

An Appraisal of the Handicrafts in North Eastern Region

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Abstract

The handicrafts have been playing a significant role in the socio-economic development in the North Eastern Region. The region is very suitable endowed with resources for handicrafts in terms of men, materials and markets. The making of handicraft products is relevant from the point of view of economic, environment and culture of the region. There is an ample scope for the development of handicrafts on the basis of renewable resources in the all states. Although there is a potential for the development of handicrafts in the region, some important constraint is always going against its expansion and growth. Keeping the consideration in mind this study has been undertaken to highlight the present status of handicrafts in the North Eastern Region.

Key words : North Eastern Region, Handicrafts, India, Assam.

Introduction :

The North Eastern region is comprised of the eight states namely Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura and Sikkim. It is to be noted that the entire region was administratively comprised of the Assam Province in 1947 and two princely states of Manipur and Tripura joined India in 1949. The Himalayan state of Sikkim is officially included in the North Eastern Region after it has been included into the North Eastern Council in 2002. The total geographical area of the region is 2,62,230 sq kms which is eight percent of the country and have a population of 45,587,982 according to the census 2011, nearly 4 percent of the total population and 2 percent of the economy (In terms of contribution to Gross Domestic Product) in India (Bezbaruah,2012). The unique feature of the region is that more than 75 percent of the total geographical area is under mountain and hills. The N-E region has got its definite identity due

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to its peculiar economic, social, cultural and physical characteristics than others parts of the country. The region is the home of a large number of tribal and sub-tribal groups. There are 209 numbers of scheduled tribes with distinct culture, varied customs and colorful traditions are living in this region. There are more than 192 languages and dialects are found in this region. Around 40 percent of its population is living below the poverty line. Though region is endowed with rich natural resources but large percent is still underutilized. About 98 percent of the total border of the region is surrounded by foreign countries i.e., Bangladesh, Bhutan, Burma and China. Only 2 percent border is with the rest of the country. The region is very famous for tea, petroleum, coal, animals, forest including handicraft. The cultural richness of the region is visible in its quality handicrafts. The handicrafts have been recognized as one of the most important means for providing better economic opportunities for the people of NE region. The handicrafts are by and large most common in every households in the NE states.

The terms handicraft and crafts are used in a very specific sense to mean those activities that deal with the conversion of materials into product, using primarily hand skills with simple tools and employing local traditional wisdom (Ranjan, 1996). Handicrafts are manual skills for making usable products graced with international visual appeal. Needle work, lace, weaving, printed textile, pottery, ornamental metal works, jewelry, leather work, wood working, embroidered goods, cane, bamboo, bell-metal, ivory, tannery works etc. are included in handicrafts (Encyclopedia Britannica, 1966). On the other hand, a catalogue on Handicrafts of India includes handloom woven fabrics and hand printed artistic cotton and skill textiles, cane and bamboo works, wood carving, ivory and horn works, hand tooled leather works, pottery, jewelry and metal wares and host of such other artistic products of cottage artisan as handicrafts in our country (Baishya, 1989). The office of the Development Commissioner of Handicrafts (under Ministry of Textiles, Govt. of India) mentioned that items made by hand, often with the use of simple tools and generally artistic or traditional in nature. They include objectives of utility and objects of decoration (Lierl, 2003). Handicrafts may often play magnificent role in the socio-economic development of a society. The cultural trait of every society is also reflected in the quality and workmanship of the handicrafts (Dutta and Duarah, 1990). The crafts were originally made for home consumption, but occasionally some

surplus products were particularly exchanged for goods. With the changes of economic systems craft products changed into the market economy. Depending on their various specialization, the maker of crafts known as artisans, craftsmen, crafts persons, designer crafts persons etc. Gradually, craftsmen were started increasing their items supplied to the market economy.

The present study seeks to modest attempt to discuss the development of handicrafts in the NE states, using of secondary level data. The paper is divided in to five sessions. Section I presents status of handicrafts in India. Section II provides product line of handicrafts in the NE states. Session III is devoted to an analysis of marketing channels and institutional network of handicrafts. Session IV describes the problems and prospects of handicrafts and Session V draws the conclusion of the paper.

