



THE ROLE OF HANDICRAFTS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL TOURISM INDUSTRY IN THE DOOARS REGION: A GEOGRAPHICAL ANALYSIS

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Abstract:

Over the past few years, India's rural tourism industry has grown unimaginably. Rural tourism contributes to the nation's development by creating job opportunities, increasing Gross Domestic Product (GDP), and earning foreign exchange. The rural tourism industry and handicrafts are closely intertwined. Handicrafts are unambiguously one of the most feasible contenders for promoting rural tourism. West Bengal, particularly Dooars region, has distinguished artisans from time immemorial. The skill of the artisan is a traditional representation. These handicrafts have always been a source of fascination for Indian and foreign tourists. Handicraftsmen make a simple object very artistic with their proficient hands. This type of handicraft is widely used in modern homes for beautification and decor purposes. These beautiful objects are sold in the local markets, and numerous tourists' visits for the same. Several handicraft families are entirely dependent on this industry sector in the Dooars region. However, this handicraft industry is going through numerous inconveniences and the present study attempts to find out the remedial measures. This study also endeavours to examine the role of handicrafts in the economical growth and promotion of rural tourism. Different underlying policies are identified, and if the state government and the ministry of tourism come forward, it could definitely help in the tourism industry. This study would also attempt to find the appropriate techniques for developing handicrafts in the rural tourism field.

Keywords: Unimaginably, Rural Tourism, Gross Domestic Product, Job Opportunities, unambiguously, Artisan, Beautification.

Introduction: Art and craft are the essences and core of Indian culture, which preserved the cultural heritage until the date and to some extent, improved the

livelihood of the rural community. India is popularly known as the faithful blue shopper's paradise, with a rich cultural background reflected in the complexity of its handicrafts. The artistic skills of craftsmanship and its crafts always make an external source of magnetism to the domestic and foreign tourists in India (Mohapatra, 2011). The age-old artisan always depicts the history of our country, and strangers are engrossed by the mind-blowing handicrafts products made by the local artisans. Nowadays, the tourism industry has become a fascination among the people who travel from one destination to other. Visitors are eager to explore various handicrafts markets in the destination and try to get some of the products as a souvenir. Thus, the relationship between handicraft products and the tourism industry is interlinked.

Concept of Handicrafts:

Crafts are useful substances produced by hand using simple or no technology. It has numerous utility right from the domestic equipment to ornamental items, religious or ritual things – often meant for individuals within a specific community or for established trade networks, and also often incorporate varied and symbolic imagery. Individuals, family members, small workshops, or even entire villages concentrate on a particular type of handicrafts object produced in most manufacturing industry scenarios. Handicrafts are often made from locally obtained materials such as wood, leather, clay, stone, plant and animal fibers, or metal, although rare materials acquired through trading ties are also used. Carvings, leatherwork, textiles, pottery, and metals are examples of handicrafts (Cohen, 1993).

West Bengal has rich cultural diversity, where various castes, religions, and other demographic features are intermingled here. People of the state have multiple talents, and their artistic ideas make the state and the variety or the range of creations popular in terms of handicrafts or artesian goods. The enticing clay models, stunning Dhokra (non-ferrous brassware product), shola, and the silk of Malda districts in the West Bengal are popular across the country. Besides, the present study area (Dooars Region) has numerous handicrafts products like wooden furniture and various utility products made from cane,

bamboo, and tree branches which are well furnished and in high demand among the visitors in the region.

Review of literature:

Ahmed (1980) tried to explain the role of central and state governments in promoting the handicrafts industry on a micro and macro level. He also claimed that there is an urgent need to give more attention to this heritage and cultural based industry which has an unlimited opportunity for the economic growth of rural India.

Chattopadhyaya (1996) has elaborately explained the state-wise distribution of Indian handicrafts, which are significant in terms of states' glory and added endowment in its treasury due to inflow of tourism activity. Additionally she also mentioned the most famous handicrafts products of Orissa.

Zargham (2012) has recognized the handicrafts that impact the long-term sustainability of individual tourist sectors, considering the handicrafts' sufficiency in achieving the ongoing tourism development and providing strategies to improve handicrafts. Also, to ensure the long-term maxim processes, services and products, wherever possible, be the alternatives that have a lower impact on the environment of rural tourism.

