Chapter II

ABOUT THE INDUSTRY
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2.01 INTRODUCTION

With a view to appraising the financial problems of the conch-shell industry, it is necessary to have a look at the general characteristics of the conch-shell industry in particular and the handicraft industry of India in general.

Since, the conch-shell industry is mainly confined to West Bengal, the scenario of handicraft and cottage industry of West Bengal also is to be reviewed.

2.02 HANDICRAFT AND COTTAGE INDUSTRY

2.02.1 General Characteristics

General characteristics of handicraft and cottage industry can be studied from the study of the different facets of the industry of India. What is handicraft? Whether production of conch-shell articles can be termed as industry or craft? If it is a craft, is it a folk craft or a commercial craft? If not, is it a cottage industry? Answers to these questions are necessary to have an idea of the general characteristics of the units producing conch-shell products.

Firstly, handicraft should not be treated merely as luxury item. Handicraft has been defined as "objects made by the skill of the hand and which carry a part of the creator, as well as centuries of their evolutionary tradition".\(^1\) Thus handicraft is considered as very basic activity of human society. It is an expression of human spirit in material form. These objects are created by people to ensure their ritual and personal needs as well as for their livelihood. Craft develops out of social and cultural urge of people. It stood for man's endeavour to bring elegance and grace to the monotonous human life. The terms of crafts or arts are used interchangeably and they helps us to know the social history of mankind.

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\(^1\) Dhamija, J., *Indian Folk Arts and Crafts*, National Book Trust, New Delhi, 1992, p.3.
2.02.2 **Type of Crafts**

Crafts may be divided into four distinct types viz.,

1) Folk crafts or Folk arts.

2) Religious crafts or crafts developed around religious centres.

3) Commercial crafts or crafts as a means of livelihood.

4) Crafts developed as a hobby or to show creativeness.

Folk craft is an integral part of folk culture. These crafts are created by people for personal uses based on tradition or by the village craftsmen for a limited clientele with whom they are in touch. In this type of craft, the urge or need of particular community rather than individual craftsmanship, and hereditary tradition rather than instruction or cannon of scriptures are more active.²

The religious crafts are based on religious institutions and ceremonies associated with them. The needs of pilgrims are responsible for development of such craft. Craftsmen of many religious places in India e.g., Varanasi, Kanjivaram are specialist in some crafts which are specially required for religious ceremonies.

Articles produced under commercial crafts are made by specialised craftsmen for satisfying the need of the people. A group of people have mastered themselves in some specialised crafts through long years of apprenticeship and traditional acquisition of skills.

The cottage industries are industries which are run by the members of the family. These industries are generally based on traditional skills and usually don’t require modern machineries.

2.02.3 **Indian Perspective**

Handicrafts and cottage industry of India express the great tradition and cultural heritage of the country and more often they combine beauty and utility. Arts and

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crafts of India play a vital role in the economic life of the people. Handicrafts constitute an important sector of the decentralised sector of the economy and provide employment to about four million people, specially in the rural areas.\textsuperscript{3}

The Indian handicraft products became an important commodity, for world trade from ancient times. Trade links with India and rest of the world existed even in ancient time, and handicraft products were sold to traders since that time. The Government of India and the State Governments have taken most active steps to revive the handicraft sector which faced a blow when machine made goods ousted the hand-made products. Export promotion policies for handicraft products were also taken. The export of handicrafts, including hand knitted carpets, fetched a whooping Rs. 4458.30 crores during the financial year 1994 - 1995.\textsuperscript{4} The main handicraft products of India may be grouped under the following.

1. Textiles, needle work and embroidery,
2. Floor covering and pile carpets,
3. Pottery and Terra-Cotta,
4. Wood-work, Bamboo-work and Cane-work,
5. Metal ware,
6. Jewelry,
7. Stone carving and shell carving,
8. Painting,
9. Ivory products and

2.02.4 Scenario in West Bengal

In India there are 26 States and 6 Union Territories. West Bengal is one of the important States of India. The State of West Bengal is situated on the north eastern

\textsuperscript{3} Annual Report - (1992-93), Ministry of Textiles, Government of India, New Delhi, 1993, Chapter -X.
part of the country as well as on the bank of Bay of Bengal. The location of the State of West Bengal in India is given in Fig. 1. (p. 10). West Bengal has an area of 88752 sq. Kilometers and a population of 6,79,82,732, out of them 72.61 percent people live in village. The main occupation of rural people is either agriculture or handicraft/cottage industry or both. Arts and crafts of undivided Bengal had a great cultural heritage and were famous throughout the European and Middle East countries in medieval age. The Dacca weavers of East Bengal (Now Bangladesh) were famous for the finely woven cotton mal-mal and muslin. The items were an important commodity for foreign trade at that time.

Cottage industries and handicrafts provided employment to a large section of the people of Bengal till the development of commerce and large scale industries in the area. So, the dependence of people on land had been much less till the end of 18th century. But the position of the cottage industries and handicrafts had been declining from early nineteenth century. Thereafter up to the end of the British period many of the crafts become an antiquity.

After Independence the Government had established All India Handicrafts Board for the development of crafts and the Khadi and Village Industries Board for promoting handicrafts. They have assisted in developing handicraft and cottage industries through specific schemes. In West Bengal through the Directorate of Cottage and Small Scale Industries, State Government also helped this sector. Afterwards in the year 1976 West Bengal Handicraft Development Corporation Limited (W.B.H.D.C.) has been set up to promote and develop the handicraft sector.

Present position of small-scale and cottage industries of West Bengal could be gauged from the following table.

5. Government of West Bengal, Introducing West Bengal, Information and Cultural Affairs Department, Calcutta, 1994, p.29.
6. ibid, p.32.
7. 'Mal-mal' - Fine transparent cotton.
TABLE 2.01

Employment and Number of Units of S.S.I.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of units</th>
<th>Employment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1985 - 1986</td>
<td>22955</td>
<td>162375</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988 - 1989</td>
<td>28536</td>
<td>175805</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989 - 1990</td>
<td>29636</td>
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<td>27434</td>
<td>150828</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995 - 1996</td>
<td>17246</td>
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<tr>
<td>1996 - 1997</td>
<td>19246</td>
<td>117017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997 - 1998</td>
<td>16359</td>
<td>163132</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Now let us have a look at the origin of the conch-shell craft.

2.03 ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE CRAFT

First we trace the origin of the conch-shell craft and thereafter we review the development of the craft in historic to modern period.

2.03.1 Origin of the Conch-shell Craft

The position of conch-shell industry in the West Bengal handicraft sector could not be understood unless the origin and development of the craft are traced. Again, the origin of the craft can be traced if we know when and how the cult of the using conch-shell as an indispensable part of religious ceremony developed in India. It is not easy to find out the development since it goes far beyond what is practised now in India.

The conch-shell ornaments and shell-horns were extensively used in ancient period. Puranic, Pre-historic and Historic testimonies give evidence of the existence and use of the conch-shell products.
The earliest evidences of the use of conches can be obtained entirely from religious scripts and literature. We may collect evidence from classics, scriptures, epics and books of eminent ancient authors.