I. Indian Scenario :

From the very ancient times, down to the present day, handicrafts have been recognized as the most important economic activity in our country. The traditions of many crafts can trace their origins back almost to about five thousand years ago to the ancient Indus Valley and Mohenjo-Daro Civilizations in our country (Bhavnani, 1982). Indian crafts are immediate expression of Indian civilization as a whole. The crafts tradition of India is intermingled with her religion, philosophy and way of life of people (Upadhyay, 1975). In the Gupta period, each village had its blacksmith, potter, carpenter, skinner of dead cattle, tanner, barber and so on (Kosambi, 1992). In ancient India, life of the artisans were very happy, because crafts were highly encouraged and supported by the royalty. In old times, artisans would receive recognition from royal patrons and patronage would often be inherited by their families in India (Saraf, 1991). Artisans were organized on the guild system and crafts guilds wielded enormous social and political power in that times of India.

History tells us that in the Mughal period, the handicrafts were very well-known and integrated possessing advantages due to specialization to tasks and large scale of production. There was a considerable variety of handicrafts which, indeed, exhibited a more advanced economic and financial organization than

the handicrafts in contemporary Europe in the Mughal period of India (Mukerjee, 1967). At a time, when a west of Europe, the birth place of modern industrial system, was inhabited by uncivilized tribes, India was famous for high artistic skill of her craftsmen. However, Indian handicrafts had received a step-motherly treatment in the hands of British rulers. The establishment of colonial British rules in India was the cause of indigenous manufacturing industry, town handicrafts and village artisans industries (Chandra, 1987). The growth of factory system of mass production was the major cause for the progressive decline of the centuries old Indian handicrafts. The establishment of new industries by the British government destroyed traditional opportunities for handicrafts. Because, with modern tools and large capital, the workshop of the craftsmen turned out to be an injured class. The craftsmen had lost their comfortable earnings after introduction of factory system of production. During the colonial period, a few encouragements had been given from time to time, but not in a manner commensurate with the vast interests of the artisans.

The national freedom movement was given an opportunity for artisan to work again and create of artistic activity of different crafts, many of which had been through the ages in the society of India. M. K. Gandhi worked and advocated for the removes of the low status of the artisans, so that the artisans could enjoy his due place in the society of our country in the time of freedom movement (Bhattacharya, 1980). Considering the role of handicrafts sector to the national economy, national government had taken different steps for the development of handicrafts after independence of India.

The artisans has been an important element in the economic development in the country. Total 8.4 million handicrafts artisans were engaged in producing a variety of handicrafts product in 1994-95. On the other hand, the estimated number of employment were 8628331 in the handicrafts in 1999-2000 of the country. The different types of handicrafts units are an integral part of Indian economy and constitute a continuing element in the industrialization for the country. The handicrafts industry also becoming a larger partner of valuable foreign exchange earning. In view of the ever increasing exports market in handicrafts sector, which has been increasing the export value of handicrafts products (Excluding Handmade Carpets) from 476.07 USA S million during 1996-97 to 722.69 USA S million in 2002-03 in the country. It is estimated that in

India there are about 2682 handicrafts clusters and this sector employed 67.70 lakh people in India in 2011. The 2682 handicraft clusters are belonging to 24 products groups and covering 292 products. Out of total, 548 textiles, 418 basketry, 289 woodwork, 251 metal ware and 203 earthenware related handicrafts products in India in the year 2011(Sarkar, 2011).

II. Product line of Handicrafts in NE States :

NE region is well known for its handicrafts since time immemorial. From the beginning of the known history the handicrafts forms a valuable cultural, social and economic traits of the NE region. The socio-economic pattern of the society of the region is reflected in the quality and craftsmen ship of their handicrafts. The history of handicrafts sector is as old as the land itself. The region is a treasure house of different handicrafts and these handicrafts not only bring foreign exchange, income and employment opportunities, but are a mirror of cultural and social heritage of the region. The different type of handicrafts products are entirely oriented to locally available raw materials. There is no denying the fact that to know handicrafts in the region it is very essential to understand the cultural, social and economic evolution which have cut a deep impression in the life of indigenous people in the NE states. The handicrafts bear the witness of many traditions and civilization and these have been preserved by the age old experience skilled craftsmen in the region.

