinct division of labour is practised while making the masks. Each one involved in making of a mask is assigned a particular task in the process. And, if things go right, beginners like Shri Ananta Kalita and Shri Pranjal Dascan earn around Rs. 500 each every two-four days by selling the masks made.

Case 2: Krishna Kanta Bora, Narayan Neog, Jiban Saikia, Dibjyoti Goswami and Nipen Dutta mostly in their early twenties are not only learning the art of mask making in Natun Samuguri Xatra of Majuli but also are earning from the artform. Some of them pursuing higher secondary, others are pursuing either degree or master degree. They are learning the artform after college hours. Khagen Goswami who is into his mid-thirties along with Hemchandra Goswami and Haren Goswami are teaching the youth in not only the artform but also making them earn gainful income from the artform. It has been more than ten years that Hemchandra Goswami, Haren Goswami and Khagen Goswami have been training the young boys and girls in mask making.

These youths have the parental and family support in learning the artform. Besides personal fervour for learning and taking up the artform as a livelihood activity, the demand in the local market for the masks is attracting these youth towards mask making. However, the young generation feel that the use of traditional methods and tools for mask making makes the process a time consuming one with lesser productivity. Therefore, there is a felt need towards infusion of new methods and technology at each stage of making a mask.

Case 3: Honoured with the Sangeet Natak Akademi Puraskar in 2003, Kosha Kanta Deva Goswami aged around 86 years is a living doyen of mask making in the Natun Samuguri Xatra of Majuli. The Xatradhikar of the Natun Samuguri Xatra and also a recipient of Pranab Baruah Shilpi Bota in 2013, Kosha Kanta Deva Goswami has trained many hands in mask making. It is under him that Naren Goswami, Pradip Goswami, Dhiren Goswami have learned the art of mask

making. Also, many foreign tourists who visit the island have become disciples of Kosha Kanta Deva Goswami.

The young boys Rupam Goswami, Anupam Goswami, Dhiren Goswami, Gautam Bhuyan, Ankur Baruah who are pursuing their higher secondary studies from villages in and around the Xatra are undergoing training in the art of mask making at Xatra. Initially, these boys have tried their hands in mask making by observing their elders who are into mask making. However, for the last two years they have been formally undergoing training in mask making at the Xatra. It is after college hours that they come to learn the artform. The two years of hands on experience in mask making has enabled the boys to earn an average income of Rs. 3,000-4,000 per month for which they have to spend three to four hours every day for five days in a week.

Though the young boys are enjoying their part time income generating activity and few of them are also contemplating to take the artform as a fulltime livelihood activity, mask making, according to them, needs new interventions in the form of technology infusion, access to credit, workshed facility, market exposure and so on.

Bell and Brass Metal Works in Sarthebari





Assam has a rich tradition of manufacturing bell and brass metal products which can be traced through many archaeological findings in the State. The culture of making bell and brass metals spread not only within the state but also outside the state.

Sarthebari⁸ in Barpeta district in Assam occupies a unique place for its famous bell and brass metal industry which dates back to the 17th century. The industry has survived 400 years post Mughal invasion of Assam. Every house of Sarthebari has an informal workshop or garhshal where a group of workmen called *kohars* beat bell metal into aesthetic utilitarian products - an integral part of Assamese culture. Currently, Sarthebari has around 300 bell metal units which provide direct employment to around 2,000 artisans and indirect employment to many.

There is no authentic documentary evidence regarding the genesis of the state's bell metal industry. However, evidences in history point to the industry's existence since the Mauryan period (321-185 BC). Some written documents trace its existence to 7th century AD when Kumar Bhaskar Barman, the then king of Kamrupa, presented a *Kangshapatra* (a bell metal item) to king Harshavardhana of North India.

8. Situated at a distance of about 95 km from Guwahati, Sarthebari is in the easternmost part of the Barpeta district in Assam.

Today, the bell and brass metal units in Sarthebari are manufacturing traditional bell metal items like the *Bhoortal* (big size cymbal used during prayers), *Bota* (a traditional tray for offering betel nuts) and utensils like *Kedahi*, *Charia*, etc., and brass metal items like the *Kalah* (water pot), *Xorai* (a platter or tray mounted on a base), *Japi*, *Bota*, utensils like plates & dishes (*Kahi/ Thal - Dofla/Saras/Aasli, Saras* etc.) serving bowls (*Ban Bati*), cymbals (*Taal*), containers (*Charia/ Gamla*) and decorative items like vases (*Phooldani*), banana tree, and decorative frames and art work (Idols of Gods, Goddess, etc).

Bell and Brass Metal Works – The Process, Market & Income

The bell and brass metal household units known as *garhxhals* are basically run by the members of the same family or close relatives of the owners of the units. On an average, two male members from each family are engaged in the units. The units are run on a partnership or on proprietary basis. At the end of the month, profit is divided among the partners. A unique work division or specialisation runs through the production units.

As bell and brass metal products demand both physical strength and artistic skill, it is found that each worker in a *garhxhal* specialises in making or contributing to the making of only a part of a product. With years of practice with hands, the bell and brass metal artisans and workers seem to be satisfied with the traditional tools and techniques leaving hardly any scope for mechanisation of the units.