In the great Indian epic Mahabharata, there is reference of use of conch as a trumpet. We have also reference in SRIMAT BHAGAVAT GITA. We quote from the same.

"पाञ्जनयं हृषिकेशो देवदत्तं धनञ्जयः।
पीष्टं दध्मः महाश्रेण भीमकर्मा वृक्कोदरः॥
अनतविजयं राजा कुष्ठिपुष्की सुधिघिरः॥
नकुल: सहदेववं सुधोषमणिपुष्कं॥\"9

"Panchanjanyag Hrishikesho Devadattang Dhananjayh Poundrang Dadhmau Mahasankhanga Bheemkarma Brikodarah. Anantavijayang Raja Kunteeputro Yudhisthirah, Nakalah Sahadevasca Sughoshomanipushakan".9

"Sri Krsna blew his conch named Panchajanya; Arjuna, his own called Devadatta; while Bhima of terrible deeds blew his mighty conch Paundra. King Yudhisthira, son of Kunti blew his conch Anantavijaya, while Nakula and Sahadeva blew theirs, known as Sughosa and Manipuspaka respectively."9

In the battlefield of Kurukhestra Hrishikesha (the other name of or Lord Krishna or God) had blown famous conch Panchajanya followed by successive blowing of Devadatta by Dhananjayh (the other name of Arjun), Paundra by Bheemsena, Anantavijaya by Yudhisthira, Sughosa by Nakula and Manipushpaka by Sahadeva. The simultaneous blowing of so many shell horns must have struck terror in the hearts of opponents.

"..... महुष वरुण....."

".......................... Sankhancha Varuna..............................\"10

In her struggle with demon Mahisasura the Goddess Durga was presented by Varuna the Lord of the ocean, conch and other conch-shell product.


Also Lord Vishnu or Narayana, and God Sri Ganesh hold conch-shell horn in their hand. Thus it is a fact that from time immemorial conch-shell horn was related with Hindu religion. Conch-shell was considered part and parcel of religious ceremonies of the Aryans. In Mahabharata it was found that conch-shell was used in the coronation of great kings.

But according to another view, the cult of using conch originated from Dravidian people rather than from Aryan in India. The argument in support of such view is that the Aryan came to India through the north-west, and they were ploughmen. They basically originated from Eastern Europe and Western Asia. Since they had never seen sea, they were not in contact with conch-shells.

There was no reference of the use of conch in the epic Ramayana. It is said that the epic Ramayana represents the Aryan culture, while the epic Mahabharata, the Dravidian culture. From this difference, it may be concluded that use of conch-shell originated from the Dravidian culture.

So, one question arises, if it was purely of Dravidian origin, then why it became a religious practice to use shell horn or wear conch-shell bangles by married Hindu women? Thus what caste or community may be considered as originator of this craft.

To resolve this issue, the historic and Puranic testimonies may be inquired.

The name Bharat Barsha (the other name of India) originated from the name of the king Bharata who ruled India at that time. He was of Aryan origin. Aryan people after entering India, developed cities, towns, villages and ashrams. They had written Vedas, Upa-Vedas, Epics, drama etc. In other words the Hindu civilization was developed by them. Aryan invaders first came in India through the north west border and forced the Dravidian of north India to south eastern and southern part of India.

13. The Vedas or "divine knowledge".
14. The Upa-Vedas or "supplementary Vedas".
Thus Aryan scattered over whole northern part popularly called Arya barta. In that period Dravidian at the southern part had business connection through sea with the people of Egypt, Paryasa etc. The major items of trade was pearls, red coral etc. Also the snow-white conch attracted the people of outside world and Dravidian also used them for their own purpose. Dravidian first employed the conch as battle trumpet. As the Aryan host advanced into India, they must have captured number of battle conches from time to time. Moreover, some Dravidian people stayed along with Aryan to help them as workers. Thereafter blood connections began to be formed with Dravidian and there was mixing of both the culture and a new civilization emerged which was called Aryan civilization. Moreover, many Dravidian Gods and Goddess were admitted to the Aryan pantheon. In Bengal Goddess Manasha and God Dharma were included and were called as one of the forms of Aryan Goddess Chandi or Durga\(^\text{15}\) and God Varuna\(^\text{16}\) respectively.

From Purana\(^\text{17}\) it is found that great Muni Agastya crossed the Vindhya mountain and had gone to southern India. Moreover, he killed demon Britasur after sucking all the water of the sea. Thereafter he get conch-shell after killing another demon Sankhasur. Moreover he was the man who introduced first time saw for cutting conch-shell. Such legend is supported by the historians and they found some logic in it. According to the historians Hindu religion and culture came through sage Agastya to Dravidian people of southern India.

Historians think that such legend might have originated from the fact that he killed the sea-decoits and collected the conch-shell used by them. Thereafter he introduced use of conch-shell products among Hindus.

But here one controversy arises. If great muni Agasthya was a Hindu sage, how the broken fragments of conch-shell products were found in Harrappa and Mahanjodero of Indus valley civilization. Because Indus civilization was older than that of invasion of Aryan in India.

\(^{15}\) Durga means inaccessible. She is worshipped as the slayer of the demon bull Mahishasura.

\(^{16}\) Varuna is the one of the oldest vedic deities, the personification of the all invading sky and sea.

\(^{17}\) The word Puranas means old and the Puranas treat of the same historical legends and mythological fictions as the Itihasas.
Another view is that, Dravidian people not sage Agasthya first invented saw for cutting intact conch-shell. The issue can be resolved, if we consider that sage Agasthya was of Dravidian origin. It is also supported by historians and it is considered that Agasthya was of Dravidian origin and whom Dravidian people respected. Thereafter when there was mixing of both the culture, he was also taken as Hindu sage. Moreover he had introduced as a preacher of Hindu religion and culture in the Deccan.

Thus the first question can be resolved in this way. Conch-shell craft was firstly introduced by Dravidian. But it slowly became a part of Hindu religion as Aryan mixed with Dravidian people.

Also Aryan become interested in collecting the snow white conch-shell and its product from Dravidian people. Thus afterwards, it became compulsory practice to call the people to their sacrifices and other religious rites through blowing horns by conch-shell.\(^\text{18}\) It was also used as an instrument of invocation, to call the attention of the Gods to the ceremonies to be performed.\(^\text{19}\)

2.03.2 **Origin of use of Conch-shell products**

The origin of use of conch-shell products or particularly Conch-shell bangles can also be traced in Puranic, historic and other references. References are found regarding use of conch-shell ornaments in the great epic *Mahabharata*.

"गात्वा स्वदेश द्रश्यामि स्मृतशब्दः शुभा: द्रियः: | सुवर्णमाला: कन्दुष्ण कुज्जः परिहारकः।"

"Gotwa swadeshang drakshyami Sthhulashankhaah Shubhaah Striyah. Subarnmalaah Kambushcha kundaly pariharakay".\(^\text{20}\)

"एकशंख्वा नामः".

