



ACCOMPLISHING TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE RURAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP THROUGH “PROJECT PALASH”

A CASE STUDY OF SABAR TRIBAL OF JHARKHAND

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Abstract

The case study has tried to find the entrepreneurial behavior among the artistic Sabar tribes of Nimidih block of Saraikela Kharswan district of Jharkhand and the initiatives and interventions taken by government agencies to make the tribe groups to become entrepreneur.

Sabar tribes, one among the nine endangered and one of the most primitive tribe group (PTG) tribes of 32 tribal communities of the Jharkhand state, predominately forest-dwelling tribe lack experience in agriculture and rely on the forest for their livelihood. During British Raj, they were classed as one of the 'criminal tribes' under Criminal Tribes Act 1871, and still fighting with social stigma and ostracism in modern times. The tribe has an inherent art for making baskets from Kanshi Grass, bamboo and palm leaves. Till 1996, they used to make baskets, mats and broom from Kanshi grass and sell it in the local village haat/weekly market at throw away prices. But intervention of Government of Jharkhand through “Project Palasah” made their way towards enterprising world and now this tribe is trying to create a different platform, not only to the existence of Sabar tribe community but also their inherent art while doing the business. Approx 325 families of Sabar tribe were trained under Project Palash of Government Jharkhand to improve their handmade useful craft to better marketability and entrepreneurial abilities.

But still lot has to be done for this tribal group to boost their entrepreneurial abilities and to create suitable and sustainable marketing platform for their products.

Key words: Project Palash, Rural Entrepreneurship, Sabar Tribe, Entrepreneurial Behavior

Introduction:

The Tribal communities form a hefty chunk of the total population of Jharkhand State. Out of these, some tribal communities have categorized as primitive tribal groups (PTG) on the basis of their extremely backward socio- economic status and other sociological traits, as per Government regulations. These primitive Tribe Groups are found in all the 24 districts of the Jharkhand state and their total number, as per the last survey was approx 1.93 lakhs. Government of Jharkhand has indentified 9 out of 32 tribes as primitive tribes. These include Asur, Birhor, Birajia, Korba, Hill Kharia, Mal Pahariya, Sauriya Paharia and Sabar. Some of the Primitive Tribes Group like Asur, Birhor and Birajia lead a nomadic life. Sabars, Paharias and Bihors are mostly found in villages of Chilugu, Asanboni, Makula, Kamjhor, Kadambjhor, Chakulia, Sumanpur and Bhangat under Chandil and Nimidih blocks of Saraikela- Kharsawan district of Jharkhand (Annexure-IV).

Out of these tribe groups ‘Sabar’ is one of the most primitive and languishing tribes in the country. Their existence is claimed to be from time of Ramayana and their strong resistance to British dominance resulted in the community getting listed among the 68 de-notified tribes who were tagged as criminals under Criminal Tribes Act of 1871.

Sabar tribe is natural artisans who makes broom, basket and mats from “Kansi Grass” (*Saccharum spontaneum*) and bamboos since several centuries. Tulsidas has mentioned about Kansi grass in his holy book of Ramayana also. (Annexure-I)

Project “Palash” is an initiative to train ‘Sabar’ artisans of Nimidih block of Saraikela- Kharsawan district of Jharkhand to weave eco-friendly designer products to make improved livelihood and infuse capabilities to become trained and skilled entrepreneurial tribe group which were languishing since long time. Project ‘Palash’ helped this endangered tribe- once trapped in Naxalite affected Zone was struggling to beat extreme poverty and underdevelopment- moved to sustainable livelihood by making them entrepreneurs and also saved them from extinction in terms of skill and existence.

This case study also tried to bring the importance of understanding the strength of tribal artisan, conceiving the value of art, orientation & training of tribal entrepreneurs and implementation of right strategies to make tribal entrepreneurial capabilities to the organized business level bring critical transformation to the whole value chain in rural enterprise.

