



## Carpet Industry and Economic Liberalization: A Social Work Perspective

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### *Abstract*

*The carpet industry provides opportunities to almost all sections of the society i.e., workers, designers, contractors, exporters and above all to the consumers irrespective of caste, class, gender and religion. The establishment of carpet industry, need and demands of new technology paved the way for skilled, technical education in designing. The openings of institutes are in abundance which in turn provides opportunities to the adults who are educated and interested in such jobs and also to those who opens such institutions. Moreover, China and other countries highlighted the issue of child labour through photographs of children working in various small units of carpet industry. In the words of exporter, since it is skill, therefore, one has to learn from the childhood. The neglected attitude of our Government in 1990s and issue of child labour causes the downfall of the hand knotted carpet work and carpet industry as a whole. The current study is ethnographic approach to collect primary data. The collection of data become possible through interview with workers, contractors and exporters involved in the carpet industry.*

**Key words:** Hand Knotted carpet, tufted machine, Social Resource Map, Ethnographic approach

### **Introduction**

The people of Bhadoi since centuries have been using their dexterous fingers to make *kaleens* (carpets) into which they weave their dreams (Syeda, 2012). The enthusiasm of weaving dream is an art more than the profession. In 1984-85 the work of carpet on tufted sheet started from Mirzapur. The places such as Bhadoi and Mirzapur together account for over 65 per cent of India's carpet exports. Companies give contract per month to about 20-25 contractors. A small contractor usually takes contract of 250-300 square yard carpet and a big contractor takes contract of 2500-3000 square yard in a month as per the availability of workforce. A contractor requires skilled workers to complete a target. The contractors, therefore, are essential part of the whole process.

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A number of companies are there for the purpose of carpet export. Every year exporters used to come to Delhi 'Trade Fair'. The exporters have their showrooms at various places within the country and outside in America, Egypt etc. The phase of 'export boom' continued till early 2000s. Since then export has entered into a new phase which is characterized by an overall decline in the production and exports of hand knotted carpets. The production of hand knotted carpets is very labour intensive and time consuming. The demand for hand knotted carpets in the international market has declined due to changes in consumer tastes in favour of cheaper, less durable, and modern design carpets rather than more costly, long lasting, and traditional design carpets. The new preferences of the US markets were in favour of tufted carpets and durries which are cheaper where as the German market used to absorb mostly hand knotted carpets of Persian variety. In recent years there has also been a shift in consumer preference in German market towards hand tufted carpets. Change in consumer taste also accompanied the slump in the market. There has been a general decline in carpet exports despite the growth in the tufted variety. The present slump has affected all the sections involved in this business. The labour force was affected because their real wages declined and stagnated. On the other hand, the profit margins of the entrepreneurs also declined severely (Venkateswarlu, D, Ramakrishna & Mohammed Abdul Moid, pp.8-11)

Thus, the ethnographic approach on carpet industry in the current study looks in to the system of carpet industry by interviewing workers, contractors, expert designers, exporters and the livelihood opportunities and hurdles for them. The current study focuses on weaving skills and opportunities of local population and carpet making as an international import and export business and its challenges. The investigator visited for the collection of data about hand knotted work, its current status in market, training, competition, changing scenario and the adaptability of technology for more production and related challenges since economic liberalization in India.

### **Objective of the Study**

The assumption is that women work with more sincerity and without diversion during their working time. The accepted fact is that women are better in hand knotted carpet work because of their soft fingers. Thus, involving women of SHGs for the work can be a good initiative for micro-finance development. The objective of the study, thus, is to find out the process of business in hand knotted carpet work. The second objective was to find out its prospect for backward and marginalized sections of society. The current study intended to learn about and evolve opportunities to the members of Self-Help Groups.

### **Research Design**

The ethnographic study on carpet industry has been conducted using methods of Social Resource Map and personal interview. The social resource map was drawn with the participation of workers whereas personal interviews were conducted with contractors, expert designers, trainers and exporters and workers too. The workers were willing to participate in the process of study. Hence, the investigator used only one method of PRA (Participatory Rapid Appraisal) i.e., social resource map for identification of units of carpet industry and accessed by transect walk/travelling in the city. Thus, the actual locations of the carpet industry and its working, repairing, workshop and training units were identified. The investigator approached across Mirzapur city to personally observe and conduct interviews. The investigator took interviews by visiting four carpet making units, one carpet repairing work unit, one handloom workshop unit, two offices of carpet unit, one *lachchi* converter unit, one household handloom unit and one exporter's company at Bhadoi. The exporters, designers, contractors were not made part of social resource map. The limited spare time and competition in the market keep them confined. Most of the exporters were reluctant to interview. The principle of confidentiality of social work has been applied to keep the

promises committed to the interviewee. The contractors designers and exporters were ready to let record their names in record dairy but reluctant to give photographs of their carpet designs. The unwillingness to share photos of carpet design was due to the cut-throat competition in the market.