"Ekashankha naryah".\(^\text{21}\)

In Shishupalbadham written by the famous author Magha, it is described that women of Indrapastha (the capital of king Yusidhthira) wore conch-shell bangles and bracelets. There are many legends, from which the origin of the conch-shell bangles can be traced. One of them could be described here.

"Prajapati Daksha once observed the bare hands of his daughter Sati and sarcastically asked her if God Siva her husband, was too poor to afford her a pair of bracelets. Sati felt insulted by her father's insinuations at her husband and at once returned to her husband. She requested Siva to present her a pair of conch-shell bangles. A couple of days later a Sankhari (dealer in conch-shell products) came to Sati with a box of conch bangles and requested her to put any pair of bangles on her wrists. Sati started trying to put on her hands the bangles but the bangles did not fit. The Sankhari remarked that this might be due to lack of fidelity and devotion to her husband. Enraged by this unceremonious remark Sati refused to wear any bangle. The sankhari who was none else but Lord Siva in disguise appreciated Sati’s devotion and at once revealed his identity to his spouse."

The story relates to how a conch-shell product came into existence and to how Lord Siva appeared in disguise as a conch-shell seller. It is also narrated in the publication, 'Tribes and Caste of West Bengal'. In the same book it is observed that in 19th Century Karis (small special shells) (sankha) bore the next higher value in Kari group. It may be due to this reason our women folk imbued with a sense of value based on tradition and folk-lore and treat bangles as sacred and valuable.

"अब्दनात्यां: प्रकोटस्थायिषु: शाप्नास्य: स्वपन सहस्य"
"Abaghnaatyah Prakosthashhaschakruh Sankhaah Swanang Mahat"²⁶

"Poushnadhrubaswikarapanchaka Basa Bejyyaditye PrabalaRadaSankha
Suwarnaivasram. Dharyam Birikta Sanichandrakujehniraktam Bhoumedhrubaditiyuge Subhaga Na Dadhyaat".²⁷

It means it is obligatory for married girls to put on conch-shell bangles. As Sankha here means conch-shell bangles and Subhaga stands for a women whose husband is living. Also some other scriptures and books like Dwipikagranta and Joytisagarasarggrantha and Devibhagbata support this view.

Moreover, laws were laid down in scriptures that conch shell bangles or other decoration should not be put on by a widow.

"Patiheena...............No Dhhatte...........Srajangcha Chandannang Chaiba
Sankhang Sindurabhusanam."²⁸

Now coming to the pre-historic and historic days we also find adornment with conch shell bangles. The Bruce Foote collection of Indian pre-historic and pro-historic antiquities in the Madras Government Museum demonstrate that the industry of conch-shell cutting and the custom of wearing conch-shell bangle had once much

²⁷ Acharjya, R.K., Muhurta Chintamoni, Daibanga Ram, Bombay, 1934, Eng. tran., p. 57.
wider coverage than at the present day. Moreover numerous fragments of conch-shell bangles conch workshop cuttings and waste along with worked specimens of bangles in fragmentary conditions with undoubted neolithic stone implement were found in Mysore, Bellary Anantapur, Kurnul, South West Hyderabad, Krishna basin, Gujarat and Kathiawar. The excavations of Mohenjodara and Indus Valley had brought to light many objects of conch-shell. A board of 41 cores of shells (the serviceable parts of which were used for the making of bangles etc.) were found in House XII(Plates IV, VI and LVI). Various other shell objects like shell caps, shell ladles etc. were also discovered. Ten conch-shell bracelets which measured 2.25" diameter, 1" wide and 0.12" thick were also found.

In vedic period, the Aryan also carried with tradition of using conch-shell and its products. There is reference of wearing Sankhamani in Atharva Veda after Upanayan (the ritual ceremony of investing a brahmin or kshatriya or vaishya with the holy thread) and the chant to be used for this purpose.

Historic references in the Buddhist literature are also available on the use of conch-shell products. Firstly in Jataks there is mention of Guild of shell-workers to refer to the Association of craftsmen. Vinay Pitaka also gives reference of this craft during Buddhist period.

Ancient Tamil classics give references to conch shell industry and to wide spread use of carved and ornamental conch-shell bangles among the Pandyan women. Cosmos, an Egyptian monk who travelled in the middle of sixth century A.D. and Arab writer Abu Zayid who wrote in 851. A.D. recorded that conch-shell and pearl

30. ibid., p.1.
were the greatest treasures of Indian king. Also they referred to the production and export of conch-shells from different Tamilnadu coasts to undivided Bengal.\textsuperscript{35}

In Mauryan dynasty (322 B.C-183 B.C.) also there was use of conch-shell products. Megasthenes (traveller of that period) also refers to the craft during the Mauryan period.\textsuperscript{36} In Kautilya's Arthasastra it is written that duties of superintendent of ocean mines includes among other things to collect conch-shell and also to regulate the commerce in these commodities.\textsuperscript{37}

The conch-shell were also in use even after the advent of Muslim in India, i.e., 11th and 12th century A.D. It has been referred in Naisadhacharita.\textsuperscript{38}

Tavernier in 1666 A.D. found Bhutanese merchants carrying with them shell bracelets purchased from Pabna and Dacca of the then Bengal. Further he recorded that more than 2000 persons were engaged in the conch-bangle trade in Dacca and Pabna.\textsuperscript{39}

Other travellers also referred to the trade in conch-shell. Barbosa (1500 A.D.) described that there was trade in conch-shells at Kayal, an important sea-port of that period and therefrom supply was directly made through sea to Dacca of undivided Bengal. Garica de orta in 1563 A.D. and Boccaro in 1644 A.D. also referred to the trade in conch-shell by Tamilnadu merchants with Bengal, where bangles were made for wearing in the arms. Father Matin (1700 A.D.) reported that Dutch reaped a huge profit from the trade in conch-shell with Bengal merchants.\textsuperscript{40}

Moreover excavation reports of different places in India give further proofs regarding the existence of the crafts during earlier period. Some of them are mentioned below.

\textsuperscript{35} Handicraft Survey Report: Conch Shell Products, op. cit., p.3.
\textsuperscript{36} ibid., p.2.
\textsuperscript{38} Bhattacharyya, J.V., (ed.), Naisadacharitam, B.B. Mukherjee, Calcutta, 1866.
\textsuperscript{39} Hornell, J., op. cit., p.78.
\textsuperscript{40} Thangaraju, M., The Chank Fisheries, in 'Handicraft Survey Report: Conch Shell Products', op. cit., p.117.
1. Excavation report of Taxtila - It describes that "The room seven of Block-D overlooking second street (Square 17.60) was evidently a shell worker's shop as many pieces of cut shell and mother of pearl were found in it." Moreover one portion of the floor of the procession path was adorned in a curious fashion with shell bangles embedded in the sand plaster.41

2. On excavation of Chandra Ketugarh at Berachampa in the district of 24 Parganas(North) of West Bengal, shell fragments for the period from 3rd and 4th century B.C. to the end of Pal period were found.42

3. On excavation at Hastinapur fragments of shell bangles rectangular in section were found.43

Thus although the craft originated in Southern states of India, that has been transferred to eastern part and particularly in Bengal. So one question arises what is the reason behind such transfer of craft center and concentration of the craft in eastern region only.

