

The Enchanting Beauty of Bamboo Craft of Bankura

Debanjali Banerjee

National Institute of Fashion Technology, Kolkata

Introduction

Bankura is located in the western part of the State of West Bengal. It is a part of Bardhaman Division of the State and included in the area known as "**Rarh**" in Bengal. It is bounded by **Midnapore** and **Hooghly** district in the East, **Purulia** in the West, **Burdwan** in the North and again **Purulia** and **Midnapore** in the South. Bankura is triangular in shape with a total area of 6882 Sq.km.

Nature has decorated Bankura with her own hands. There are old brown hills, gleaming rivers, several ancient temples and monuments which are the repositories of thought culture and tradition of Bankura.

The fairs of Bankura are often organised in consonance with religious festivities. Examples of such fairs and festivities are **Choitro Gajan** of Ekteswar and **Dharmarajer Gajan** of Beliatore. The major Hindu festivals such as **Durga Puja**, **Kali Puja**, **Lakshmi Puja** and **Saraswati Puja** are celebrated with pomp and grandeur. Major festivals of other religions, such as **Eid al-Adha**, **Eid ul-Fitr**, **Vaisakhi**, **Budha Purnima**, and **Christmas** are also celebrated.



A large number of literary little magazines are published in Bengali from Bankura district. Amongst the little magazines are: **Aaddaa**, **Aalor Shisu**, **Aarja** (quarterly published since 1979), **Columbus** (quarterly published since 1980), **Kabita Dash Dine**, **Kaanchan**, **Kolaaj**, **Kheyaali** (quarterly published since 1981), **Graamin Maatir Gandha**, **Deepti** (quarterly published since 1987), **Tulsi Chandan** (quarterly published since 1982), **Pragati**, **Manikaustav** (monthly published since 1981), **Jaameeni** (bi-monthly published since 1976), **Raamkinkar**, **Lagnausha** (quarterly published since 1979), **Lokaayata**, **Shatadal** (quarterly published since 1981) **Samakriti**, **Sat** (annual published since 1988), and **Mukta Kanthaswar** (quarterly published since 1988).

Handicrafts Prevailing

Bankura district produces a number of terracotta handicrafts, the most popular being the **Bankura horse**. It has been praised for "*its elegant stance and unique abstraction of basic values.*" Originally used for village rituals, it now adorns drawing rooms across the world as symbols of Indian folk-art. It is the logo of All India Handicrafts. The principal centres where the terracotta horses and elephants are

produced are **Panchmura, Rajagram, Sonamukhi and Hamirpur**. Each place has its local style. The Panchmura-style of pottery is considered the best and the finest of all the four types. Among other forms of handicrafts prevalent in Bankura are: dhokra, wood carving, conch-shell, stone carving, bamboo craft, bell metal, bel mala, dasabatar playing cards, and lanterns.

Bamboo Craft

Man has known basket weaving and mat making crafts since the dawn of history. It is thus one of the oldest craft forms. The tribals do most of the basketry and mat making work in India. Today, it adorns the homes of the rich and elite and mud houses alike. Many useful as well as decorative items are made out of it. Fishing contraptions, bamboo and leaf headgear for tea garden workers, etc are used as handicraft items.

Bamboo, botanically known as *bambusa*, belongs, paradoxically enough, to the family of humble grass, *graminae*. But what is more amazing about this plant is the diverse role it plays in the service of mankind, although it grows in utter neglect. One can find it everywhere either in its useful role in a frugal household or rather uselessly as showpiece in exhibitions and in the abode of the rich art lovers.

In West Bengal, varieties of bamboos are available. Each type of bamboo has its own characteristics. The **gonda, goda** and **genthe** bamboos are thick, heavy and knotty while the **beseni, muli** and **talta** bamboos are light, thin and hollow. The uses of different types of bamboos vary according to their durability, characteristics and appearance. The thick and knotty bamboos are mainly used for structural purposes, for making furniture and fencings.

The thin, straight and hollow bamboos are commonly used for making containers, fish traps, baskets etc. **Bajali**, a special type of bamboo, is used exclusively for making flutes. Bamboo is always susceptible to the attacks of germs and fungi. So it calls for chemical treatment. Generally the matured bamboo poles, after collection from bushes, are first cut into pieces and then boiled in large vat in 2% boric acid solution and 2% borax in water. Then the nitrogenous products, which ooze out of bamboo are wiped out. Afterwards, the pieces are dried under the sun on the bed of sand. In this process the bamboo pieces are made immune of the possible attacks of germs and fungi. Despite all this, some bamboo pieces are found to have been attacked by green and orange fungi during the monsoon; in that case, they are treated in a saturated solution of 1% sodium pentachlorophenete in alcohol, which is applied by brush.

Raw Materials

- Bamboo- either bought locally at the rate of Rs 40-50 per bamboo (40ft) or cultivated at home.
- Price fluctuates according to demand and availability. 10-12 bamboo is bought at a time.

- Products made are mostly decorative or fancy items. Pen stands, incense burners, hair clips, flower vases, lamp shades etc. earlier sieves, baskets, etc. were made.
- About hundred small pieces can be made from one bamboo branch, which would sell around Rs 1000 on the whole.
- No colours are added.
- The products are finished with a touch of lacquer.

Instruments Used

- Billhook drill
- Chisel
- Planer
- Hacksaw
- Scissors
- Sand Paper
- Adhesive
- Brush



The Instruments used for Bamboo Handicraft manufacture

Technique

- The bamboo is first cut into suitable pieces with the billhook.
- Then skinned and cut into fine strips
- These are cut into further fine strips
- The strips are then wetted in water then weaving or construction is started.



Some of the Bamboo Handicraft Product



Conclusion

Bamboo craft is quite popular and is more or less profitable. Approximate income is around Rs 3000/month. More exhibitions should be organized to showcase the talent of artisans working with bamboo handicraft items.

The glorious cultural heritage which the people of Bankura inherit has bestowed them with a keen aesthetic sense. This artistic sense is reflected in the traditional arts'n crafts like Baluchari sarees, Dogra items and Terra-cottaworks.

Inspite of all these, the district is still economically underdeveloped. Strategic planning of resources and mass consciousness at the national and international levels are required for a happy socio-economic life and a cultural globalization of Bankura.



Debanjali Banerjee is Assistant Professor in National Institute of Fashion Technology, Kolkata. Earlier was Research Assistant at NIFT Hyderabad and Assistant Professor at Jadavpur University, Kolkata in Chemical Engineering Department. She completed her PhD on Textile/Colour Chemistry on Natural Dyes from Jadavpur University, Kolkata, did Masters in Textile and Clothing from S.N.D.T. Women's University, Mumbai and has NET (Research & Teaching) to her credit. She has been a visiting faculty at Apparel Export Promotion Council, and J. D. Birla Institute, Kolkata. Her interests include Indian traditional textiles, blending with modern trends, using traditional natural dyes, Research and Development, Commercialization of Research Project, Coordinated Major Projects in the field of Science and Technology, Survey and Auditing Programs, Various Pattern Developments, Colour matching. She worked on projects funded by UGC, CSIR and DST. She has published several papers in National and International Journals and she is also a member of several prestigious bodies. Her works include Herbal Gulal from natural colours, Natural Colours from waste flowers, Cosmetics using natural products. She has conducted workshop to artisan groups and weavers.