#### **Participatory Rapid Appraisal method**

A Social Resource map was drawn with the participation of carpet unit workers. The social resource map guided in accessing the place for observation and conducting interviews. The keys have been shown on the left side of the figure. A few landmarks such as Mirzapur jail, Railway station, river Ganga, railway track, highway across Ganga has been drawn in map with the cooperation of the participants (Appendix, Figure 1).

#### **Market Challenges: Understanding the Context**

The competition was with Iran at the stage of initiation of carpet industry. The Iranian carpet industries, however, have still not adopted new techniques and remain dependent upon old techniques. The past experiences during the tenure of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in 1970s are noticeable. She herself visited Bhadoi and pledge to provide incentive and subsidies to carpet industry. As a result, hand knotted carpet touches the peak, thus, leaving behind all the other countries as competitors in the field. The downfall in hand knotted industry began particularly with the initiation of New Economic Policy in 1991. With the initiation of the era of economic liberalization, the less costly Chinese carpet products invaded Indian market. Presently, the main competitors are China and Pakistan. China and Pakistan has adopted new techniques and consequently adapted themselves to the use of computers for designing, clipping machines and others. This adaptability intensified the production and profit in carpet industry. These countries came into competition with hand knotted carpet because of the incentives, subsidies provided in those countries. The availability of cheap and fancy carpet attracts more customers in India and the world. The countries like China adopted market strategies to condemned child labour as against the belief and practice of exporters that hand knotted work is an art and need to be learnt from childhood. According to one of the exporters, up to 40% incentives and subsidies on trade in Pakistan and China are provided to carpet industries for its fullest growth and development. The Indian Government, on the other hand, evaded its interest and paid negligence which grossly affected hand knotted work. It grossly affected carpet industry. Now retailers directly bought items from shopping malls in the city. Prior to that trend the importers bought and provide it to the retailers. The backdrop presented an opportunity to take interviews with varied strata of people engaged in the process of carpet making. The first interview was conducted with designers.

#### **Interview with Designers**

Designing comes before weaving. The designers earn by designing on the paper. They adjust appropriate colour for attractive look to model design. The place called 'Khamarya' in the district Bhadoi is one of the centre of designers and a number of designers are available. They usually design by hands. According to one of the designers, designing course is available in Mirzapur city using computers. The course generally takes six months or one year and learns designing skills. Moreover, the computer printout is costly than design by hand. There is exception in learning through work experience. The companies like HAG Pvt. Ltd. Eastern Pvt. Ltd so on and so forth have their designer who designs. The designers go to various places to design and this is performed by micro mirror. One simple design could be prepared in a single day and cost Rs. 100 for 1 yard size of the design. On the other hand, complicated designs cost Rs.150 per yards and such design takes two to three days. The designers not only design but also fill it with colours. The design for tufted carpet is easy to make in comparison to the design for hand knotted carpets which take too much time.

### **Interview with Trainers**

According to a trainer, learning skill requires time. The gun tufted work in carpet industry can be learnt depending upon the mental capacity of a beginner. A sharp minded person can learn simple design work in 7 to 10 days while complicated design can be learned in at least 30 days. The 4 ply (number allotted to the wool) takes no more time while 2 ply take time and is in much demand. Almost 1 square yard (3X3 feet) work could be completed in a day. The carpet industry also involves women. According to him there is only one difference in work between male and female. Women work in slow manner with more sincerity. Thus, involving women of SHGs for the work can be a good micro-finance development. Women are in more numbers working in Jaipur, Agra, Shahjahanpur and in Chinese carpet industry. Women indeed are better in hand knotted carpet work because of their soft fingers and sincerity. Girls and women are also provided training at training centers.

### **Interview with Contractors**

According to Mr. Siraj, the agreement is made between contractors and exporters; therefore, contractors have to complete the task within agreement period. With a view to facilitate the process of manufacturing carpet on time, some companies provide white sheet to the contractors. However, contractors find it profitable to either purchase or manufacture required white sheet. The scissors are available in the market and trainers could be accessed on fare basis. To acquire more profit, contractors generally install white sheet manufacturing unit, scissors manufacturing machine and their own expert trainers. These experts are concerned with the modification of scissors, frame, wool etc. The expert used to sharpen and repair defective scissors. For the purpose of manufacturing scissors, the contractor owns their private scissor machine. Thus, they can manufacture the scissors at minimum cost. Scissors, if manufactured at contractor's workplace, it may cost less than the market price. The contractor generally own machine for scissors; however, they have to purchase parts of scissors whereas the complete scissors could be purchased from the market depending upon the quality. There are other benefits as well. The waste material ousted at the time of finishing kept automatically collected in a box attached to the clipping machine. The waste can be used as manure, in tent house items like (pillow, mattress) etc and separated white wool can be used in making new wool. Further, waste material can be mixed with silk and used in sewing and manufacturing low quality blanket. This waste material is usually sold out of Rs. 1 per kg in rainy season while in the winter the cost raised up to Rs. 3 to 5 per kg. The white wool separated from the wastage may cost Rs. 12 per kg.