Though the primary raw material in case of bell metal is procured in the form of old and broken articles, bellsheests⁹ made of copper and tin are also bought. Brass being an alloy of copper and zinc, brasswares are manufactured out of thin sheets of copper and zinc, either from available scrap metal¹⁰ or metal bought from outside. The artisans and the units

10. The raw material of brass and bell metal is often purchased in the form of already used brass and bell metal items such as bowls, drinking glass or plates, etc.

9. A form of bronze

mostly procure the raw material from local traders, cooperatives and *Mahjans*.

In case of bell metal, the scrap bought is melted, casted into different sizes, heated, quenched, beaten up and turned into shapes followed by polishing. For manufacturing brass metal commodities, the metal sheets are cut into the requisite size and moulded into shapes required by beating with hammers. The adjoining parts are fastened with brazing. The products are then smoothed with the help of a file and a little shine is given to them by rubbing with sand. Engraving is done with the help of hammer and chisel. In the whole process, a furnace becomes indispensable.



The melting furnace is a unique and important requirement in the process of manufacturing bell and brass metal products. The melting furnace or *Chula* is utilised for melting the raw material. The *Chula* is prepared by the unit owners in a traditional mode. It is about 40-70 cm wide and 15-60 cm deep. Hard coke is used for melting in the *Chula*.

The tools and equipment used by the artisans in manufacturing bell and brass wares are the simple handmade tools like anvils (Belmuri), Chatuli, hammers, chisels, files and a few other minor implements. Tools like *Dulari*, *Gasha*, *Saria*, *Piri*, *Khanta* (an iron instrument used for polishing the bell metal products) and pocker are also used in case of bell metal. The other raw materials procured and used are burnt coal or coke, copper, zinc, tin, acid, lacquer, borax powder, *kund*, jute fibre, rice bran and mustard oil, etc.

The products manufactured are usually procured by the raw material suppliers, dealers from local markets and *Mahajans*. The artisans seldom sell the products on their own. Despite the hard labour involved, the average monthly income of an artisan family of bell and brass metal is found to be a little above Rs. 6,000/-.





Bell and Brass Metal Works – The Challenges

Both the brass and bell metal workers depend on local dealers for raw materials. These local dealers or *Mahajans* set the prices of the manufactured products according to their whims and caprices. Added to it, the industry is also facing stiff competition from machine made products from places like Moradabad and Kolkata. These machine-made products which have better polish and finishing have a larger market share than the traditional hand made products.

The bell and brass metal units throughout Sarthebari are household *garhxhals* in which the smithy owners or master craftsmen of the units make their own worksheds, collect raw materials like brass, bell metal, charcoal and coke, etc. These master craftsmen liaison and maintain business relations with the *Mahajans* and traders from nearby semi-urban pockets like Baniakuchi.

The *Mahajans* provide the capital to the master craftsmen and also decide the product to be made along with the quantity required. Availability of easy finance from the *Mahajans*, is in fact, exploitative in nature. Paucity of fixed and working capital acts as stumbling block in many ways. First, they cannot store raw material and finished products. Secondly, they cannot procure raw material in bulk.

For many of their problems, the bell metal workers have a cooperative society as a strong union to fall back upon. The cooperative society helps source the raw materials but the government plays a negligible role. It was Kohiram Das, a master craftsman of bell metal on whose initiative the Assam Cooperative Bell Metal Utensils Manufacturing Society Limited way back in 1993. The Society was formed to safeguard the interests of the bell metal workers.

artisans have a strong cooperative society to rely on. But scarcity of charcoal and old broken bell metal products is posing a dire challenge for the bell metal artisans to continue with the profession. The tools used in both bell and brass metal *garhxhals* too are primitive and handmade ones like the hammer, chaini, tong, kunda (traditional spinning tool), sharp edged instruments twisted at the tips known as the *luwaal*, *dhonukar* (shaped like a traditional bow) etc. It is only the polishing machine which sometimes runs on electricity. But again, it is observed that most of the polishing machines across the *garhxhals* are hand driven.

Power supply and lighting arrangements in the *garhxhals* are also rather poor thus hampering the working hours. Besides, hazardous and difficult working conditions in the *garhxhals* with no safety measures not only physically strain the metal workers but also make them prone to respiratory disorders and chest pain owing to inhaling of long hours of toxic gases from the burning charcoals.

Regarding marketing of the products, the Assam Co-operative Bell Metal Utensils Manufacturing Society Ltd. has been playing a major role by providing the artisans of bell metal products in Sarthebaria platform for selling their products. The cooperative society has display and sales counters across Guwahati, Jorhat, Lakhimpur, Sibsagar, Golaghat and Tezpur in Assam. Despite the past glory and subsequent development initiatives, the bell and brass metal industry, has various internal, external as well as operational problems. Though the traditional industry has been providing livelihoods to many households, it needs interventions in the areas such as proper availability and costing of raw material, pricing of finished products, product diversification, design inputs, skill training, training in packaging, marketing issues, exposure visits, financial linkage, ergonomic designing of tools, technology infusion, providing proper worksheds with electricity, provision of health benefits in the form of health insurance, safety and hygienic measures like provision of masks and proper sanitation facilities, supply chain management and so on.