Maji & Das (2016) tried to find out the existing handicrafts products of Bankura district of West Bengal. They also explained the importance of crafts products for the expansion of tourism industry in the district and the state as well.

Shah & Patel (2019) described the contribution of artisans to preserve the heritage and the historical culture through their skills and talents. Further, they gave their views on the present socioeconomic conditions of the artisans and suggested some remedial measures to protect this industry.

Mohapatra & Dash (2011) focused on the existing problems associated with the handicrafts industry in the state of Orissa. They have quoted various prominent examples which have a direct impact and are faced by the artisans and the tourism industry. Moreover, the authors have appropriately described the importance of handicrafts to the thriving tourism industry.

Objectives:

The principal objective of the present study is to explore the linkage between handicrafts and rural tourism in Dooars region of West Bengal, India. The present paper seeks to highlight the existing handicrafts artisans and find problems along with opportunities in the Dooars region. Specifically, the main objectives of the study are-

1. To look at the existing handicrafts products in the study area.
2. To explore the relationship between the handicrafts and tourism industry.
3. To examine the visitor's perception towards handicrafts products in the destinations.
4. To scan the present problems and opportunities.
5. To suggest some remedial measures.

Research Methodology and Database:

The present study is conducted under four selected tourist destinations at Lataguri, Murti, Jayanti, and Jaldapara. Random sampling was conducted for the present study. Primary and secondary data were collected through direct interviews referring to journals and government reports, publications, local newspapers, and through the internet to concerned networking sites. There was a total of 170 samples randomly selected from three different sources- visitors (120), Shopkeepers (20), and handicraftsmen (50), respectively. The collected field data has been analyzed with suitable statistical techniques and formulas through IBM SPSS 20 software.

Selection of the Study Area: The present study area is located on the western side of the Sankosh River, the eastern part of the Teesta river, and the northern side of the Bhutan hills. The place extends with the latitudinal and longitudinal extension of 26°30'N to 27°0'N and 88°E to 90°E. Dooars is one of the incredible destinations for its forest cover, attractive lush green tea gardens, and abundant Perennial River following from the northern Himalayas. Dooars region under Jalpaiguri and Alipuduar districts of West Bengal covers an area of 6227sq.km. The part is a southward slope, and the highest altitude is 1725 feet. The region experiences a temperature of 26°C and rainfall of 50mm on an average.

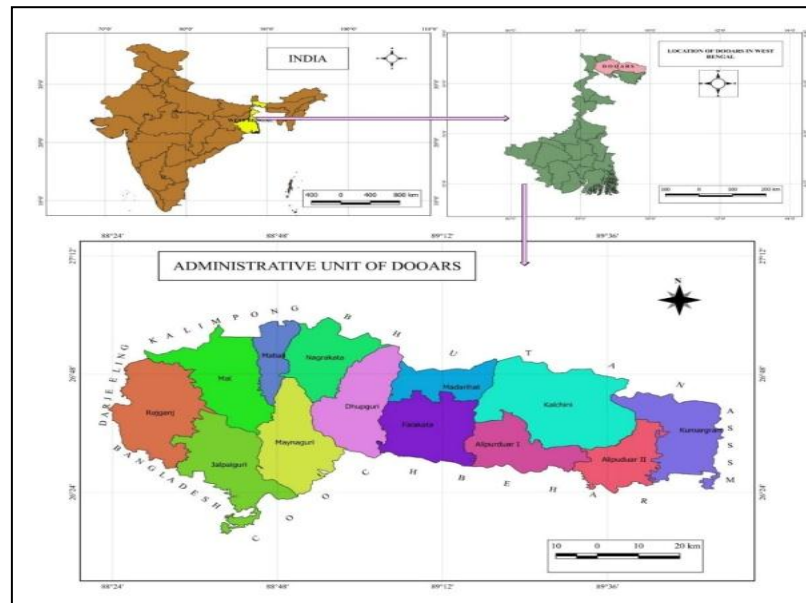


Fig. 1

The term ‘Dooars’ means, ‘doors to Bhutan.’ Eighteen gates are connected with the hills of north Bengal, Sikkim, and the northeastern states of India. Various kind of wildlife is present in the dense forests like Gorumara National Park, Chapramari wildlife sanctuary, Jaldapara National Park, Buxa Tiger Reserve Forest, etc. All these forests have a rich biodiversity of flora and fauna. The region is popular with British colonial tea gardens and Bungalows.