### **Interview with Exporters**

According to one of the exporter Mr. Abdul Qayyum, the exporters are facing shortage of experts in hand knotted work, therefore, opened their own training centers. The training centers provide training to the trainees from Bihar, Assam, Orissa and other parts of Uttar Pradesh. All types of incentives, accommodation and facilities of food are being given by exporters to the trainees during training course. They can learn hand knotted work maximum in 6 months. The trainers at the centre are skilled enough to provide training to people of other countries. Thus, 20 skilled trainers from Mirzapur had gone to impart training to the Egyptians. This enhances awareness about the beauty and demand of hand knotted carpet work in developed countries. The countries like New Zealand, Australia, and offshoot countries of erstwhile USSR, South American countries like Argentina and others manufacture wool. Moreover, Middle East and Indian wool is also in the market. However, the best quality wool is manufactured in New Zealand and he always prefers wool from New Zealand. He exports most of his manufactured product to USA. Indeed, 50% of the total carpet production is exported to USA. While the remaining 50% goes to the European countries like Germany, Spain, Switzerland, London, Belgium, France and others.

### Interview with workers

The interaction with the workers such as *Santoshi, Kamal, and Sipahiya* in industries shared that working hour starts from 9 o'clock in the morning and end up at 6 o'clock in the evening including one hour lunch interval to the workers. They work at night if demand increases and earn more for over-time work as per square yard. Workers are paid as per square yard of work. The workers shared that the sheet used for manufacturing tufted carpet is called white tufted sheet. The scissors or gun tufted machine as it is called used in tufted carpet. The scissors are called *Kaichi* in local language whereas frame is called *Khaddi* and differs from one to the other. These machines are of different shape and quality. The shape of the machine depends upon the mode of the woolen thread. The nozzle of scissors used for 2 ply is minute while the nozzle for 4 ply is broader than the nozzle of 2 ply scissors. The maximum length of a frame is generally considered 10/14 and minimum is of 3/5 feet. The cost of the frame, therefore, differs from one another according to the size and quality of the material used. The wool is provided to the contractors by the company. Local industry people called the wool as *Kati*. The cost depends upon the quality of wool. The contractors give woolen *lachchi* to locals in the neighbourhoods (*mohallas*) to unfold. The local females irrespective of age used to make woolen ball out of *lachchi*. They usually take the help of *Charkhi* in converting the *lachchi* in to woolen ball. *Charkhi* is made up of iron plates. The cost of one *Charkhi* in the market is Rs.70-80. The locals earn Rs. 3 or 5 for converting 1 Kg woolen *lachchi* into balls. Normally every company provides the contractor extra 100 gram wool on 1 yard carpet work. The contractors fetch profit out of the extra wool provided by the company. They save it and sell it to the local shopkeepers. The shopkeepers, in turn, sell it on certain amount of profit.

### Interview with workers on Health Hazard

Malaysia is the largest producer of rubber in the world. In India, the state like Kerala is the largest producer of rubber. The care taker at a unit shared that latex chemical is made from liquid extracted from rubber plants. This chemical is mixed with chemicals like dispulsor, CMC powder, CMC liquid, Sulfur, white *mitti* etc as per the requirement. The latex chemical spreads on back side of carpet and a sheet is placed on it and kept for almost five hours in sunlight to dry. The winter season takes less time in drying the carpet in comparison to rainy season. The clipping machine is used to furnish it. A sharp iron rod used to create space between two lines of different colours. The work of sewing is done from all corners of the carpet. The worker makes corrections in the carpet during the process. They shared that dust and tiny spare particles of wool causes problem for health. He, however, shared normal working hours doesn't cause harm to the health. Those who engage in extra work during night throughout the month usually found sick at least for a week. The carpet industry does not create harm to the health of those involved. Latex chemical is also not completely harmful as now it does not mix sulphur which is poisonous in nature. The tufted carpet does not have longer life to throw away usually in water resources which indeed harm to the environment.