Socio economic Status of Sabar Tribe:

As per local administration records, there are approx. 8000 Sabars in 20 forest villages in Nimidih block of Saraikela- Kharsawan district which is 60 Km North west away from Jamshedpur (Tata Nagar) and 100 km south west from Ranchi, the Capital of Jharkhand. However, most of the sabars are concentrated in 3 villages namely- Sumanpur, Bangat and Makula. They fulfill their majority of day to day requirement from forest like- food & fire. They are Bengali speaking tribe and worship the nature. They generally do not engage in agricultural activities and their major source livelihood is making brooms, baskets and mats from Kanshi grass, Bamboo and Palm leaves which are abundantly available in their vicinity of forest. They are natural artisan and their income source is only from sale of brooms, baskets and mats in the local haat and bazaars. Before Project 'Plash' their income level Rs 100-200 per month per family during 1996 and now they are able to earn average of Rs 4000-5000/- per family per month from sale of value-added handicrafts. Project "Palash" has given a new way to this tribe group to improve their entrepreneurial ability during last 2 decades and slowly they are becoming organized Tribal entrepreneur beyond rural markets.

Intervention through Project "Palash":

During 1996, Government of Jharkhand, identified and understood the entrepreneurial behaviour of Sabar tribes and decided to bring the intervention in tribal handicraft value chain through training in Nimidih block of Saraikela. During 1996, Government officers were on visit of Sumanpur, Makula and Bangat villages of Nimidih block and saw Sabar tribal were in pathetic condition and almost away from modern civilization and living under abject poverty situation in forest. (Annexure-III)

Officers observed and felt that this tribe group has inherent talent of making brooms, mats and baskets from Kanshi Grass and bamboo, which was abundantly available in the forest.

However, this tribe was not engaged in agricultural activity and thrives on forest produce for their food and on the verge of extinction due to lack of medical facility and cut off from main stream. It is also understood that this tribe do not believe in disturbing the soil or natural eco system for agricultural activity.

But their keen observation on the artisan ability for making beautiful brooms, mats and basket from available local resource made them to design an intervention programme- "Project Plash" towards creating a unique value chain for tribal handicrafts for bringing up their entrepreneurial ability and for a sustainable livelihood and save these entrepreneurs from extinction.

Government Officers felt that if this tribal entrepreneurs make other useful products like- Caps, Bags, show pieces and useful products like tea coaster, fruit basket, table mats etc with better design the marketability of such crafts will be high and better price for the products can be fetch. But it was possible only through best training by suitable institution to this tribe group and it can be only possible in a project mode.

With lots of challenges government was able to implement concept 'Project Palash' under Government funding during 1996, however, it took further 5 years to bring it on the ground and Project Palash actually started after year 2000 only and today for more than 325 sabar families are benefitted from this Project.

Implementation of Intervention:

Any intervention should have clear objective and Project 'Palash' was clearly designed to upgrade the skills of Sabar artisan through an organized effort with set strategies. However, there will time lag in implementation and impact. Similarly happened in case of this project also, and when target group is not educated and having less exposure then it brings more challenges. Nevertheless, when objectives are clear and strategies are set, challenges can be tackle easily.

Project Palash was a need based intervention under government support to a target group to make them entrepreneurs on their own skill and inherent products through training to make more attractive products other than Brooms and Baskets.

This project gave birth of AMBALIKA- a NGO of Sabar Tribal in Nimidih block in 2000 with objective to train artisans and craft persons from Sabar Tribe group to improve their skill, increase productivity through design and development of their products and finally to sale the products to maintain the rural enterprise. Ambalika now was the center of Tribal entrepreneurship and adopted the Sabar tribes in 7 villages and started working with them in this area for making Sabar tribe better rural entrepreneurs and for better economic development by way of reviving and upgrading their age-old dying craft with help of designers from National Institute of fashion Technology (NIFT), Delhi & Kolkata. The designers from NIFT stayed with this tribe group in their villages, mix up with them to understand their art, crafts and culture and to impart training to them to improve their skills and efficiency by way of introducing new design and technology in order to modernize their products and them marketable. With this Sabar tribe group got a platform and a new way for developing and exercising their entrepreneurial capabilities. Therefore NIFT played critical role in improving the value chain of this rural enterprise through skill development and helped Sabar tribe enterprise to shift from Broom to designer bags and many new products from same raw material i.e. Kanshi Grass, Palm leave and Bamboos. Now Ambalika was producing new marketable designs with increased efficiency and quality.