2.04 REASONS OF LOCATION OF THE CRAFT IN WEST BENGAL

As discussed earlier that the production of conch-shell products in general and conch-shell bangles in particular is now concentrated mainly in West Bengal. To study the financial problems of the industry in West Bengal, the reasons behind such localisation of the industry has to be examined. Now question arises whether such localisation was from time immemorial or it is a recent phenomenon.

There are various reasons for localisation of the industry. It is also applicable to cottage industry and handicrafts. Conditions for industrial localisation are:

1. Nearness to the source of raw material.

2. Nearness to the markets where goods are sold, so that transportation cost is minimum.

41. Handicraft Survey Monograph on Conch Shell Products, op cit., p.11.
42. ibid., p.11.
43. ibid., p.11.
There are, however, exceptions arising from the availability of technology, cheap labour, regional self sufficiency etc.

Localisation of craft is not a new phenomenon. As regards localisation of crafts in a particular locality we have frequent reference in the ancient literature. For example we have reference of villages of smiths, carpenters, potters etc. in Jataka 32. 44 It is observed that localisation of crafts in particular cities was the results of their natural growth, availability of raw material and marketing facilities.

Also it is stated that the economic factor of specialisation of labour was responsible for the localisation of various crafts and industries at separate village and for the grouping of people of same profession and caste. 45 In this context, the reasons behind localisation of conch shell craft in West Bengal has to be analysed.

The demand for the conch-shell bangles is based on Hindu customs, beliefs and rituals. Now crafts generally concentrate on the places where the wearing of conch-shell bangles is the custom. Although the custom of wearing conch-shell bangles on bride's wrists was considered as of Dravidian origin, 46 afterwards it became purely a Hindu custom. One time, it became general custom that married women of all section of Hindu religion throughout India should wear bangles. 47 The fact is also supported by the excavation reports. Fragments of conch-shell and work-shop waste were found in many places of southern and western India. Moreover, legends of south India and other testimonies give enough evidence that since pre-historic age brides of all caste and tribes of south India, Kathiawar etc. wore conch-shell bangles to maintain one of the marriage customs. But, presently as revealed from the field study only in West Bengal and adjoining states i.e., Assam, Bihar and Orissa in India, the custom of wearing conch-shell bangles continues.

So although the custom as well as craft prevailed in most part of the India in ancient period, why has it been forgotten in the southern and western parts of India ? There is an exception to the theory of localisation because the basic raw material i.e.,

45. ibid., p.142.
intact conch-shell are mainly fished off from the coasts of Tamilnadu and Gujrat. But in those states such craft did not exist in the earlier periods. Whereas fishery for conch-shell did not exist in the coast of West Bengal, though this craft flourished here since long ago. One of the reasons might be that discovery of glass and glass bangles gave a heavy blow to the conch-shell industry of south India and more particularly to that of Visakhapatnam. Glass bangles are available at a small fraction of the cost of the conch-shell bangles. So it might be that the south India women switched over to glass bangles leaving the hard and fast rules of the custom.  

It may also be that the close of the unchallenged Hindu supremacy in the South, the spoiling of riches of the Pandyan cities by Muslim invaders and the heyday of Arab Sea powers in the Indian coasts had contributed to dispensing with the custom by the womenfolk of south India.

But such custom is still prevalent among Bengali Hindu married women. The custom at one point of time tended to die out from amongst the women of high social status who prefer temporarily to dispense with the custom. But womenfolk in general in West Bengal and its adjoining states are too conservative to disregard the custom of wearing conch bangles beginning from marriage ceremony and continuing to wearing the same so long their husbands remain alive. The tribes of Santals and Kurmis of Bihar and Orissa also observe this custom. So there is shifting of craft centre from the source of raw material to the user centre or market.

Secondly, supply of raw material was not a problem in the earlier period, because previously raw conch-shells were imported from Cylon (Sri Lanka) and south India through Calcutta port. Thus there was adequate supply of raw materials from Calcutta to all the centers of undivided Bengal. As referred to earlier, the reference of export of intact conch-shell from Tamilnadu coasts to Bengal are found in the description of different travellers, monk etc. of different times viz., Cosmos, an Egyptians monk in 6th century A.D. Abu Zaid in 851 A.D., Barbosa in 1500 A.D. Garica de orta in 1563 A.D. and Boccaro in 1644 A.D.

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Reference of conch-shell industry were also found in various reports. The list of craft centers and their employment pattern is given in Table 2.02 for the year 1911 and 1921. This table also includes the artisans engaged in bone and horn carving.

**TABLE 2.02**

**Craft Centers and Employment Pattern**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Craft Centers</th>
<th>Number of Persons Engaged</th>
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</tr>
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</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Birbhum</td>
<td>389</td>
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<td>Calcutta</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Now in Bangladesh</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dacca</td>
<td>2640</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jossore</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rajshahi</td>
<td>232</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rangpur</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bagura</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pabna</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maymansiong</td>
<td>269</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faridpur</td>
<td>227</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noakhali</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khulna</td>
<td>267</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Census Figure 1911 & 1921, Office of the Registrar of Co-operative Society, Bengal, A Summary of the Cottage Industries in the districts of Bengal, Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, Calcutta, 1923.*
It is evident from the table that shell craving was an important craft in both parts of Bengal in the first quarter of this century although more artisans were engaged in Dacca. After partition of Bengal in 1947 skilled artisans of the districts of Dacca and Pabna came to West Bengal for their settlement. Thus refugee colonies surrounding Calcutta and as well as old craft centers of Murshidabad and Bankura districts became important centres, where the craft flourished thereafter. The position of this industry in the scenario of total handicraft and cottage industries of West Bengal can be studied to have an overall idea of the industry from the economic point of view.

2.05 POSITION OF CONCH SHELL CRAFT IN THE SCENARIO OF HANDICRAFT AND COTTAGE INDUSTRY OF WEST BENGAL

The importance of the conch-shell industry in the economy of West Bengal and particularly in the craft centers where it is carried on can be clearly understood if the position of this industry among the other major handicrafts of West Bengal is inquired. To have an idea of its development, we may go through some literature on the same. But it may be noted that the nature product of this industry is such that it is not required for everyday use by all families. Demands for the products are limited to home market, i.e., West Bengal and few adjoining states. In spite of this limitation position of this industry is not less significant than that of other major crafts excluding handloom weaving. The Table 2.03 shows what was the position of different crafts in terms of employment and annual production during early fifties.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>No. of People Employed</th>
<th>Estimated Annual Production Rs. (Lakhs)</th>
<th>Rank (In terms of value of production)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Handloom Weaving Industry:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cotton</td>
<td>3,75,000</td>
<td>840</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silk</td>
<td>18,000</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art Silk</td>
<td>1,800</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wools</td>
<td>1,500</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jute</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3,96,800</td>
<td>1031</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brass and Bell Metals</td>
<td>30,000</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Village, Pottery, and Clay modeling</td>
<td>20,000</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leather Industry</td>
<td>30,000</td>
<td>800</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mat Weaving</td>
<td>30,000</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bamboo and Cane works</td>
<td>2,500</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hosiery</td>
<td>25,000</td>
<td>320</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conch-shell</td>
<td>12,000</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horn Weaving</td>
<td>3,500</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coir</td>
<td>1,000</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ivory work</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Button Industry</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Government of West Bengal, Arts and Crafts of West Bengal, Home(press) Department on behalf of the Cottage and Small Scale Industries department, Calcutta, 1955, p.3. Ranks computed

