

Reviving Pottery Industry by Solving Problems: A Study in a Developing Economy

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Abstract

The pottery industry is a traditional handicraft in human civilization with historical and archaeological values, covering small and cottage industries, having remarkable contributions to the economy. The research aims to pursue the problems of Bangladesh's pottery industry and find out some ways to solve these constraints. Data were collected through a closed-ended questionnaire from males (87%) and females (13%) of 55 members of potter's families from 14 villages under 6 Upazila of Rajshahi district having various ages, 58% were 15 to 24 years. There were numerous problems, including production, marketing, and the social sphere in this area. Here, Marketing related problems (WAM-4.11) were more important than the other two difficult arenas. Finally, some imperative guidelines are stated that can be adopted for minimizing diverse weaknesses and challenges of the pottery.

Keywords: *Pottery, problems, industry, economy, archaeology.*

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I. Introduction

The pottery industry is an integral part of our history and archaeology. On the other side, thousands of families live in this sector, contributing to employment creation and poverty alleviation¹⁶. It has occupied a large part of small and cottage industries. Over time, numerous problems have arisen in this sector. It is difficult to get back the previous glory of the pottery industry, but proper steps can improve the present situation. Customization of products, maintaining standard quality, using modern technology, availing median and large-scale business capacity, research & development, marketing promotional activities are urgent for reviving the pottery industry⁷. This research wants to discuss various problems of pottery and narrate some relevant recommendations for reviving this industry.

Objectives of the study

The aim of the research is to recognize the incompleteness of the pottery industry in the Rajshahi district in Bangladesh and finding out solutions to pathways. Particularly, the paper aim to:

- Identify problems in the pottery industry in a particular area.
- Recommend for solving drawbacks.

II. Literature Review

Pottery industry

Pottery is an important part of tradition and culture. Pottery is a word that originated from the French word "Poterie" and the Latin word "Potium" which means the drinking vessel¹⁴. In real meaning, pottery is all objects or things made by clay. It has been practicing this industry for thousands of years in different parts of the world. In the Indian sub-continent, there is a long history of pottery. Although pottery existed in various areas for the livelihood of ancient people, after the 4th century BC, it expanded enormously in Bangladesh¹³.

Problems in the pottery industry

Despite being a historical part, pottery has lost its glory all over the world. This industry has gone to extinction in many areas, and the rest of existence is facing various problems. Lack of finance, inadequate raw materials, inappropriate technology, lack of training, old production methodology, lack of infrastructure, weak marketing network, and competition are major problematic issues of the pottery industry². Besides, the sector is lagged by lower investment, scarcity of product diversification, availability of machine-made plastic products, inefficient management, and lack of research and development⁹.

In the same, Lower profit margin, remote area living, wastages of products, health problems, lack of government patronization, weak transport facilities, lack of storing facilities & working places, and absences of marketing promotion are also weaknesses of the pottery industry³. Bad weather hampers activities of its

production. Many potters discourage the new generation in pottery for lower social status and ignorance of other professional persons¹¹.

Contributions of the pottery industry

From the beginning of human history, pottery has been contributing various ways to world civilization. When there was no plastic or any metallic objects, pottery was a unique, dependable sector. At present, the pottery industry is a vital part of the culture and history of some areas of the world, like the Nile River area in Egypt¹⁴. Also, it is creating job facilities and alleviating poverty¹. This industry is improving the living standards of various communities and empowering women by providing jobs inside the house¹⁰. Pottery encourages modern ceramic production in different parts of the world¹⁷. Notwithstanding, scopes of pottery are waning for various purposes, millions of people are surviving on it.

