

Socio economic condition and problems of pottery industry in Basudebpur, Shyamnagar, West Bengal: A Geographic Appraisal

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Abstract:

Handicraft industry is one of the most ancient rural cottage industries of India. Since time immemorial, this industry has played a vital role in shaping the socio-economic life of the people of rural India. Pottery industry is one such industry that has played a very important role in bringing about rural development. However, at present, the industry has been suffering from many problems that have brought about a decline in the quality of the life of the pottery workers. An attempt has been made in this paper to analyze the socio-economic condition and the problems of pottery workers of Basudebpur in Shyamnagar of North 24 Parganas District, West Bengal. Weighted score technique has been applied to analyze statistically the intensity of problems faced by the pottery workers. The study revealed that competition from other products has turned out to be main threat for the decline of the pottery industry.

Keywords: Socio-economic life, Pottery Industry, Basudebpur, Weighted Score.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Pottery is one of the oldest handicraft industries of India. Since time immemorial, this industry has played a vital role in shaping and strengthening the backbone of rural areas of our country. Man learnt pottery in the Neolithic era and it made marked improvement during the time of Indus Valley Civilisation with the advancement of technology. In Bengal, evolution of pottery started around 1500 B.C. The artisans who were engaged in pottery industry used the fertile soil found by the side of the rivers as the source of their raw material. However, with the passage of time, the pottery industry of West Bengal has been suffering from many problems. With increasing demand of modern products, pottery industry has been facing a significant decline and is also suffering from several problems (Akilandeewari & Pitchai, 2016). Thus, there is a gradual decline in the development of pottery industry and thus the industry is gradually getting lost in the shadows of time. Basudebpur of Shyamanagar in North 24 Parganas district of West Bengal has about 35 households where the people are engaged with this pottery industry. However, presently the workers of the industry have been suffering from many problems which have laid a negative impact on their socio-economic lifestyle (Nuruzzaman, 2014). An attempt has been made in this paper to analyse the socio-economic condition of the pottery workers of Basudebpur and to have keen insight about the problems faced by the workers and to suggest suitable recommendations for their solution.

II. OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

The work has been designed with following objectives: -

1. To study the socio-economic lifestyle of the pottery workers of Basudebpur area.
2. To analyse the problems of the pottery industry by adopting weighted score technique of Aristidis K Nicolopoulous.
3. To analyse the impact of lockdown on the life of the pottery workers.
4. To suggest recommendations for the solution of the problems faced by the workers of the study area.

In order to accomplish the task, primary data was collected by means of field survey. Data was selected by random sampling method. For the analysis of the problems, about 150 artisans were questioned. On the basis of the responses given by the artisans, the major problems of the industry were identified. Now, each of the problems were given weightage on the basis of number of respondents responding to a particular problem. Now, the number of respondents and the weightage were multiplied to compute the weighted score. This weighted score decided the degree of intensity of the problem. Higher the value of weighted score, the greater will be the intensity of the problem.

III. BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY AREA

Basudebpur is located in the district of North 24 Parganas in the state of West Bengal. It is located in the Barrackpore I sub-division of the North 24 Parganas district. According to census of India, the village code for Basudebpur is 323100. According to census 2011, the total population of Basudebpur was 3768 out of which 1984 were male and the rest 1784 are female accounting for about 52.6% and 47.4% respectively. The sex ratio of the village is 899 females per 1000 males. Out of total population of 3768, 1454 are engaged in some employment activity while the rest 2314 are not engaged in any type of jobs. Out of total 1454 working population, 1245 are main workers while the rest 209 are marginal workers.