It is evident that the industry occupied 8th rank in the craft industry during that period.
The position of the industry declined in sixties and symptoms of decay appeared on the surface. Whereas in eighties, the potentiality of the craft increased. It was estimated that more than 12000 artisans were connected with the industry in 38 craft centers over ten districts including Calcutta. The approximate annual production in 1985 - 1986 was estimated at Rupees three hundred lakhs. It may also be noted the demand of intact conch-shell was met at that time only to the extend of 50 percent.\(^{51}\) The position of the industry in early eighties can also be traced from the Table 2.04 showing the approximate employment pattern of different crafts in West Bengal for the year 1980 - 1981.

### TABLE 2.04

**Craft Wise Employment Position**

**Period- 1980-81**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Craft</th>
<th>Employment (No of persons)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cane &amp; Bamboo</td>
<td>35,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mat Weaving</td>
<td>50,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dhokra</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brass &amp; Bel Metals</td>
<td>20,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leather Work</td>
<td>6,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shell Products</td>
<td>12,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horn Carving</td>
<td>2,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clay products and Folk toys</td>
<td>3,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The total number of craftsman engaged in handicraft industry and their total annual production was estimated at 1,30,000 persons and Rupees 12 Crores respectively for the same period. Again the number of person engaged declined in nineties which is evident from Table 2.05.

---

\(^{51}\) *Handicraft Survey Report: Conch Shell Products, op.cit., Preface, p.(x).*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the craft</th>
<th>Craft Concentration (Estimated number of Artisans)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brass and Bell Metals</td>
<td>4092</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cane/Bamboo/Reeds</td>
<td>6526</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dokra (Metal Casting)</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dolls/Toys/Modelling</td>
<td>847</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Filigree/Tribal/Imitation Ornament</td>
<td>30078</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horn</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ivory</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fancy Leather</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mat</td>
<td>9692</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mask of all varieties</td>
<td>218</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needle Craft</td>
<td>8137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Chikon, embroidery, kantha, zari)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pati/Talai</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Printing (Textile)</td>
<td>1178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Painting</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pottery/Terracotta/Ceramics</td>
<td>1864</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sholapith</td>
<td>1544</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stone-carving</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shell-carving (Conch-shell and sea &amp; river shell)</td>
<td>6077</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weaving (Textile)</td>
<td>850</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wood Carving</td>
<td>754</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous Crafts (Carpet, Jute, Lac, Musical instruments, Wool-knitting, Paper, Leaf, Feather etc.)</td>
<td>66970</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Craft and Crafts persons of West Bengal, Directorate of Cottage and Small Scale Industries, West Bengal and West Bengal Handicrafts Development Corporation Ltd, Government of West Bengal, Calcutta, 1990, pp.125-126.
Thus in terms of employment it was 5th in the rank of craft industry during that period.

So this industry was much important in the economy of West Bengal. Now a large number of artisans are associated with the industry. It highlights the potentiality of this craft to offer employment to men and women in the rural as well as urban areas. Earlier studies on the issue carried out at government and private levels should be reviewed to have a background of the present study. Such review will reveal whether such studies explored the employment potential of the industry, problems of the industry in-depth and whether those studies were carried with the objectives similar to the objectives of the present study. For the purpose the main findings of earlier studies are discussed now.

2.06 SUMMARY OF EARLIER SURVEYS

2.06.1 Introduction

With a view to having an idea of the state of affairs of handicrafts, after independence the Government both at centre and state levels, arranged to study various types of handicrafts and cottage industries. Following four surveys were made by different bodies at different times on conch-shell handicraft industry.


2. Census Survey (1961) on Conch-shell products by Census Operations, West Bengal and Sikkim, during the period 1963-64.


4. Survey on Conch-shell craft in some selected pockets of West Bengal carried by the Office of the Development Commissioner, (Handicrafts), Eastern Regional Office, Calcutta during the year 1986.

2.06.2 First Study

The first of these four studies were carried on 1959 - 60, by State Statistical Bureau, Government of West Bengal. That study was the ninth of the type study series in
different localities of four districts viz., Bankura, Twenty-four Parganas, Murshidabad and Nadia of the state of West Bengal.

1. Coverage

The survey covered selected units of four districts. It was done through administering structured questionnaire. During the period of survey 1207 units were listed as active units in those four districts. The report of the study was made on the basis of information received from 739 units out of 829 selected units. The scope of investigation was broad. It included the economy of the establishments engaged in this craft, their capital and assets structure, cost of production, value of products, marketing channels and problems faced by these establishments.

2. Findings

Major findings of the study can be summarised as below,

1. The establishments were mainly of two broad categories viz., independent units and auxiliary units.
   
   (i) Independent units were those which purchased raw materials, manufactured the articles and sold finished articles independently.
   
   (ii) auxiliary units were those units which worked on behalf of others. Such contractual piece-rate workers (called bani workers) received raw materials from wholesellers, brokers or traders-cum-manufactures (called mahajan) and supplied finished product to them against wages. Out of 739 units actually surveyed 417 units were independent units and the rest were auxiliary units.

2. The major articles produced at that time were conch bangles of various types, shell trumpets or blowing conch, ring, bracelet, locket and button. The only by-product was shell-dust which was used for herbal(ayurvedic) medicine or used as lime. 99 percent of the total value of production for independent units was finished and semi-finished conch bangles.
3. In terms of value of production on an average 74 percent of the capacity was utilised, but it varied from district to district. The rate was the highest in 24 Parganas (i.e., 86 percent) whereas it was the lowest in Nadia (i.e., 67 percent.)

4. It was found that average value of consumption of basic raw material i.e., raw conch-shell, by artisans was Rs.1532.60 and Rs.39.40 for independent and auxiliary units respectively. Also wide variation was observed in use of raw materials by different units of different districts. Whereas craftsmen of Bangaon of 24 Parganas consumed mostly semi-finished bangles processed by other units, craftsmen of Bankura and other places mainly consumed raw conch-shell. During that period principal raw materials used were:

   (i) raw conch-shell
   
   (ii) semi-finished bangles and

   (iii) cut pieces of conch-shell.

5. From the analysis of labour position, it was found that most of the establishments were run entirely by family workers. Only 8 percent of the independent establishments engaged outside labourers. Wages of outside labourers varied widely from region to region during the year 1959-60, i.e., from Rs.29 p.m. at Kandi subdivision of Mushirdabad district to Rs.66 p.m. at Ranaghat subdivision of Nadia district. Average labour employed per establishment was 1.71.