### Analysis of Interviews

The carpet industry provides employment and earning opportunities for exporters, contractors, trainers, designers, workers and local people in the vicinity of carpet industry. For instance, a worker can easily earn Rs. 80 per day and more than Rs. 100 if over time is done. They receive their money on monthly basis in between 5-10<sup>th</sup> day of the month. The workers are paid money as per their need on every Saturday after the work. According to one of the contractor profit is less now since 2000 when he initiated carpet work. By 2001, in Bhadoi and Mirzapur, there were around 850 exporters. At present only 40% exporters are in the market competition. As a result only 10% hand knotted carpet work remains and, 90% tufted, gun tufted, silk and other carpet work is in prevalence. The hand knotted carpet is indeed costly. One square fit carpet generally cost Rs. 5 thousand. The hand knotted carpets

are prepared as 8/10, 9/10 in size and manufacturing takes minimum 6 months to be completed. Indeed, profit declines as the rate of dollar falls. Every year before 25<sup>th</sup> day of December all completed work assignments have to return to the exporters. The contracts are allocated again to the contractors in last week of January. Thus, work in the period in between 25<sup>th</sup> December to 25<sup>th</sup> January usually moves in slow pace. In return to the manufacturing of scissors, contractor will have to pay to the experts. Approximately Rs. 5,500 is given to the trainer per month. On the basis of discussion and personal observation of the investigator it was assessed that a worker in carpet industry inhales not more than the quantity of dust particles an ordinary person consumes on daily basis. Thus, it justifies that there are little hazards for worker's health.

### Conclusion

All revolutions disrupt the traditions and customs of people. Indeed, they threaten peoples' very safety, security, and even identity. The world revolution, that is, globalization in some measure threatens the security of every people on the globe. It is not only to be expected that the impact of such disruption and threat exacerbates the conditions of groups that are already excluded, vulnerable and are at the margins of society (Radhakrishnan, 2009). The participant observation through ethnographic study and its subsequent analysis reveals clear impression about the benefit from all tiers of carpet industry. On the basis of carpet work availability at indigenous level, people find an alternative to live a dignified life and excel in the field of social, economical and educational spheres. Such a social groups leaves no space for the vested interest to create havoc in the society. But the policies of the government in the time of economic liberalization, in turn, created havoc in the lives of earning hands. The growing competition in the market as well as the campaigns against the child labour in a headlong way crumbles the whole indigenous skilled work in these cities of eastern Uttar Pradesh. In totality, it could be said that it is a field which provides opportunities to the people at their door step, however, according to their capacity and capability. Apart from this, the carpet industry of Mirzapur is in competitive era with the other states manufacturing carpet by using information technology and digital use of electronic resources.

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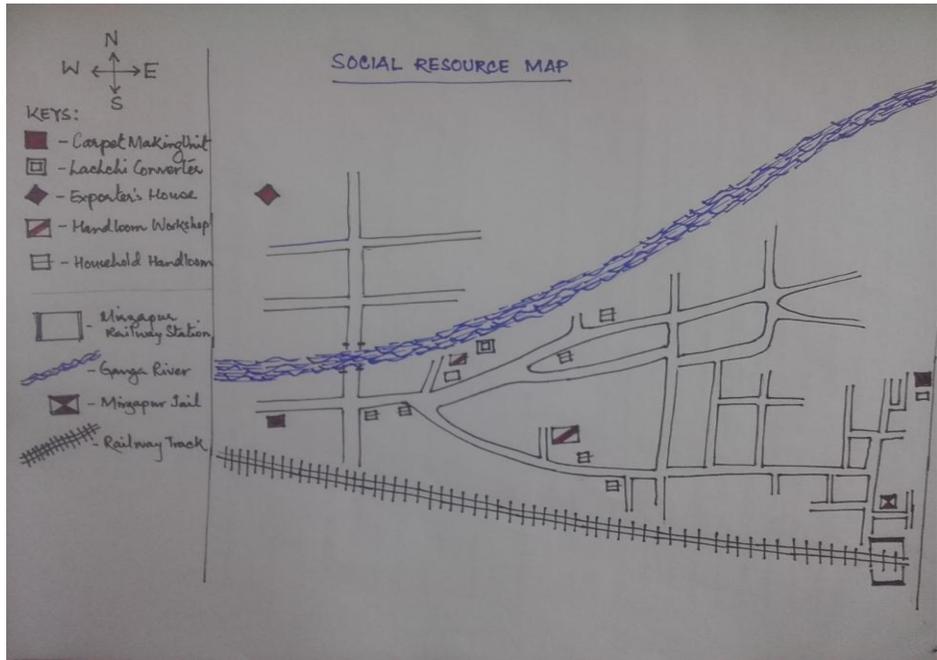
### Notes

The social resource map under PRA (Participatory Rapid/Rural Appraisal) approach does only require indicators in the form of keys and does not require mentioning of names of

the places. The map mentioned the keys to understand the available carpet related resources in Mirzapur and Bhadoi.

Appendix

Figure-1. Social Resource Map



(Source: Fieldwork: Carpet units and landmarks)