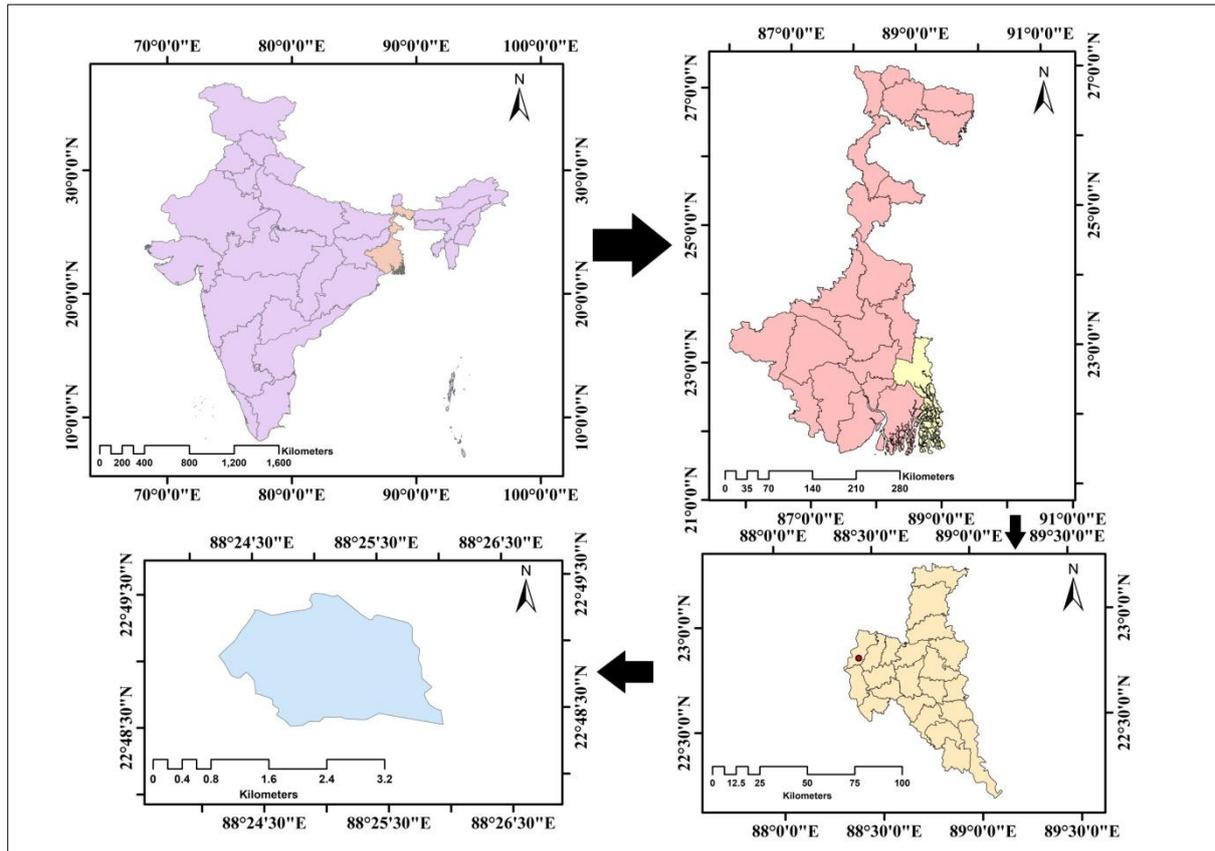


Figure 1: Location Map of Basudebpur

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Field survey revealed that about 375 people of the village are engaged with pottery industry. Out of those 375 people, 150 people were selected as the sample for the study. Out of 150 pottery workers surveyed, 90 workers were male while the rest 60 workers were female. Division of labour based on gender is absent in the village. Females and males work together and divide work among them as per convenience.

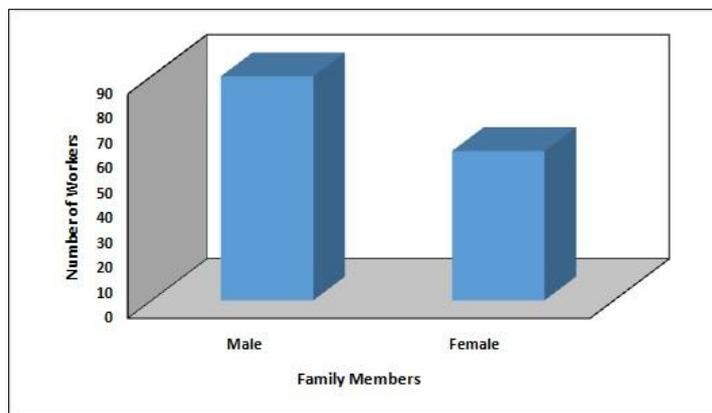


Figure 2: Sex composition of Pottery workers in Basudebpur

Category of workers:

Out of 150 workers surveyed, 32 workers belong to the Scheduled Caste group accounting for about 21.3% of the total surveyed population. 48 workers belong to the Scheduled Tribe group accounting for about 32% of total surveyed population; 45 workers were from Other Backward Class (OBC) group accounting for about 30% of the total population and only 25 workers belong to the General category accounting for about 16.7% of the total population. Thus, it becomes clear that most of the workers being surveyed belong to the Scheduled Tribe group.

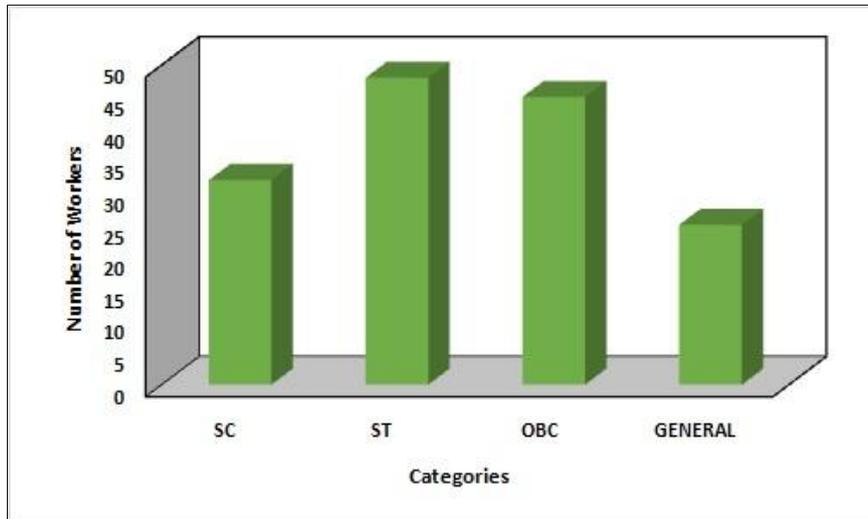


Figure 3: Category of Pottery workers in Basudebpur

Age Group of Pottery Workers in Basudebpur Village:

Determination of the age group of working population plays a vital role in determining the socio-economic condition of a study area. As it has been already mentioned that 150 pottery workers were surveyed out of which 90 were male and 60 were female. Out of 90 male workers, 28 workers belong to the age group of 31-40 years followed by 15 workers belonging to 21-30 years. These two age groups thus account for 31.1% and 16.7% of the total male workers respectively. 10 male workers belong to the age group of 11-20 years while considerably good number of male workers also can be seen within the age groups of 41-50 years (12) and 51-60 years (13). Very less involvement of male workers are seen in case of age group of 0-10 years (2) and more than 70 years (1). Out of 60 female workers surveyed, most of them fall within the age group of 41-50 years (13) followed by 31-40 years (12). These two age groups account for about 21.7% and 20% workers respectively. However, it can be seen that the involvement of male workers is higher in most of the age groups than that of the females. Involvement of young population is also there in this industry.

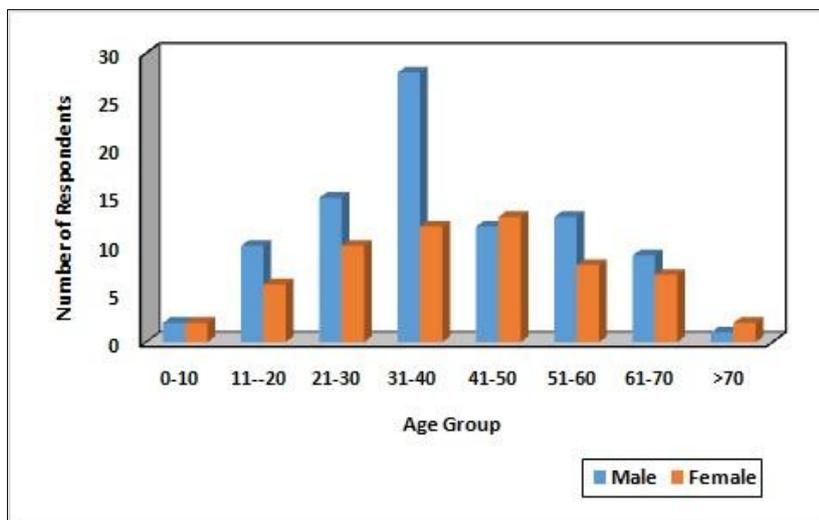


Figure 4: Age group of Pottery workers in Basudebpur

Scenario of poverty level of the workers surveyed at Basudebpur:

Poverty level acts as an economic benchmark that helps in the identification of the financially weaker section of the society. According to the Suresh Tendulkar Committee, a person who spends Rs 27 per day in rural areas and Rs 33 per day in urban areas will be considered lying below the poverty line and hence will be considered as poor. The survey of pottery workers at Basudebpur revealed that out of 150 workers, 108 workers belong to the BPL category accounting for about 72% of the surveyed population while the rest 42 fall in the APL category accounting for about 28% of the total surveyed population. From this perspective, it can be stated that most of the workers surveyed belong to the financial weaker section.

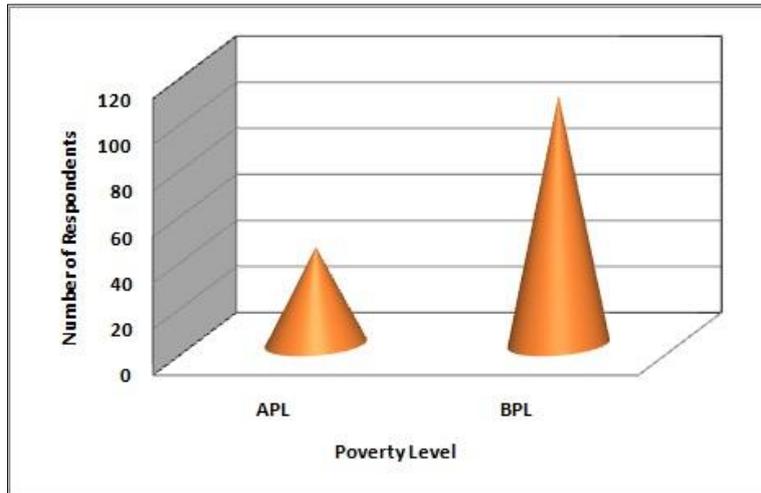


Figure 5: Poverty level of Pottery workers in Basudebpur

Level of Income of Pottery workers of Basudebpur:

Income per month plays a vital role in shaping the socio-economic lifestyle of a community. The study revealed that most of the workers of Basudebpur (55) have monthly income ranging from Rs 5000 to Rs 10000 followed by 40 workers who have monthly income ranging from Rs 10000 to 15000. Only 30 workers out of 150 surveyed enjoy a monthly income of more than Rs 15000. Rest 25 workers out of 150 workers have a monthly income of less than Rs 5000. Proper planning will surely help in the improvement of the monthly income condition of the workers of the village.

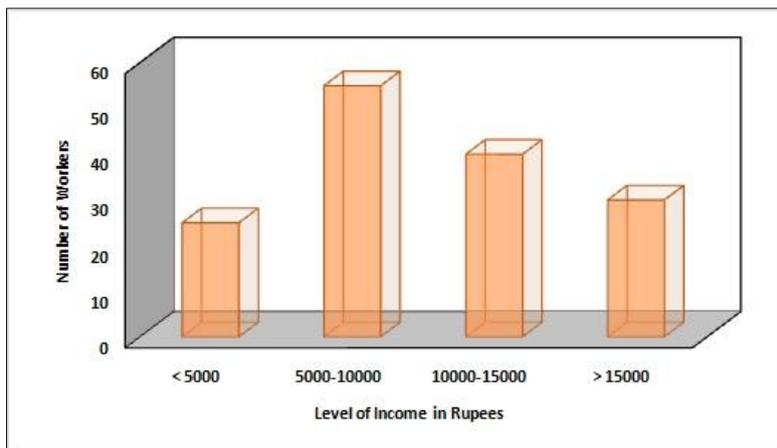


Figure 6: Monthly income of Pottery workers in Basudebpur

Production of Pots per day:

Production of pots per day is a useful index to determine the working efficiency of the pottery workers of Basudebpur. The study revealed that out of 150 workers surveyed, 95 workers make 100 to 200 pots per day. 30 workers manufacture more than 200 pots per day and this section falls within the young pottery workers while the rest 25 workers manufacture less than 100 pots per day. Most of these 25 workers fall within the age groups of 61 to 70 years and above 70 years. One old worker while survey stated that in his young age, he used to make more than 250 pots per day. However, at present he makes 10 to 15 pots per day as he is about 75 years

of age and could not work for longer hours as he has problem of arthritis that causes immense pain if he sits and works for longer hours. Thus, age turns out to be a bar in manufacture of pots per day because with increase in age, level of efficiency of workers also declines.

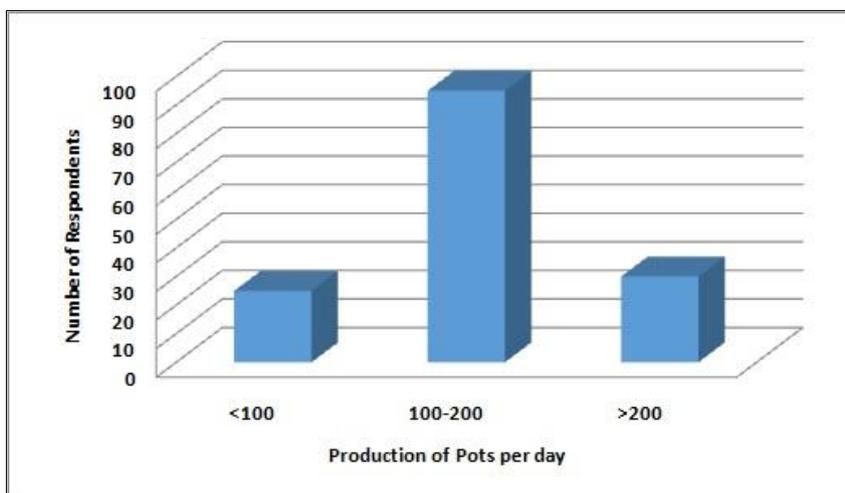


Figure 7: Production of pots per day by Pottery workers in Basudebpur

Working hours per day:

Since the workers of the Basudebpur are engaged with the pottery industry, working hours is an important determinant factor. Out of 150 workers surveyed, 80 workers work for 6 to 8 hours and fall within the middle age groups. 40 workers work for more than 8 hours. Considerable portion of these workers belong to the age group of 21-30 hours. One young pottery worker stated that he works for 3 hours in the morning from 5 am to 8 am in the morning with his parents. Then, he goes to college. After returning from college, he works for another 6 hours in painting and making designs on the pots. Youth section of the village is very much interested in upholding their traditional activity. 30 workers work for less than 6 hours per day. Workers of this group include mainly children and old population.



Figure 8: Working hours per day of Pottery workers in Basudebpur

Source of Fuel in Pottery Making:

Fuel acts as an important input in pottery industry. Fuel is mainly used for lighting fire which is used for drying the pots. Out of 150 workers surveyed, 65 workers (44%) use coal as the source of fuel, 53 workers use kerosene (35%) while the rest 32 (21%) use wood as the source of fuel.