Shift from Traditional products to Designer Products under organized effort:

Organized efforts under Project 'Palash' started giving good results to this new rural tribal enterprise- "Ambalika". Sabar artisan enjoyed learning from NIFT training session and they started producing eye catching designer products very soon. Now Ambalika- Sabar tribe enterprise of a forest village was a center for modern designs of crafts from natural resources. Sabar tribe is now no more a broom maker languishing tribal who used be found in weekly haats of rural market. They were ready to enter into high end market with their newly designed products. From 2001 to 2012 more than 300 sabar artisan were trained by various agencies apart from NIFT to experiment on products based on its usefulness and demand from customers.

Post training eye catching products were Caps, Tea coaster, Fruit basket, Dust bean, Lamp shed, Ladies bags, Show pieces, Candle Stand, Mask and many more. The products can be seen in Annexure- II.

Overall organized initial effort resulted into a creation of new tribal product brand as "Jharkhand Plash" and sabar artisan got branding for their products. However, new creations also brought lots of challenges before Sabar entrepreneurs.

However, with new challenges the earnings of the sabar families also started improving significantly. Now trained families were able to earn Rs 4000-5000 per month from sale of newly designed products. No doubt customers were paying more for new products.

New Challenges for Sabar Entrepreneurs:

Project Palash was a funding initiative and lack of continuous effort and support from Government towards this project hampered the development of this rural enterprise.

However, Ambalika has organized several Design development workshops in the adopted villages tried to secure fund towards infusing new talents and improving the product design and bringing new products as per market need. Ambalika also use to create products based on given ideas by customers. They also started making sofas, chairs, book shelf, puja stand, standies etc but challenge was to how to reach to target market to ensure right price and recognition the improved version of crafts.

Under brand name of Jharkhand Plash, Ambalika started participating in various national level exhibitions for sale of their products. They also participated in India International Trade fair 2011 at Pragati Maidan with the help of Department of Industries, Government of Jharkhand and awarded with best among craftsmen participated in that trade fair. But this did not solve the problem of marketing challenge for this enterprise.

Based on feedback during IITF, further advance training was imparted to 20 artisans afterward by NIFT but marketing platform was still lacking.

Another challenge this enterprise is facing right customer reach for right price. The products are handmade and it is only the unique selling proposition for the products made from Kanshi Grass and Bamboo. However, on price front these products are facing big issue to secure regular sale and competition from low price similar artificial products.

In absence of right market, permanent market and genuine return for the effort of artisan, production get effected on regular basis and inventory is lying in the warehouse of Ambalika.

Adhoc basis production and marketing forcing these artisans to go back to make broom and basket and making them sit again in village haat to their livelihood. Only new ideas and training is not going to help any ways to grow such tribal enterprise

Further, lack of continuous support from Government in terms funding, marketing linkage

,branding and marketing issues made Ambalika almost at halt after marginal success in the initial stage of project.

However, even under these challenges, Project Plash definitely helped Sabar tribals to position them before the modern market and equipped them to compete with similar artificial industrial products some way and somehow.

Now big questions are before Sabar Tribal entrepreneurs:

1. Should they go back to traditional products ?
2. How to market the products?
3. Where is the customer?
4. What marketing mix model is needed?
5. Should they stop this business and find new alternative of Livelihood?

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Annexure-I



Annexure-II







Annexure-III



Annexure- IV

Map of Jharkhand