Pottery industry in Bangladesh

There is a long historical background of the pottery industry in Bangladesh. A remarkable number of archaeological potteries, pieces of evidence have been detected in some sites of Bangladesh, as Paharpur (Naogaon), Mahastangharh, Govinda Bhita, Bhasu Vihara (Bogura), Mainamati (Comilla), Bhitargarh (Panchagarh) and Wari-Bateshwar (Narsingdi)¹³. According to the book “Karupalli” published in 1985 by Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industries Corporation (BSCIC), there were 666 pottery villages locally known as Kumarpara or Paulpara consisting of 18 thousand families with 76 thousand people worked for livelihood in Bangladesh when the total investment was BDT.106 million and products price BDT. 367.4 million⁴. But now it has been reduced to 350 pottery villages where 5 lac people are directly and indirectly related to it in Bangladesh¹⁵. Earthen pots, glasses, pitchers, jugs, pot covers, small banks, dishes, bowls, flower vases, dolls, and buckets are common products of this industry in Bangladesh.

There are several reasons behind declining previous pride of this sector as financial facilities, insufficient technology, lack of modern equipment, huge substitute products, poor local administrative coordination, lack of marketing promotion⁶. Some courses of action are urgent for rejuvenating this sector in Bangladesh, such as providing financial help, supplying soil, improvement of production technology, expanding training opportunities, cooperative society formation, modernizing products design, marketing facilities, developing & reforming national policy, and enhancing awareness on pottery¹³.

Prospects of the pottery industry of Bangladesh in the international market

There is a huge demand for pottery products outside of our country. Some daily newspapers published news on exporting pottery products. Tapos Paul, Rotarian of “Bijapur Rudrapaul Cooperative Society Ltd.” of Comilla district explained that they exported decorative and crafts pottery products in 15 countries¹⁸. Shankar Paul, general manager of the same institution, also stated that they usually took orders of BDT.40-50 lac every year from the international market¹². The members of this cooperative society produce 3000 types of pottery products, including cup-saucer, dinner set, jug-glass, vase, shopis, various toys, the religious script, coil vase, different types vase, portrait of sages, wall plate, and other various goods⁸.

III. Methodology

Sample size

In this paper, an online-based survey was conducted among members of the pottery family at 14 pottery villages under 6 Upazila of Rajshahi district in Bangladesh. The data were collected from a randomly selected sample of 55 respondents by closed-ended questionnaire through convenience sampling. I chose the online-based survey due to lockdown during the COVID-19 pandemic. Respondents were selected from the family having pottery activities.

Data collection

In the online survey, I circulated a google form link among family members of potters to collect data through email, text message, Facebook page, messenger groups, messenger messages, Facebook groups and was prayed to share this link like a snowball sampling. The data were collected from June to July in the year 2021. Data were analyzed using SPSS version 26.0. Five points Likert scale was used in the analysis having, strongly disagree (SD) = 1, disagree (D) = 2, neutral (N) = 3, agree (A) = 4, and strongly agree (SA) = 5.

IV. Results And Discussion

Most of the respondents were male, having 87.3%, and 12.7% were females (Table 1). Three-fifths of them were aged 15-24 years, 36.4% and 5.5% were aged 25-35 years and more than 36 years, respectively. Nearly two-fifths of repliers were higher educated.

Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents (n=55)

Variables	Sub-Variables	Frequency n=55	Percentage (%)
Age	15-24 years	32	58.2
	25-35 years	20	36.4
	Above 36 years	3	5.5
Gender	Male	48	87.3
	Female	7	12.7
Present education level	SSC (10 th class)	16	29.1
	HSC (12 th class)	18	32.7
	Honors (Undergraduate)	15	27.3
	Masters (Postgraduate)	6	10.9

Table 2 represents some important areas of respondents. About 95% of answerer’s families had been practicing this industry from their successors. Three-fourth of them were unknown to make products, but all of them or their family depended on pottery for their livelihood. Around 92.7% of respondents did not choose this industry as a career. The majority of them manually prepared clay and ran the wheel (Chak) by hand. Daily household types products were the main products of them, some produced toys, decorative and all kinds of goods. Almost all of the respondent’s products were not exported, and 96.4% of repliers or their family didn’t apply any marketing promotion activities.