Successful Cases

Case 1: Hari Das is a brass metal artisan. It is more than 200 years ago that Bapuram Das, one of his forefathers tried his hands-on brass metal works. Ever since, for generations, brass metal works have become a source of livelihood for the progeny of Bapuram Das. Aged around 44 years, Hari Das has been into brass metal works for the last 12 years. His day in the garhxhal begins at six o'clock in the morning and continues up to nine o'clock at night. Today, the garhxhal of Hari Das not only sustains his family but is also supports the families of five other craftsmen employed in his garhxhal.

Case 2: Umesh Barman and Paramesh Barman are two brothers aged 39 years and 35 years respectively. Having undergone training in brass metal at Baniakuchi, Barpeta, both the brothers are into the craft for more than 10 years now. Specialising in xorai making, they make the xorais on order. Eight other craftsmen are employed in the garhxhal. Working from six am in the morning to late evening, they make around 20 xorais a day. A xorai weighing around 13 kg fetch them an income of around Rs. 2,080/- at the wholesale rate of Rs. 160 per kg. A middleman named Harmon Deka collects the finished products from the garhxhal. What they need today is more capital for marketing the products on their own.

Case 3: Kulen Barman is a young craftsman who along with his brothers Sailen Barman (aged 41 years), Madan Barman (aged 45 years) and Dharani Barman (aged 33 years) is running a garhxhal in brass metal for the last 18 years. All four brothers have undergone training in the craft at Baniakuchi. The work in the garhxhal which specialises in making xorais starts at six am in the morning. The garhxhal makes around 15-20 xorais a day. Each brother draws a salary of Rs. 6000 per month from the earnings of the garhxhal. The garhxhal has been able to give a decent living to the Barman family.

Case 4: Khon Barman is 42-year-old craftsmen and an owner of a brass metal garhxhal. He has been practising the craft since the age of seven and has an experience of 35 years in making xorais. He makes xorais and other utility items like the koloh in his garhxhal. The garhxhal fetches him an income of Rs. 10,000-12,000 per month.

Case 5: Nipam Barman, 30-year-old craftsman in brass metal has been running a garhxhal along with his three brothers Dipen Barman, Loken Barman and Bolen Barman. The garhxhal, making different goods of brass metal, is sustaining a large joint family of the Barmans.

Case 6: Harekrishna Deka, a 48-year-old-craftsman in brass metal has been practicing the artform for the last 18 years. Having read up to class VIII, Harekrishna Deka has been making various diversified utility and decorative items of brass metal like Mandir, doba, xorai and statues, etc., Harekrishna Deka today is in need of new technology in brass metal craft which can save time and give quality output.

Case 7: Deepak Deka has been into brass metal craftsmanship for almost 20 years now. In his garhxhal, Deepak Deka has engaged four other skilled craftsmen, namely Deben Das, Nabajit Deka, Rupdhan Das and Pranjal Das. They make mostly the japi and duloni. Deepak Deka procures the raw material locally and sells the finished products on his own in Fancy Bazar in Guwahati. Since most of the products made are based on order, market is not a problem. However, Deepak Deka is yet to participate in any fair.

Deepak Deka, after meeting all variable expenditures including salary of the craftsmen engaged in his garhxhal, earns a profit of Rs. 10,000-12,000/- a month. Deepak Deka is reluctant to allow his children to learn and continue in business due to the hardship involved in the trade along with the meagre returns.

Case 8: Hari Das is 44-years-old-craftsman of brass metal. Hari Das has been practising the artform for the last 12 years and has been earning a decent income for sustaining his family. Hari Das is involved in the making of various brass metal items like mandirs and diyas, etc.

Case 9: Haridas Das is an awardee in brass metal works who has made replicas of moving train and Saraighat Bridge. Having done his schooling up to class VIII, Haridas Das has been into the artform for the last 10 years. A craftsman of par excellence, Haridas Das has been making xorais to sustain his family of six members.

Case 10: Jatin Deka has been running a garhxhal engaging six skilled craftsmen in brass metal. Jatin Deka has been manufacturing brass metal products like the xorai and has been delivering

the finished products in shops in Guwahati and upper Assam. Earning an average monthly income of Rs. 20,000-25,0000, Jatin Deka has been able to provide a decent living to his family.

Case 11: Abani Deka has a garhxhal in bell metal works. Having exclusive expertise in making Bhutia taals, apart from Bhutan, Abani Deka gets orders to make these taals from Nepal, China and Tibet. Having engaged around six workers in the xhal, Abani Deka is a successful bell metal craftsman today.

Case 12: Rajiv Choudhry, Biren Tamuli, Hemen Tamuli, Kamal Deka, Pujit Talukdar and Diganta Deka work together in a bell metal garhxhal and are experts in making Dafla kaahis (big serving plates). The income which they earn from the garhxhal is divided among them after meeting all expenses.



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