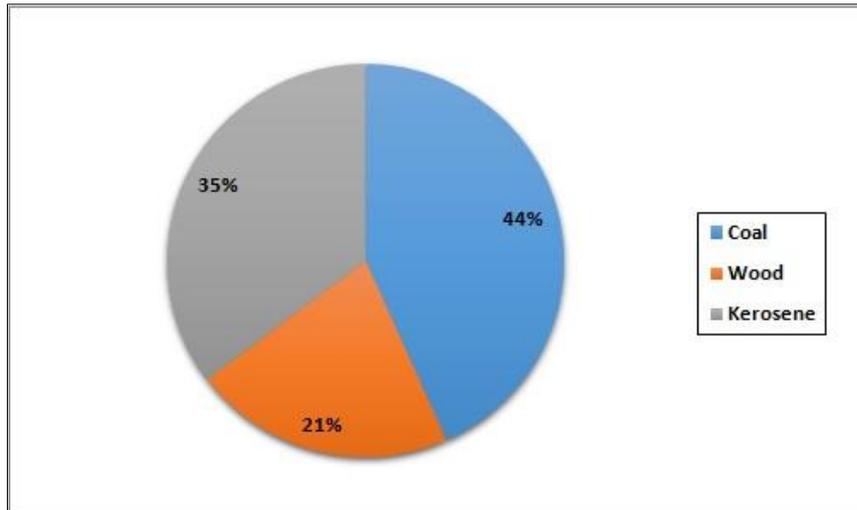


Figure 9: Source of fuel used by Pottery workers in Basudebpur

Other Sources of Income:

Besides being engaged with the pottery industry, pottery workers of Basudebpur are also engaged in other sectors to supplement their family income. Out of 150 workers surveyed, 121 workers are also engaged in other sectors. Out of those 121 workers, 36 are working as maids in different residential houses. This section mainly constitutes the female workforce. 45 workers work as electricians. 40 workers are engaged with the construction sector and work as labours. One of these workers stated that he works in an electric shop from 8 am in the morning to 1 pm at noon. After returning home, he works with his family members in manufacturing pots. In the evening, he again goes back to his workplace and work there as an electrician from 6 pm to 9 pm. Since the shop remains closed on Sunday, he extends his helping hand towards his family members in making clay pots and also makes design on them. The study revealed that in spite of being engaged in other sectors of income, they are trying hard to uphold their traditional activity. Such initiative is hardly seen in present economic condition where the issues of livelihood transformation are very common.

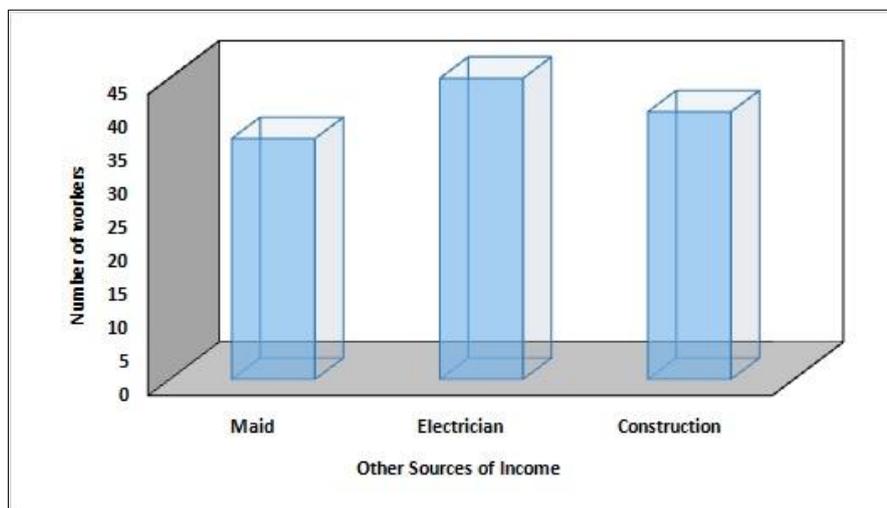


Figure 10: Other sources of income of Pottery workers in Basudebpur

Problems of Pottery Industry in Basudebpur:

The handicraft industry is considered to be the one of the major backbones of the Indian economy. In the present world, there is large scale availability of decorative items and daily needs made up from modern raw materials like plastic, nylon and metals. Products manufactured from these modernised raw materials are long lasting. As a result, demand for these products have risen significantly among people. This has led to decline in the demand of pottery products that are produced in a traditional way and by using old technology. Decrease in demand has brought about problem in the socio-economic life of the people engaged with this cottage industry. Pottery workers of Basudebpur are not an exception and are facing the same problems.