6. Cost of raw materials constituted 84 percent of the total cost of independent units whereas other major cost was labour and cost for work done through other (i.e., 13 percent of total cost).

7. The value of production by auxiliary units could not be found. Only quantitative details were given. The average production fluctuated from district to district. It was the highest in 24 Parganas (i.e., 5367 pair of finished bangles) and the lowest in Nadia (i.e., 1062 pair of the same.)

8. The total average cost of production per establishment in terms of per rupee of value of production was also studied. It was observed that, it was the highest
for the units of Bangaon area of 24 Parganas (i.e., 0.79 paise) whereas it was the lowest for the units of Murshidabad (i.e., 0.64 paise). Thus profit margin in terms of per rupee of sales was around 0.33 paise.

9. The study also covered income of individual unit. It was reported that in spite of high cost of production income margin was the highest for independent units of Bankura and average income per unit was reported at Rs. 1068 p.a in 1959-60. Whereas income margin of independent units of Nadia and 24 Parganas was Rs. 959 p.a. and Rs. 953 p.a. respectively. On the other hand income margin was reported still lower for the auxiliary units. On an average it was Rs. 600 p.a. for units of Bankura and it was the lowest on an average for units of Nadia district.

10. Thus the study revealed that on an average an artisan’s income from this craft was only Rs. 50 p.m. Moreover more than 50 percent of their incomes were derived from this craft.

11. Regarding marketing aspect, it was noted that for auxiliary units question of marketing did not arise, as they worked only in exchange of piece rate wages. But independent units had to market their products. It was revealed that on an average 60.52 percent of the production was sold directly in the whole sale markets and 39.23 percent of the production was sold through retail sale in the first hand market. Only 0.25 percent of the total sales had been effected through mahajans. The average value of sales of all the independent units studied was Rs. 2,704 per year per establishment.

12. The study on sources of supply of principal raw materials and terms of purchase, revealed that about 74 percent of total consumption of raw materials of independent units was purchased from markets, 19 percent of the same was supplied by co-operatives and 7 percent of the same came from mahajans. The terms of trades were more or less on cash basis except for the units of 24 Parganas where 99 percent of the total purchases had been made on credit.

13. The study also covered capital structure of the units at the date of enquiry. Information on the following aspects were given in the report.
(i) Average value of fixed and working capital employed.

(ii) Ratio of fixed capital in terms of working capital.

(iii) Investment of capital in different types of assets.

(iv) Percentage of establishments paying rent against fixed assets.

It was found that the productive capital employed in the industry was about Rs. 495 per establishment of which 51.50 percent was employed as fixed capital and rest 48.50 per cent as working capital. Since auxiliary unit requires very little investment in working capital, aggregating data of two type of units will not give correct picture. It was found that average investment in fixed capital and working capital was Rs.316 and Rs.395, respectively for independent unit, whereas aggregate data shows a different picture. Investment pattern found in the study was that 40 percent of total capital was invested in land, buildings and other fixed assets and rest was invested in stock, sundry debtors, advance etc.

The establishments were grouped in three classes according to the value of the assets i.e., up to Rs.500, Rs.501 to Rs.1,000 and Rs.1,001 to Rs.2,000. It was found that 78% of the total units were under the lowest assets group i.e., upto Rs.500 and only 6% of the were in the highest assets group i.e., Rs.1,001 to Rs.2,000.

14. The survey revealed that 84 percent of total credit were obtained from private sources, whereas only 0.45% came from the Banks. Moreover contribution of the State was modest and only 14% of the total credit were supplied by the State. Co-operative societies were helpful only to units of Murshidabad district and only 2% of the total credit was supplied by them. As regards interest charges, the rate varied very widely when loans were taken from private sources. The average rate of interest charged by the private agencies was about 3% p.m., whereas it was about 5.58% p.a. and 10.84% p.a. when loans were collected from the Government and the Banks respectively. The average rate of interest charged by the co-operative societies were 5.22% p.a.
15. On analysing the current liabilities position of the units it was found that about 32% of the establishment had some sort of current liabilities. Moreover major item of current liabilities was 'credit for raw material supplies'. The average value of current liabilities was Rs.290 per establishment. But it fluctuated between district to district and it was the highest in Nadia i.e., Rs.538 and the lowest in Murshidabad i.e., Rs.185. On an average liability on account of credit for raw materials supplies constituted Rs.251 per establishment.

16. At the end of the study a list of problems faced by the units surveyed was given. It was stated that most of establishment had faced different type of problems. The gravity of the problems was also different. The study gave the following account (in terms of percentage) of establishment facing different types of problems.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of difficulties/Problems</th>
<th>Percentage of establishment faced the difficulties out of total establishments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Shortage of raw materials</td>
<td>72.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Lack of Finance</td>
<td>66.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Competition from other Inland goods</td>
<td>35.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Marketing of Products</td>
<td>24.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Lack of improved machinery</td>
<td>4.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Problem of labour</td>
<td>4.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Demand Constraints</td>
<td>14.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Ill remuneration</td>
<td>1.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Accommodation facilities.</td>
<td>1.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Transport facilities.</td>
<td>0.27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It was also found that the percentage of establishments facing particular types of difficulties varied from district to district. For example 93% of the total establishments surveyed faced difficulty of shortage of raw materials in
Murshidabad district, whereas in the case of 24 Parganas only 5% of units faced such difficulty.

2.06.3 Findings of Handicraft Survey on Conch-shell Products in 1961 Census

1. **Background**

   The rapid expansion of 'Six Boards' viz., a) The Khadi and Village Industries Board; b) The All India Handicrafts Board; c) The All India Handloom Board; d) The Central Silk Board; e) The Coir Board; and f) The Small Industries Board engaged in promotion of handicrafts, village and small industries demanded that a separate investigation should be carried out to have a proper accounting of manpower and resources engaged in such industries and to have specific idea about their contribution to national income. With this view in 1961 Census, it was thought a special series of questions to be asked on household industries. The primary aim was to obtain a picture a) as much as of the artisan himself as of his craft; b) the perspective of the artisan and his craft in his social and economic setting; and c) the condition of the market, credit facilities etc. To fulfill above objectives it was felt that following aspects should be studied viz., the caste; occupational, social and economic stratification; the limitation of credit and marketing facilities; the flexibilities of traditional skill; limitation of transport and the inability to adopt new lines or adopt to changing circumstances. The main findings of the survey can be summarized as follows. The survey was limited to conch-shell artisans of Raibaghine village of Bankura District.

2. **Major Findings**

   1. The settlement history of the artisan families revealed that *Sankhabaniks* were the earliest settler among the practising conch-shell artisans in the village. They might have immigrated in Raibaghine village of Kotulpur police station in District of Bankura, about a century ago. The maximum persons was found to had been settled between 51 to 150 years ago. According to the survey, that was the crucial period for the craft.
2. The survey tried to give an account of myth, legend and history connected with craftsmen community, although investigators could not get much help from the practising artisans in this regard.