The handicrafts signifies man's discovery of materials in the forest which were transformed by the technology of human hands in the NE region (Shirali, 1983). The handicrafts of the region is famous for their artistic creativity, exquisite design and superb workmanship of the region. The main handicrafts are basketware, cane furniture, mats, wood-carving, terracotta, artistic textile, metal artware, dolls and toys and embroidery in this region (Thiyagarajan, 1987). The number of handicrafts items are also produced at the cottage level. The tribal crafts in the region is mainly include utilitarian, decorative and magico-religious items. It is observed that the crafts as practiced by the tribal people are essentially products of Primitive artistic skill embodying the creative imagination of the tribal artisans in the country (Pal, 1978). The crafts produced

by the tribal people still possess their own traditional characteristics. The tribal handicrafts are interwoven with the social life of the family, its standard of living, manpower and the degree of adaptation with natural environment of the village in the different parts of the region (Agarwal, 1985).

It is observed that the NE region has a number of handicrafts of cane and bamboo works, wood works and textile are universally practiced in all the states. The handicrafts industry occupies an important place by creating economic opportunity in the economy of NE region. State wise the main traditional handicrafts in the region are given in Table-1

Table-1
Main Traditional Handicrafts in the North Eastern Region

<p>Arunachal Pradesh ↓</p> <p>a. Cane and bamboo works b. Carpet weaving c. Wood carving d. Thonka painting e. Tribal textiles f. Pottery.</p>	<p>↓</p>	<p>↓</p> <p>bamboo works carpets toys book printing shoes wooden crafts embroidery</p> <p>costume dressing bell metal</p>
<p>Meghalaya ↓</p> <p>a. Cane and bamboo works b. pottery c. wood craft d. stone carving e. pine apple fibre craft f. flower fabric craft g. dry flower h. embroidery i. textile dye and dye j. leather and rexine k. sheet-metal craft.</p>	<p>↓</p>	<p>↓</p> <p>bamboo works carving</p> <p>carpets bags rings ceramics.</p>

Nagaland ↓	↓
a. Cane and bamboo works b. spears b. wood carving c. weaving d. head gear e. tribal dress f. artistic textiles.	a. carpet weaving b. thangka paintings c. wood carving d. woolen blankets e. woolen bags f. woolen jackets g. choktse tables

Source: North Eastern Region (2002): Handicrafts at a Glance, Office of the Development Commissioner (Handicrafts), Government of India, Guwahati and Handique, K.J. (2010): Handicrafts in Assam, Kalpaz Publication, Delhi.

The North Eastern Handicrafts and Handlooms Development Corporation (NEHHDC) was set up in 1977. As per information made by NEHHDC in 2011, the centrally sponsored institution has been developing different types of handicraft products of the NER which are mentioned in Table-2 (A, B, & C).

Table-2
Handicraft Products Developed by NEHHDC

A

Home Furnishings and Furniture	
1. Sri Krishna Sofa Set	13. Bishnu Sofa Set
2. Latum Sofa Set	14. Apple Antique Sofa Set
3. Bamboo Sofa Set	15. Payal Sofa Set
4. Purbashree Sofa	16. Mejestic Sofa Set
5. Square Box Sofa Set	17. Knitting Sofa Set
6. Bamboo natural colour Sofa Set	18. Cascade Sofa Set
7. U. Design Sofa Set	19. Full Knitting Chair Set
8. Monalisa Sofa Set	20. Full Knitting Sofa Set
9. Motra Payal Set	21. Hanuman Sofa Set
10. Maha Raja Sofa Set	22. Square Sofa Set
11. Duli Sofa Set	23. Cool Bunnai Sofa Set
12. Oliver Sofa Set	24. Antique Chair Set