Existing Handicrafts in Dooars Region: Dooars region is popular with its wildlife, ethnicity of the tribal communities, and various tourism products offered to the visitors to the destination. Handicrafts are one of the most prevalent and prominent points of symbolic art with an extended back history in the region. Numerous communities/castes have been involved with this artistic talent. Table 1 shows the present status of handicrafts products in the area. There are a total of four types of handicrafts products expected in the place, and all the raw materials used are locally provided or available. Among all the products, ‘Sital Pati’ (Mat of cane) is well known by the visitors, and it has a high demand for the tourists. A tea table made from tea roots is another important handicraft product unique in the region. Besides, the tourists highly appreciate wooden furniture made of teak wood and cane products.

Table No. 1 Category-wise Existing Handicrafts Products in Dooars Region

Sl. No.	Category	Sub-Category	Examples
1	Wood Crafts	Furniture, Showpiece, Kitchen Utensils, Jewellery, Home Décor,	Beds, Table, Curtain hook, DIY pallet plaques, Wooden drawer, wooden plant stand,
2	Cane Crafts	Mat, Furniture, Decor	Beg, Home Sital Pati, handbags, Cane tray, Cane Sticks, Cane Box,
3	Bamboo Crafts	Furniture, Home Décor, Kitchen Items, Showpiece,	Chair, Bamboo placemats, Bamboo toys, Bamboo lamps, Bamboo wind chimes, Bamboo baskets.
4	Jute/Cotton Crafts	Mat, Home Decor, Garments,	Jute Basket, Jute Curtains, Jute Flowers, Jute mats, Flower pots

Source: Based on Primary Data, 2021-22



Handicrafts and Tourism:

The modern world is occupied with automation products, but hand-made products make people curious. Each handicrafts products has its own ancient story, which is the main attraction to the people. The tourism industry is the

accumulation of various aspects, and local artesian products are a blooming recognition for the destination because every visitor wants to make their trip forever memorable. The uniqueness of each crafts item is another characteristic that is carefully reshaped by the skilled hand, and no similar or alike products can be seen. Many tourists pay special attention to the local products of the place before visiting the destination because they love to shop. Not only these, but handicrafts have also improved the financial status of the local community. Similarly, it creates new job opportunities as there is a high demand for local products from the visitors. So the development process of handicrafts is essential in terms of drawing maximum tourists to the area and saving the heritage or culture of the place. That is why the tourism industry and handicrafts products go hand in hand.

Visitors' perception of existing products:

The satisfaction of tourists is an essential component of the region's further development. So, the present study has tried to determine the visitor satisfaction level regarding handicrafts products available in the Dooars region. Therefore, Hudale's (2012) formula has been applied to assess visitor fulfilment levels.

Formula: $S_{li} = \frac{\sum M_i \cdot N_i}{N}$, Where, S_{li} = Level of Satisfaction Index for 'i'th factor, M_i = Numerical value for the individual level of satisfaction for the 'i'th factor, N_i = Number of respondents deriving the particular satisfaction level of satisfaction for 'i'th factor, and, N = Total Number of respondent for all level of satisfaction (Hudale, S and Bhakare, 2012).

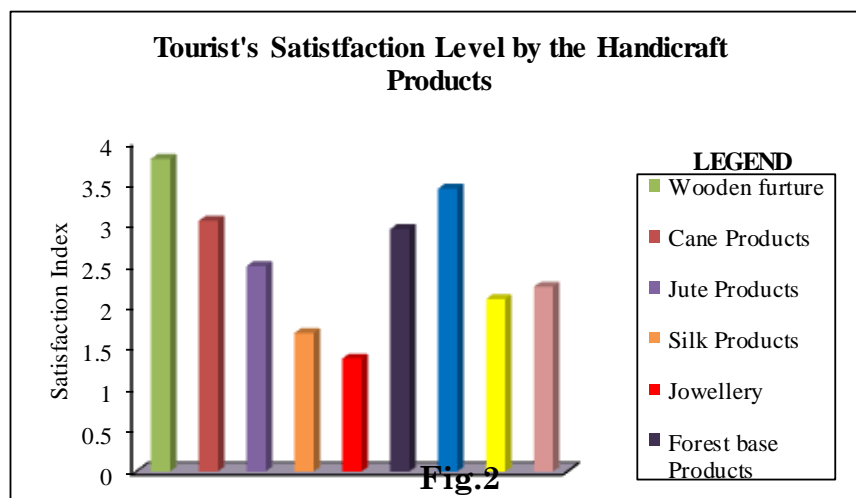
Table No. 2 Visitor's Satisfaction Index of Various Handicrafts Products