3. The survey gave full account of member of families/person actually engaged in this craft out of total number of families belonging to craftsmen caste. Also it gave a table showing caste wise distribution of practising and non-practising artisans. The survey revealed that on average 41.8% of the total number of the families were engaged in the craft. The study also tabulated data on martial status, age distribution, and education level of the artisans.

4. There were two major types of workers viz., independent workers and dependent workers. Independent workers were those who themselves collected raw materials and processed the products themselves or by other workers, whereas dependent or bani workers worked as contractual employees of independent units or mahajans.

5. During the period of the survey, principal items produced at that village were plain conch-shell bangles, coloured bangles and shell-horn or blowing conch. It was revealed that some of the articles produced earlier like ring or ringlets disappeared. Only a limited number of designs was used on the outer surface of the bangles. During the period of survey engraved designs were popular to the customers.

6. The survey provides a clear description of raw materials used, tools and equipment manipulated for production of various articles. It also gave an account of terms and conditions of purchases and source of main and subsidiary raw materials and description of tools used; process and stages of production and source and price of tools and implements.

7. Difficulties in estimating the true cost of production were also stated. Following factors were considered as the impediments in determining the actual cost of production.
(a) Ascertainment of cost of labour imparted by the head of the household and family members,
(b) Wide variation in the variety, size and the price of main raw materials,
(c) Variation in the volume of work due to irregular supply of raw materials.

The study gave an estimate of cost of production under the following heads with reference to different articles.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(i)</th>
<th>Price of raw materials</th>
<th>Rs. 5(approx.) (one intact conch- shell)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(ii)</td>
<td>Cost of transport</td>
<td>Rs. 10/- per trip from Calcutta.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(iii)</td>
<td>Wages</td>
<td>(a) operation wise - Rs.0.03 to Rs.0.19 per operation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(b) product wise Rs.0.06 to Rs.0.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(iv)</td>
<td>Rent for work shop</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(v)</td>
<td>Rent for tools</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(vi)</td>
<td>Other payment for processing</td>
<td>arises only where a process is carried through outside worker.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(vii)</td>
<td>Interest on loan</td>
<td>@ 6.25% p.a.in Government loan @ 36% p.a.on private loan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Considering all the above elements of costs, costs of 8 pcs. plain bangles were estimated to be Rs.6.27 i.e., Rs.1.56 per pair of bangles. On the other hand cost of a pair of coloured bangles was estimated to be Rs.2.

8. The investment for tools and implements necessary for production of plain bangles was estimated to be Rs.265.50. Substantial amount of investment were required for purchasing tools required for sizing and cutting operations. A part of investment were required to be made on raw materials, payment to workers etc. On an average total working expenses was estimated at Rs.800 p.a.
9. Main source of finance was own capital, which was generally obtained through sale of assets or retained income from other sources.

10. Loan capital was considered as a minor source. Loans were collected from money lenders or from private persons when needed. Loans from the Government were also available to some artisans.

11. For the year 1963 total output of 31 units surveyed was estimated to be 36,000 pairs of different variety of bangles and 150 pcs. of blowing conch valued at Rs. 36,300/- in the year 1963, i.e., preceding year of survey.

12. The survey provides also an account of economic behavior of the craftsmen. Following were the findings:

   (i) Out of 59 craftsmen at that village 55 persons had opted for this craft as their sole operation.

   (ii) Only two adult persons were found unemployed, and 76 persons were non-workers. By a non-worker the study refer to a person who was no way connected with any economic activity and was not searching for a employment at present. Out of the 141 members belonging to 31 practising artisan households, only 4 persons were engaged in economic activities other than this craft.

   (iii) The income distribution was also studied and it revealed that earnings of most of the artisans per annum varied between Rs.351 to Rs.400.

13. The study dealt with the consumer preference also. For this purpose 10 consumer households of different caste were selected. The study revealed that married females always preferred the genuine conch-shell bangles or Sankha to synthetic bangles (plastic) because they considered conch-shell sacred. It was found that out of 10 households only one household wife had used the synthetic bangles even though cost difference between the two was about Rs.1.88 per pair.
14. In conclusion surveyors dealt with the causes of decay of this industry. Since at that time many households had left the profession and the production had declined.

The main causes of decline identified by the survey were (a) difficulty in getting raw material; (b) deterioration of quality of raw material; (c) steep increase of price of raw material; (d) shrinkage of market due to competition from synthetic bangles; (e) dislocation of continuous work due to non-availability of raw material; and (f) inadequacy of capital and inability of artisan to provide sustained supply of capital.

Survey provided some suggestions to save the industry. The surveyors opined that people in the countryside still prefer to use conch-shell bangles as signs of marriage and also blow shell-horn in the temples and houses at evening. Their suggestions were as follows:

(i) The Government should consider the potentiality of the craft and the possibility of export.

(ii) The supply of raw materials should be improved with the help of the fishery department.

(iii) The Government may train the artisans in learning new methods and designs.

(iv) To increase the market, product diversification should also be considered.

2.06.4 Findings of Handicraft Survey on Conch-shell Products during 1986-87

1. **Background**

After the attempt was made to study about one hundred fifty crafts in the 1961 census, a similar attempt was again made in connection with the 1981 census. But the studies taken up in connection with the 1981 census had concerned their attention only on rural based craft. Accordingly, again a study of conch-shell craft was conducted during 1986-87. This study was administered with the help of questionnaire and schedules. The main findings were published

Major findings of this study which were in addition to that of the study conducted in connection with the 1961 census and scope of the study are briefly discussed below.

2. **Scope of the Study**

Twelve craft centers in the rural area of West Bengal were listed as important craft centers during the period of study. Out of the 12 craft centres three craft centres were at Raibaghini, Kamarsale and Saspur in the district of Bankura had been selected for an intensive study. It may be pointed out that the craft centre at Raibaghini village was also studied in the 1961 census.

3. **Major Findings of the study**

1. The study revealed that although conch-shell carving was the traditional occupation of the people of Sankhabanik caste, people of other castes, including upper caste Brahmin, had also taken up the craft as their occupation.

2. The quality and varieties of the articles produced in different craft centres were more or less the same. The major products produced during that period were plain white bangles, coloured bangles, rings and shell-horn.

3. Two type of production units viz., independent unit and auxiliary unit also existed during the period of survey. In 3 selected craft centres out of fifty-eight artisan households, 40 were independent units and the rest were auxiliary units. Auxiliary units were run by Bani Workers who work on contract basis on payment of wages.

4. The study revealed that West Bengal Handicraft Development Corporation Ltd. and 'Zilla Parishad' of Bankura district had made useful contribution through helping in canalizing the supply of raw material to the craftsmen directly and organising the sale of finished products through different sales emporia located in important towns and
cities of the state. The study also pointed out that although fifteen co-operatives were in existence in different craft centres of West Bengal, their activities cannot be known due to non-availability of data or non-receipt of response against enquiry.

5. The study also covered the qualitative characteristics of the craft centres. It gave a brief report about location, ethnic composition, other craft pursued etc. Moreover the economic condition, demographic profile of practising and non-practising craftsmen, occupational characteristics were also studied.