- *Rise in the price of clay-* There has been a significant rise in the price of clay at present. Due to low income, pottery workers of Basudebpur are not able purchase good quality of clay. They have to depend on poor quality of clay which are available at lower prices. As a result, the pots manufactured by them are not of very good quality and are highly brittle. They collect clay from different spots like banks of ponds, river, residential construction sites and from the lands adjacent to the Kalyani Expressway and have to pay no money for this purpose. They have a separate place in their house where they store this collected clay. About 81.3% of the total workers surveyed considered this to be an important problem and has been given a weighted score of 70.21.
- *Decline in the quality of raw material-* Besides clay, there has also been a decline in the quality of other raw materials like colour, brush, pens etc. Most of the workers still work with their outdated painting kits as they cannot afford to purchase good quality brushes and colours which are very costly. However, they are so skilled in their work that they produce good quality items even by working with these poor quality raw materials. About 78.7% of the total workers surveyed considered this to be an important problem and has been given a weighted score of 84.18.
- *Competition from products of other materials-* This is the most important problem for the pottery workers of Basudebpur. The products of the industry have been suffering large scale competition from the products manufactured using raw materials like plastic, nylon, artificial fibre and metal. As a result, the industry is lagging behind. About 94.7% of the total workers surveyed considered this to be an important problem and has been given the highest weighted score of 130.64.
- *Scarcity of labour-* The pottery workers of Basudebpur are of the opinion that there has been a problem of scarcity of labour. Although there is very less incidence of livelihood transformation, they opined that there has been a decline in the degree of expertise of the workers with generation. An old pottery worker of Basudebpur opined that his son lacks skill and expertise than him although he gives sufficient time in working with pottery. He opined that in his young age, he made 100-150 pots per day whereas his son produces 50-100 pots per day. He thinks that this is owing to lack of expertise, skill and patience. However, he expects that his son will become expert as he gets matured and will uphold his traditional activity which he and his forefathers have been practicing for ages. About 74.7% of the total workers surveyed considered this to be an important problem and has been given a weighted score of 66.08.
- *Decrease in demand in Market-* The pottery workers of Basudebpur are of the opinion that there has been a decline in the demand of the product in the market. Customers prefer purchasing pots of aluminium and lamps of metal which are long lasting than those made from clay. Besides, large scale demand of multi-coloured electric lights have also drastically reduced the demand of lamps. A pottery worker informed that the demand of earthen lamps has declined drastically during the Diwali due to the dominance of disco lights and electronic lamps. People at present prefer decorating their houses during Diwali with electric lights rather than earthen lamps. About 92% of the total workers surveyed considered this to be an important problem and has been given second highest weighted score of 118.68.
- *Increase in price of fuel-* As it has been already discussed that pottery workers use coal, wood and kerosene are used as source of fuel. They use fire to dry up the wet earthen pots. Rise in price of kerosene and coal is also a main problem as most of the workers use them as the source of fuel. Sometimes, they cannot get good quality of coal and kerosene owing to dearth of money. Some workers even collect dried leaves, twigs and branches from neighbouring areas to dry their wet earthen pots. Workers who fail to buy good quality kerosene and coal leave their pots wet and hence it takes a lot of time to manufacture the final product. This is one of the serious problems. About 86.7% of the total workers surveyed considered this to be an important problem and has been given a weighted score of 102.7.
- *Less Income-* The income of the pottery workers has declined to a large extent. The per capita income is very low. As a result, they often get trapped in the clutch of vicious cycle of poverty. Decline in quality of raw materials, decrease in demand of the products in the market and large scale competition are responsible for such decline in income. Workers have developed a feeling of Topophilia where they are more emotionally attached to their dwelling place and are not ready to leave home for better opportunities (Roy, 2017). A young worker surveyed reported that in spite of getting a better job opportunity in other state, he did not leave his home. He preferred staying back and practice his traditional job. Thus, less income turned out to be one of the serious problems where about 84% of the total workers surveyed considered this to be an important problem and has been given a weighted score of 95.76.