25. Woven Big Bar Set	48. Room Divider
26. Woven Low Bar Set	49. Cane Divan with back rest
27. Garden Set	50. Woven Divan with back rest
28. Woven Coffee Chair Set	51. Jati Cane Divan
29. Woven Chair Set	52. Mini Divan
30. Garden Chair Set	53. Divan Natural Colour
31. Garden Chair Set of Back Knitting	54. Cane T.V. Stand
32. Garden Knitte Chair Set	55. Corner Stand
33. High Back Chair Set	56. Trolley
34. Dining Set	57. Corner Rack with woven tray
35. Antique Dining Set	58. Rack
36. Reclining Chair	59. Corner Magazine Rack
37. Low Ground Chair	60. Magazine Rack
38. High Ground Chair	61. Tub Stand
39. Rocking Chair	62. Cane Woven Ladies Murrah
40. Triangular Chair	63. Oriental Murrah
41. Dining Chair	64. Deluxe Murrah
42. Bar Stool	65. Woven Gents Murrah
43. Easy Chair	66. Liphan
44. High Ground Chair	67. Kalshi Murrah
45. Hanging Jula	68. Oriental Murrah Sundie Top
46. Swing Chair	69. Carpet
47. Kula Chair Split Golla	70. Floor Mat
	71. Cushion Cover

B

Fashion Accessories and Conference Bags	
1. Ladies Bag	7. Shopping Bag
2. Jute U Cut Kari Bag	8. Jute Kori Bag
3. Karbi Muga Ladies Bag	9. Spear Design Ladies Bag
4. Jute Cane Handle Bag	10. M Gents Shoulder Bag
5. S.K.File Hand Bag	11. Toilet Bag
6. Kauna Ring Ladies Bag	12. Hair Clip

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| 13. Hair Band | 26. Jute Bamboo Hand Bag |
| 14. Queen Cap | 27. Conference Bag |
| 15. Hat | 28. Sital Pati Conference Bag |
| 16. Neck Tie | 29. Sital Pati Conference Bag
with Handle |
| 17. Mizo Hat | 30. Sital Pati Conference Bag
with Lace |
| 18. S K Toilet Set | 31. Jute Bamboo Conference Bag |
| 19. S K Ladies Purse | 32. Jute Bamboo Conference Bag
with Handle |
| 20. S K File Hand Bag | 33. Sital Pati and Jute Conference Bag |
| 21. Hand Bag | 34. Sital Pati Mat |
| 22. Ladies Purse | 35. Scenery Fan |
| 23. S K Gents File Bag | |
| 24. Sital Pati Rectangular
Conference Bag with Handle | |
| 25. Sital Pati Conference Bag
with Cover | |

C

Decoratives	
1. Wooden Deer	13. Wall Piece
2. Flower Vase	14. Bullock Cart
3. Flower Saji	15. Khasi Wood Carving
4. Japani Long Flower Vase Woven	16. Panel Board
5. Decorative Flower Stand	17. Bullock Cart
6. Cane Flower Vase	18. Decorative Japi
7. Bamboo Flower Vase	19. Table Top
8. Long Flower Vase	20. Wall Scenery Valvet
9. Wooden Deer Head	21. Wall Scenery Plyboard
10. Wooden Rhino	22. Photo Frame
11. Wooden Elephant	23. Palki
12. Wooden Wall Hanging Ganesh	

D. Utilities	
1. Basket	15. File Tray Rectangular
2. Fruit Basket	16. Pipe Tray
3. Laundry Basket	17. Holder
4. CSB Cocoon Basket	18. Bamboo Magazine Holder
5. Oval Woven Ring Basket	19. Bamboo Bottle Cover
6. Round Cylindrical Planter Basket	20. Mirror Frame
7. Cane Woven Round Cylindrical Planter Basket with Handle	21. Beer Mug
8. Knitting Marketing Basket	22. Lamp Shade
9. Dust Bin	23. Helmet Lamp
10. Box	24. Pegoda Lamp
11. Tray	25. Cane Table Lamp
12. Rectangular Tray	26. Pineapple Lamp
13. Round Ring Tray	27. Lotus Lamp
14. Woven Rectangular File Tray	28. Cane Stand Lamp
	29. Wall Hanging Light

Source: Catalogue of Handicraft Products of North Eastern Region (2011): NEHHDC, Guwahati

In the past several years the number of artisans and handicrafts units have been increase in the region. For example in the year 1992, there were 95129 number of handicrafts artisans in the NE region and these artisans produced good worth Rs. 22,323,30 . It is known that the highest handicrafts artisans and units are found in Manipur and the Arunachal Pradesh has lowest artisans and units in the NE region. On the other hand, total 0.08 lakhs handicrafts artisans were found in Mizoram in the year 1998-99 (Basis Statistics of North Eastern Region, 2000). As per information given by Office of the Development Commissioner (Handicrafts), Ministry of Textiles, Govt. of India, Guwahati, the total handicrafts units and artisans were 190642 and 725272 in the NE states in 2002. Out of total, the handicrafts units of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Megalaya, Nagaland and Tripura were 4044, 30360, 98051, 11512, 17603and 29072 respectively.