Components	Excellent	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfied	Satisfaction Index	Rank
Wooden furniture	100	15	5	0	3.79	1
Cane Products	50	40	15	15	3.04	3
Jute Products	20	30	59	11	2.49	5
Silk Products	5	21	25	69	1.68	8
Jewellery	4	6	20	90	1.37	9
Forest base Products	50	26	31	13	2.94	4

Bamboo Products	65	41	14	0	3.43	2
Cotton Products	11	27	44	38	2.09	7
Clay Products	18	23	49	30	2.24	6

Source: Based on Primary Data, 2021-22

Table 2 shows the satisfaction level of various handicrafts products in the Dooars region provided to tourists. A total 120 of visitors have shared their views, and all the data was carefully analyzed, taking Hodule's satisfaction equation. Most visitors are contented with the quality, and the furnished wooden furniture products ranked number one with a 3.79 point in the satisfaction index. At the same time, bamboo and cane products ranked 2nd and 3rd respectively, with the satisfaction index of 3.43 and 3.04. Moreover, Forest base products, Jute products, Clay Products, and Cotton Product's satisfaction level ranges from 2 to 3, considered "good" at a satisfactory level. Besides, the rest of the products not covered come under unsatisfactory level. Therefore, there is a need for early steps to improve or required measures to advance all those handicrafts products ranging behind or lagging behind their desired level.



Problems and Remedial Measures of Handicrafts Industry:

The fact handmade products always preserved the ancient arts and culture. The artistic skilled hand is a boon to the community of the Dooars region. But there are specific problems that create a barrier in a row to running the wheel of progress in the handicrafts industry in the region:

1. The tourism industry in the Dooars region is seasonal and as a result, during the lean season, artisans or craftsmen suffer from a financial crisis.
2. The new generation is hesitant to engage themselves in this absorbing work of their ancestors.
3. The local raw material is amply available here in the region, but it is sometimes inconsistent.
4. This handicraft has gradually become unnecessary to the people in modern industrial civilization, which does not inspire the artisans engaged in this industry.
5. Unfortunately, there are no arrangements and wide platforms to sell the products in other states or overseas.
6. So far, it has been seen the government has no concrete plans to expand the industry, and no steps have been taken to motivate the people employed in the handicraft industry by providing them with minimal financial support packages.
7. Various other enforcing environmental laws in the states and in the union restrict the use of diverse forest products required in making the crafts.

Remedial Measures:

Further to improve the handicrafts industry and its market, the following measures and proposals should be given due importance and considered significant in the Dooars region:

1. As tourism is a seasonal business, the central and state government should give financial support to the craftsmen who can pull on during the lean season and continue to manufacture more products.
2. The government should give more attention to the handicrafts industry and promote it to the maximum possible extent through devising the policies, support system, advertisement and trade facilities needed to expand the industry.
3. 'Dooars handicrafts mela' (fair) could be organized where all the craftsmen can display their artistic talent in front of the tourist or visitors. It also gives

locals an opportunity and allows them to enhance their skills and simultaneously attracts tourists to be acquainted with a kind of rural festival.

4. Proper market areas need to be identified where tourists can purchase their required crafts items.
5. There is a high demand for furniture items among the tourists, and all bits and pieces are hefty to deliver. So hassle-free transport systems are required where tourists can easily carry their purchased goods.

Conclusion:

Dooars is one of the most attractive tourist destinations in West Bengal, and every year millions of strangers visit the place. There is a strong relationship between the tourist flow and handicrafts sold in the Dooars region as visitors have a passion for purchasing different local products, and handicrafts are undoubtedly one of them. The artisans, neighbouring raw materials, and excellent handworks fascinate tourists. Although certain problems are always associated with this industry, and it is wide clear that all the related agencies and available mechanisms can easily solve them. Like sponsored NGOs, state and central governments, including the private sectors by taking the initiative to promote the handicraft industry, which will, in turn, can play a significant role in drawing the maximum number of tourists to their destination generating additional source of an income.

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