Table 2: Some aspects of the pottery industry (n=55)

Items	Sub-items	Frequency n=55	Percentage (%)
You / your family has been involved in pottery activities.	More than 20 years	3	5.5
	From Ancestor	52	94.5
Main earning source of your family.	Pottery	55	100
I know how to make pottery products.	Yes	13	23.6
	No	42	76.4
I choose pottery as a career or future profession.	Yes	4	7.3
	No	51	92.7
I know about the cooperative society in the pottery industry in my village.	Yes	2	3.6
	No	53	96.4
You / your family prepares clay/soil for pottery works.	In manually (With hands and feet)	51	92.7
	By machine	4	7.3
You / your family makes pottery products/goods.	In manual wheel (Chak)	47	85.5
	By mechanic wheel (Chak)	8	14.5
You / your family makes/produces such classifications of pottery products.	Daily household	37	67.3
	Toys	2	3.6
	Decorative and artistic or crafts	4	7.3
	All above	12	21.8
Products of you / your family are exported.	Yes	1	1.8
	No	54	98.2
You / your family advertise for selling pottery products on billboards, leaflets, Facebook, Youtube, or any other.	Yes	2	3.6
	No	53	96.4

The desired average inter-item correlation range is (0.15-0.20) for broad higher-order and (0.40-0.50) for narrow-order⁵. Similarly, according to the most psychometrician, Cronbach’s alpha value of 0.70 was acceptable. Consequently, the internal consistency reliability of the following items was allowable (Table 3).

Table 3: Internal consistency reliability

Items	Number of variables	Cronbach’s alpha	Average inter-item correlation (AIC)
All problematic items	16	0.806	0.216
Production	9	0.745	0.254
Marketing	5	0.729	0.351
Social	2	0.711	0.558

In table 4, More than 85% of respondents agreed to some problems in production areas, such as inadequate supply clay, lack of loan facilities, unavailable firewood, inconsiderable factory space, scarcity of assistants, and unfavorable nature. Besides, inaccessible training facilities, scabies for using mud and water, and body related problems at old age were supported by 65% to 84% of the informants.

Table 4: Production (P) related problems in pottery industry (n=55)

Items	SA	A	N	D	SD	Mean
P1 Scarce supply of clay/soil and high cost to collect this.	10	43	1	1	0	4.13
P2 Lack of available training facilities.	10	36	7	2	0	3.98
P3 Insufficient loan/credit and fund facilities.	19	32	3	1	0	4.25
P4 Short supply of fuel/wood and high cost to buy this.	13	37	4	1	0	4.13
P5 Small / inadequate working place.	20	30	4	1	0	4.25
P6 Difficult to get workers / helping hands.	6	41	5	3	0	3.91
P7 Rainy seasons and natural disasters hamper pottery activities.	24	29	2	0	0	4.40
P8 Potters suffer skin diseases from working with clay and water.	8	31	11	5	0	3.76
P9 Potters suffer physical problems in old age for long time work in pottery.	8	28	16	3	0	3.75
Weighted Average Mean (WAM)						4.06

Marketing oriented difficulties were lagging behind the pottery industry in various ways (Table 5). More than 85% of the responders consented to some problems, such as gradual demand reduction, decreasing sales for substitute products, dissatisfied return on investment, wastage of goods in carrying, and lack of fair or exhibition of products.

Table 5: Marketing (M) related problems in the pottery industry (n=55)

Items	SA	A	N	D	SD	Mean
M1 Demand for pottery products are decreasing.	7	41	6	1	0	3.98
M2 Plastic, steel and metallic products are declining market share of pottery products.	25	27	3	0	0	4.40
M3 Lower profit earning in the pottery industry.	5	48	2	0	0	4.05
M4 Bad condition of road and communication damages pottery goods in the time of transportation.	15	38	2	0	0	4.24
M5 Unavailable fair and exhibition of pottery products.	2	45	7	1	0	3.87
Weighted Average Mean (WAM)						4.11

Table 6 depicts that potter was disliked in many cases by society for involving this profession, and most of the time, poor people were entrepreneurs of pottery.