Table 1: Analysis of problems through Weighted Score technique

<u>PROBLEMS</u>	<u>TOTAL RESPONDENTS</u>	<u>NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS</u>	<u>PERCENTAGE</u>	<u>WEIGHTAGE</u>	<u>WEIGHTED SCORE</u>
Rise in the price of clay	150	122	81.3	0.69	84.18
Decline in the quality of raw materials		118	78.7	0.64	75.52
Competition from products of other materials		142	94.7	0.92	130.64
Scarcity of labour		112	74.7	0.59	66.08
Decrease in demand in Market		138	92.0	0.86	118.68
Increase in price of fuel		130	86.7	0.79	102.7
Less income		126	84.0	0.76	95.76

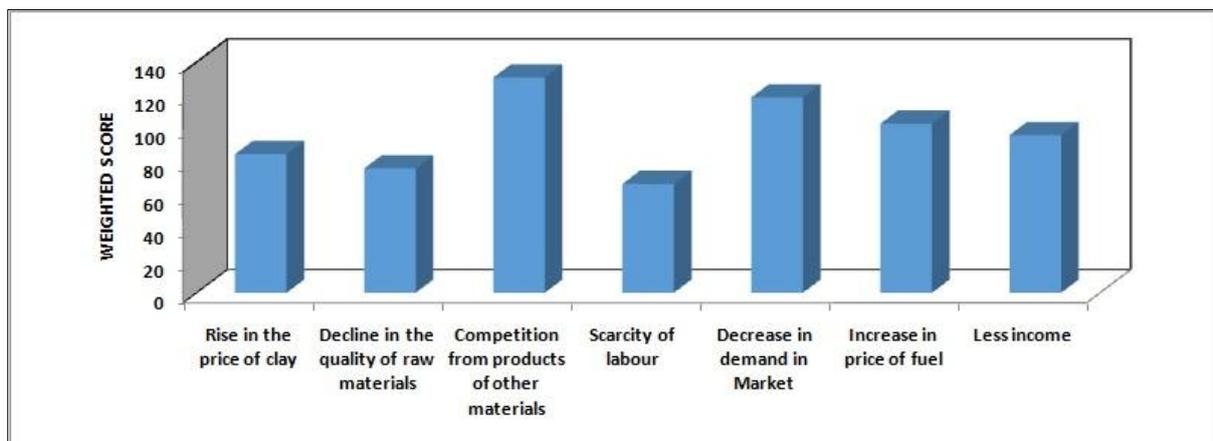


Figure 11: Analysis of problems through Weighted Score Technique (After Aristidis K Nicolopoulous)

V. SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

There is an urgent need to take steps to bring about the solution of the problems faced by the pottery workers at Basudebpur. Some suggestions are as followed: -

1. Supply of good quality of clay has to be ensured. Supply of good quality of clay will improve the quality of pots manufactured by them and thus will help in increase in its demand in the market.
2. Price of other raw materials like good quality of brushes and colours has to be lowered so that they are within the reach of the poor workers.
3. The pottery workers must innovate new designs and produce unique products so that the demand of the products manufactured by them rise in the market in spite of existence of high competition (Regon, 2019). They must come out of their monotonous design and think of something new to stay back in the competition. Besides, the Government and NGO's must also extend their helping hand by providing them proper financial assistance and support for their upliftment.
4. Banks should come forward and provide them with loans at low rates of interest.
5. For the expansion of the demand of these products in the market, proper promotion of these products has to be done. Local panchayat has to play a great role in this aspect. They can publish weekly souvenirs and magazines where they can promote the products manufactured by them. Besides, social media can also act as indispensable tool in the promotion of products in the market. Products should also be sent to fairs organised by the Government like the Hastashilpa Mela and the Sabala Mela etc. Local administrative authorities, clubs and NGO's must come forward to make these initiatives successful.

VI. CONCLUSION

There is no doubt of the fact that the pottery industry of Basudebpur has been facing several problems since a long time period. However, the industry has a good future prospect which will surely improve the socio-economic lifestyle of the workers if steps are taken by the Government to solve their problems. Proper promotion of the industry can only be brought about through expansion of the market of products manufactured by the workers (Prakash & Jilani, 2017). Not only the local panchayat, but also the State Government and Central Government must come forward and take steps to solve the problems. If it is done, then the pottery

industry of Basudebpur will not only bring about the development of the study area but also will strengthen the economic foundation of India in general and West Bengal in particular.

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