6. The study revealed that there was no arrangement of formal training of the craftsmen. The training in general was received by the artisans from their elders or the techniques of production were learned by the artisans by closely observing the elders at work. The survey indicated also that with each decade there had been a fall in the recruitment of craftsmen. During that period only 18 percent of the total craftsmen had been pursuing the craft for less than a decade.

7. Further the survey gave an account of manufacturing processes. The special feature of this study was that data about average monthly production of major articles was available here. The study revealed that average productions were not uniform in the craft centres. The highest monthly production was recorded in Saspur (i.e., 270 pairs of plain bangles and 225 pairs of coloured bangles) whereas the lowest production was found in Raibaghini (i.e., 132 pairs of white bangles and 133 pairs of coloured bangles). It was also pointed out that the operation of the craft was not seasonal, although some slackness in activity occurred during rainy season or due to non availability of raw materials.

8. The survey report also gave clear account of source of main raw material, their qualities, monthly consumption, problems regarding procurement and terms and condition for purchase.
9. The study clearly pointed out that it was very difficult for the investigators to collect data on annual production and related information due to some peculiar characteristic of this craft. Firstly, the auxiliary units did not maintain any record of production as they work for the mahajans. Secondly, the craft being traditional and small household industry type, the craftsman did not know modern management and financial accounting. Moreover the artisans, even who are literate, did not bother to keep records of production. But survey report gave a rough estimate of annual production and its value. The production during 1985 in the selected 3 craft centres was 51,980 pairs of plain white bangles valued at approximately Rs. 7,79,700, 94,270 pairs of coloured bangles valued at Rs. 2,82,810 and 550 pieces of shell horn worth Rs. 13,750.

10. The study also covered methods of disposal, and the terms and conditions of disposal. The study revealed that main purpose of production was sale. There were some set channels along which articles were sold in traditional style. The channels included vending to the local consumers, sale at local market and Hat (open air country market) within a radius of 10 Kms., sale at seasonal rural fairs held in Bankura and neighbouring districts, sales to wholesalers who occasionally visit the craft-centres and sale to urban areas including Calcutta. The terms of payments were more or less in cash on delivery. In very few cases credits were allowed to some wholesalers from Calcutta.

11. The study pointed out also that artisans were reluctant to give true account of their margin of profit and they generally tried to suppress it. A rough estimate of cost of production and margin of profit were given. But the investigators pointed out that the costs did not include the unpaid wages of family of labour. Thus wages cost was reduced to such extent. The element wise cost of production of a pair of white bangles as given in the report was as follows.
Cost of Raw Materials Rs. 5 to 10
Cost of Carriage-in-ward Rs. 0.35
Cost of labour/cutting and designing Rs. 3.00
Rs. 8.35 to Rs 13.35

The surveyors opined that on verification it had been revealed that margin of profit varied between 25 percent to 50 percent. But the artisans in their response to questionnaire pointed out that margin of profit was only 10 percent on sale price.

Lastly, survey gave an account of employment pattern since 1961. With the help of the data from the previous study it revealed that the number of households engaged in the craft gradually eroded during last three decades in all the three craft centres. A description of the general condition of the craft was also given. In the eighties the craft was in a state of stagnant condition. The craftsmen expressed their view that the craft can still be rejuvenated by some timely measures like financial assistance on easy terms, supply of quality raw materials and proper marketing facility for finished goods.

In conclusion the study pointed out that in earlier decades the craft gave employment to surplus rural labour-force. But craft had lost its appeals to rural unemployed youth as a source of income and livelihood. Various factors were identified for such a situation, viz., disappearance of mahajans, increase in cost of production, decrease in margin of profit and availability of other remunerative occupations to educated youths.

The survey report listed following problems of the craft which had stopped its development.

1. Inadequacy of capital.
2. Irregular supply of raw materials.
3. Lack of efficient modern tools.
4. Lack of formal training.
5. Competition from substitute cheap industrial products.
6. Change of consumer's preference.
7. Non-existence and non-functioning of co-operative societies, training-cum-production centre or any apex body.

Following suggestions were also given:

1. Productivity should be increased through supplying improved tools and implements and providing training to young apprentices under master craftsmen.

2. Training-cum-production centres are to be established in each district.

3. Long term credit from industrial and rural co-operative banks should be supplied to the needy artisans.

4. New items of consumer goods of novelty are to be innovated.

5. Arrangements should be made for spot purchases of article by the Government agencies.

6. Better entrepreneurial skills are to be developed and the knowledge of costing technique should be given to the craftsman.

7. Modernisation of production system without effecting its traditional craftsmen-ship should be introduced.

Survey pointed out at the end that the extinction of the craft is "far, far, off".

2.07 SCOPE FOR FURTHER ANALYSIS

The earlier surveys indicate that most of them did not pinpoint the specific financial problems of the industry as a whole. Moreover, scope and coverage of those studies were very limited and did not cover the major units of the industry except that relating to 1959-1960. Cost structure of different type of products, value of by-products, variability of cost structure, profitability structure, return of investment made in the units etc., also were not studied. The first study carried in 1959-1960 gives only statistical information of both dependent and independent units. But there are differences between the operation of two types units. So aggregate information of these two type of units does not reveal the correct picture. Moreover, conclusion
was not drawn about the result of the study. Even though this study have very high academic value it gives scope for further study to fill these gaps.

Other two surveys made in connection with 1961 and 1981 census confined respectively to one and three villages of Bankura District in the state West Bengal. So those studies do not reveal the position of the industry as a whole.

Being census surveys, they were limited to social surveys and they fail to analyse the cost structure, financing problems, and profitability of the units. Those studies concentrate mainly on socio-economic aspect of the units. Thus it left the scope of analysing the financial problem in depth. The 1986 study on the units of six sample villages carried by the Office of the Development Commissioner (Handicrafts), Eastern Regional Office, Calcutta also limited in scope and coverage. In this study too cost structure, return on investment in the units etc. were not analysed in depth.

2.08 NEEDS FOR PRESENT ENQUIRY

Thus there is need for further enquiry from broader aspects covering most of the craft centres of West Bengal. So there is need of survey. The statistical and other empirical data relevant to the issues are very inadequate.

So an enquiry through data collected from primary sources is required to have an idea of financial ills of independent units of this industry and to identify possible remedies to cure that. For this purpose, there is a need to inquire:

i) The elements of costs.

ii) Cost structure and their variability.

iii) Capital and assets structure.

iv) Sources of financing and cost of capital.

v) Profitability position of the units.

vi) Return on Investment (ROI) and Return on own capital of the units.

vii) Marketing channels and their problems.

Through the present enquiry it may be possible to have an idea of financial health of the industry and scope of further improvement. Thus, whether employment
opportunity can be enhanced may also be analysed. Scope of expanding inland market, problems of marketing and scope of improvement in marketing system can also be inquired.

The present enquiry is very much needed to have clear idea of the economics of the conch-shell industries in West Bengal in general and their financial problems and marketing aspects in particular. But for this purpose we must have an idea of the process of production and their specific technicalities for each types of product separately. That is why, the next chapter will deal with production process of the industry.