Table 6: Social (S) problems in the pottery industry (n=55)

Items	SA	A	N	D	SD	Mean
S1 Many people hate/neglect working in the pottery sector.	13	36	5	1	0	4.11
S2 Lower-income groups adopt pottery as a profession.	12	35	5	3	0	4.02
Weighted Average Mean (WAM)						4.07

V. Recommendations

It is urgent to revive the pottery industry in Bangladesh for socio-economic development and preservation of traditional assets. I propose some suggestions from these perspectives. As-

- ☞ Financial support to potters by banks and other financial institutions is imperative. The loan can be disbursed under easy conditions and a lower interest rate, where micro-credit finance can be the best option here.
- ☞ Training facilities for potters should be available in all remote areas of the country. Government and non-government organizations (NGOs) can arrange short-term and long-term training programs in production, marketing, and other aspects.
- ☞ Communication & transportation systems are important for developing rural areas where pottery is a rural-based industry.
- ☞ The establishment of cooperative society among potters in the production and marketing section can be a great initiative.
- ☞ Raw materials such as soil, fuel, and others are crucial for pottery. Government and NGOs can help in this case.

- ☉ Inclusion of pottery education at different education levels can be helpful for the expansion of knowledge and techniques of this sector.
- ☉ Research & development activities on pottery by the government, NGOs, and the personal initiative can be a valuable process for creating new dimensions in pottery that will help to avail future opportunities of this industry.
- ☉ Arranging exhibitions & fairs of pottery products in different parts of the countries and overseas can contribute to the market promotion and increasing market demand.
- ☉ Awarding successful potters every year can be an important motivational factor in this sector.
- ☉ Pottery is a monumental part of the historical and archaeological elements. So, the government should develop necessary policies for keeping pottery.
- ☉ Various government agencies and NGOs should explore new technology for the pottery, which will ease production procedures and improve product quality.
- ☉ Mass media should disseminate news on pottery's historical and archaeological value and the usefulness of its products. It also takes part in enhancing favorable awareness among people.
- ☉ Arranging warehouse or shed facilities and financial help during natural calamities and the rainy season.
- ☉ Export Promotion Bureau (EPB) and other related organizations should develop policies for the increasing identity of local pottery products abroad.
- ☉ ICT division of the government can dispose of E-business, E-marketing, and other digital concepts in the pottery industry.
- ☉ Some pottery areas/villages can be declared tourism sites based on cultural values for the quick mass introduction of the pottery industry.
- ☉ Free or low-cost medical facilities can be given to these potters who are suffering from the various physical disorders for working a long time in this industry.
- ☉ Potter should utilize training opportunities given by the government and NGOs.
- ☉ Products diversification is imperative for market expansions. They should not only focus on daily household goods but also necessary, decorative, artistic or crafts, terracotta, ceramics, and other products as per customer's demand.
- ☉ Potter can take low-cost marketing promotional activities through Facebook, YouTube, Messenger, and others as per their ability.
- ☉ Keep quality of products for retaining present customers and attracting new customers.

VI. Limitations

There are some limitations of the study. Initially, the sample size was small. Secondly, only Rajshahi was selected. Finally, the paper only focused on problematic areas of pottery. Further research can be conducted by minimizing these limitations.

VII. Conclusion

Pottery is a valuable part of human history, existing for a long time. Past earthen crafts and terracotta are the mirrors of our successor's world. Besides, it is playing a magnificent role in the socio-economic development of a country. Creating employment, alleviating poverty, empowering women, generating new entrepreneurs are all victorious achievements of the pottery industry. At present, this glorious sector is facing many troubles, including natural calamities, backward procedure, capital insufficiency, unskilled potters, absences of research & development, limited product diversifications, lack of marketing promotion, negligence of people, etc. Finally, proper actions at the appropriate times by government agencies, NGOs, and potters are compulsory for reviving this worthy pottery industry.

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