Handicrafts artisans are important elements in the economy and society. The handicrafts artisans of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Nagaland and Tripura were 15735, 100482, 379988, 53546, 79878 and 95625 respectively in 2002.

III. Marketing Channels and Institutional Network :

A good marketing system can stimulate production and can increase economic welfare of the artisans. The handicraft products are generally disposed of through the following marketing channels.

1. Sale at home.
2. Local markets
3. Middlemen
4. Fairs
5. Sale emporia of the government.
6. Supply on contract or order basis
7. Co-operative societies.
8. Exporters including public and private organizations.
9. Sale at shops.

There is no denying the fact that absence of proper marketing facility stands in the way of expansion and modernization in the N-E region. It is also encouraging to note that over the past years artisans also in this region has received the national award on various crafts. Total 62 artisans have received national award from 1966 to 2002 in the region. Out of total 62 artisans, the majority of artisans (18 artisans) are in the state of Tripura(North Eastern Region, Handicrafts at a Glance, 2000).

The North Eastern Council was constituted in 1971 as nodal agency for regional development. The North Eastern Development Finance Corporation Ltd. (NEDFi) was incorporated in 1995 and the Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region(DONER) was set up in 2001. The three organizations have been playing an important role for the development of the eight states. In addition to these, a number of organizations have been set up at the central, regional and state level for development of handicrafts in the region. The All India Handicrafts Board was established in 1952 with the objective of finding out the problems of the handicrafts

industry and suggest measures for its development in India. The All India Handicrafts Board was established in 1981 for the development of handloom and handicrafts in the country. The office of the Development Commissioner for handicrafts is presently the nodal agency for the implementation of all the central government programmes and schemes for development of handicrafts in India (Kothuria, 1988). The Handicrafts and Handlooms Export Corporation was constituted in 1958 with the primary object of promoting the Indian handicrafts at home and foreign markets. The all India Khadi and Village Industries Board and the Khadi and Village Industries Commission have been taken some positive schemes and programmes for the village artisans in the country. The North Eastern Handicrafts and Handlooms Development Corporation was established in 1977 and the corporation has been playing an important role in growth and development of handicrafts industry in the N-E region.

There are several organizations for the development of handicrafts industry in the NE region. There are state level organizations like Assam Government Marketing Corporation, the Manipur Handloom and Handicrafts Development Corporation, the Meghalaya Handicrafts Development Corporation, the Nagaland Handloom and Handicrafts Development Corporation, the Tripura Handloom and Handicrafts Development Corporation, Mizoram Handloom and Handicrafts Development Corporation and Handicraft and Handloom Institute at Sikkim in the region. Besides, the state Directorates of Industries look after the functioning and requirements of the handicrafts in the N-E states. It is also encouraging to note that some powerful NGOs have been playing an important role for promotion and modernization of various traditional crafts in the NE region.

The Regional Office of the Development Commissioner (Handicrafts) is situated at Guwahati and the office efforts are very much appreciated in promoting and modernization of handicrafts industry by providing financial support, technical skill, product diversification, designs development and setting up of crafts Bazar in the NE region. Moreover, the regional office has setup eight marketing and service extension centers at Jorhat, Gauripur, Aizawl, Imphal, Kohima, Agartala, Itanagar and Shillong. The marketing and service extension centre is aimed at generating self employment among the different types of artisans and to augment the export potentiality for handicrafts industry

as a whole, by way of marketing facilities and other extension service to the artisans under the area of the centre. A Bamboo and Cane Development Institute was established at Agartala by the All Indian Handicrafts Board to develop cane and bamboo crafts for best use and generate self employment in 1974. This is the only institute for cane and bamboo development and research work in our country. There are others crafts development centers and institutes for the development of handicrafts in different parts in the N-E region. The NEC Shillong has taken up ambitious plans for promotion and development of handicrafts industry. The North-Eastern Handicrafts and Handlooms Development Corporation has established of emporia in Delhi, Chennai, Bangalore, Shillong and Guwahati for marketing of handicraft products of the N-E states. The NEHHDC is one of the largest suppliers of cane and bamboo furniture in India.

IV. Problems and Prospects :

Artisanal clusters face a variety of problems in the region. Although the heritage of handicrafts in the NE region is very rich but the development of handicrafts sector is hampered due to diversity of problems. The handicrafts sector is faced all the problems of inadequacy of raw materials, paucity of finance, absence of trained personnel, unorganized marketing and poor consumer demand of the region(Wadia, 1980). It is observed that the handicrafts artisans are facing a number of problems while managing their units. Though the severity of a particular problems many vary from unit to unit, there are certain problems which are common to all types of handicrafts units. The various problems being faced by the handicrafts artisans to deliver the products from time to time and from place to place in both rural and urban areas in the NE region. The artisans face these problems do vary from artisans to artisans in making and selling their products. Some of these important problems faced by handicrafts are mentioned below.

1. Lack of Finance :

Adequate finance is required to the handicrafts artisans to meet their business obligations. But, necessary financial resources are not made available

to the artisans from the financial institutions. Most of the artisans are poor and they depend on money lender and traders to meet their financial needs. The cheap credit facilities are not available from banks and others financial institution to the artisans. It is an universal complaint from the artisans that they suffer the lack of finance for running their business. Under such situations emergence of new entrepreneurs undertaking handicraft as profession cannot be expected.

2. Stiff Competition :

The Stiff Competition with other products is also one of the major problem of the handicraft industry in the NE region. The handicrafts products of the region is facing increasing competition from the organized industrial products particularly plastic, steel and aluminum. The growth of factory system of mass production is the cause for the increasing competition between machine made products and handicrafts products. Due to the competition with other products artisans sometime go for distress sell of their products to the traders and middlemen at a poor price.

3. Marketing Problem :

The efficient marketing system can stimulate production and can increase welfare to the handicrafts artisans. It is realized that lack of proper marketing facility stands in the way of expansion and modernization of the handicrafts industry in the region. The artisans who produce quality products, they cannot be sold at a remunerative price due to lack of proper marketing system. The handicrafts units do not have any proper marketing organization to sell their products of their own. In the absence of marketing facilities, the handicrafts artisans have to dispose of their items in generally local markets at price offered by the buyers. Few products of the region is sold in the national and international market. In the local markets traders and middlemen from get the scope to exploit the artisans in the NE region.

4. Problem of Raw Material :

Non availability of raw material is also another major problems for the growth and development of handicrafts sector in the NE region. There are some

handicrafts units which based on local raw materials while there are also some units which are based on imported raw materials. The gap between the demand and supply of raw material is increasing day by day in this region. Sometime locally produced raw materials is also not available to the actual users due to the activities of the different types of hoarders and the small producers are compelled to buy raw materials at abnormally high prices through black market. Due to the seasonal fluctuating, the raw materials rate increase which directly or indirectly affects the cost of production and profits. The gap between the demand and supply of raw materials adversely affects the development of handicrafts in the NE region.

5. Other Problems :

In addition to financial, stiff competition and raw materials problems, another problems in the development of handicrafts industry is absence of proper training facilities, lack of systematic guidance from government agency, high cost of production, design development, limited transport and communication facilities, outdated methods of production and absence of a good number of technical personal in the NE region.

In spite of various problems the prospects of the development of handicrafts sector is brightened in the NE region. There are many handicrafts items which are in great demand outside the region. These handicrafts items have good prospects for development through diversification of products and modernization process. It is observed that the different types of handicraft products offered by the master artisans of the region has attracted a large number of visitors, tourists and foreigners at many market centers, emporia, bazaars, exhibitions and fairs (Assam Beyond, 2000). It is also true that quality handicrafts products are supposed to have a huge potential market(Saha, 1984). The handicrafts products have good income oriented, which indicate their suitability in the underdeveloped economy of the region. The establishing of handicrafts units can be provided of ample employment opportunities to large number of people of the region as these units are limited capital investment and labour intensive in nature. The development of handicrafts industry also can make best use of earning foreign exchanges in the region.

In Assam, handicrafts items had been exported to foreign countries. Assam

had been exported cane and bamboo items to countries like USA, France and Japan in the world. A cane and bamboo unit located at Dibrugarh had executed an order for supply of cane handicrafts to a departmental store of the USA in 1988 (Mali, 1989). It is to be noted that Assam has earned Rs. 4.5 lakhs by selling cane baskets in the exhibitions held in Kolkata, Delhi and Mumbai in the year 1981 (Sarma, 1986). The cane and bamboo products like hats. Baskets and furniture are exported in a large-scale from Mizoram. Meghalaya is well known for its wooden cutteries, basketery items and cane works. The Naga elaborately designed shawls are all woven in the primitive loin looms and the price of the finished goods are very high (Alemchiba, 1968). Naga shawls and bags with various textures have highly demand outside the state. The cane and bamboo handicrafts have a lucrative market outside of the Tripura. The handmade carpets, cane hats and cane belts are among the successful crafts of Arunachal Pradesh. These crafts have a huge export potential of the state. Manipur is famous for metallic items artistic leather works and bamboo products. One cannot imagine the cultural life of the people of Manipur without bamboo products (Bahadur, 1994). People from inside and outside the country, stroll the markets to grab hold of the crafts of Sikkim which is the important even for the North Eastern region.

The above analysis clearly gives an indication that the handicrafts sector has an immense possibility of enhancing the income and employment potential in the NE states. In this respect, it may be mentioned that a number of countries including Japan has gone in a big way in developing of handicrafts because of its potential in the internal and external trade sector. Japan is a highly developed country, but Japan do not neglect her handicrafts. In Japan, artisans are very highly respected and it is consider as a glorified profession (Trivedi, 1994). In the NE region, the Development Commissioner (Handicrafts), the North Eastern Handicrafts and Handloom Corporations and other handicrafts organizations have been providing training facilities, financial help, market information and other inputs for the development of handicrafts. The New Industrial Policy of the Govt. of India 1991, has recognized the important of the handicrafts industry for the rural industrialization, income and employment opportunity and also for export promotion in the country. It has been realized that the future prospects will depend on raw materials, capital, labour,

organization, entrepreneurship and economic facilities development in the NE region. Though handicraft is considered a cottage industry, it evolved as one of the major revenue generators over the years in the region. During the past 68 years, this micro and small enterprise has contributed significantly towards building a stable and sound regional economy in the NE region. The region has vast potential for setting up of number of micro and small handicraft enterprises. The region at this present time needs a thriving, vibrant and strong enterprise, particularly in the micro and small enterprise segments for all round economic development of the region (Saikia, 2011). As we know that handicrafts activity being a state subject, its development and promotion are the primary responsibility of every state government in our country. But, the central government is supplementing their efforts by implementing different developmental schemes and programmes. The plan expenditure for the handicraft sector has grown from Rs. 71.65 crores in 2002-03 to Rs. 220.00 crores in 2009-10 in the country (Mathew, 2011). Positive efforts are being augmented during the 12th Five Year plan (2012-2017) on core areas for the growth and development of the handicrafts in North East including in India.

V. Concluding Remarks :

It is quite clear that handicrafts have been playing an important role for socio-economic upliftment of all communities effectively in the eight sisters. The majority of handicrafts units are run by individuals for whom large scale production is not possible. In the context of present liberalized economy, the time has come to us to realize the hard economic reality ensuring efficiency is the key to survival of the handicrafts units. The highly potential handicrafts industry should be developed in such a manner so that it can attain the economic viability at its earliest and will also help in preserving the social, cultural and religious heritage and tradition of the people of NE region. The present scenario need to be changed with the help of government and non government agencies with appropriate programmes and projects can be utilized the various resources for making of value added handicrafts products in an eco-friendly way in the eight states. The state governments programs need to be more creatively designed to accommodate the different players, different stages of growth and development of

handicraft enterprises in the resourceful North Eastern region. It is the duty of the younger generation to undertake handicraft as profession.

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