
Cultural Heritage Management of the Traditional Crafts Using Vulnerable Natural Resources: A Case Study on the Ivory Craft of Murshidabad, West Bengal, India

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Abstract: India has legislations to protect and conserve its vast natural resources and diversified human culture, but sometimes a conflict of interest arises when a traditional cultural practice exploits natural resources for the sake of art as well as livelihood and drags it to the verge of extinction like ivory carving. Worldwide overexploitation of ivory due to the trading and carving led to the complete ban on the craft in 1991 in India. The art pieces made on ivory can be preserved in the museums but is there any possible way to “safeguard” the craftsmanship, i.e., the intangible aspect of it from the threat of “disappearance” forever? Murshidabad, a heritage town of West Bengal, was once famous for outstanding ivory craftsmanship originated from and influenced by age-old ivory carving schools from different parts of eastern India and modern-day Bangladesh as well as Delhi as early as the beginning of eighteenth-century CE. A small community known as Bhaskar belongs to the caste Sutradhar used to practice the ivory craft generation after generation, and presently, some of them still continue the craft on alternatives of ivory such as wood, bone and artificial ivory. The present paper traced the origin of the ivory craft in Murshidabad and its nature in terms of knowledge, technique and value, as well as discussed, the associated factors responsible for the craft’s growth and decline. It also compared the data with the present day scenario of the craft to understand whether is it possible to continue the true nature of the craftsmanship if the “authenticity” of the material is lost and if possible, then what are the different ways to “safeguard” it in a sustainable way with alternative raw materials to protect its intangible cultural properties.

Keywords: Intangible Cultural Heritage, Traditional Craftsmanship, Values, Ivory, Natural Resources, Sandalwood, Sustainable Development

Introduction

The most incredible aspect of India is its vast repertoire of Cultural Heritage. The definition of Cultural Heritage goes “monuments, groups of buildings or sites of historical, artistic, aesthetic, archaeological, scientific, ethnological or anthropological

value" (Gimblett 2006: 309). These are the material manifestations of ancient human knowledge, products of their imagination and creativity hence, irreversible in nature, once lost can never be reproduced or re-expressed again. These elements are constantly facing various threats like theft, smuggling, land encroaching, modern constructions, human vandalism and so on. The building block of our country, i.e., our Constitution states, "Any section of the citizens residing in the territory of India or any part thereof having a distinct language, script or culture of its own shall have the right to conserve the same" - Article 29 and "It shall be the duty of every citizen of India to value and preserve the rich heritage of our composite culture" - Article 51 A(F). As such under the Ministry of Culture various Government offices and autonomous centres are preserving, conserving and restoring those cultural elements by enacting various Acts like *The Antiquities and Art Treasure Act 1972*, *The Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act 1958* (Amendment 2010), etc. In addition to these, they also follow different conventions implemented by the international organization UNESCO (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization) like the *Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage* (1972), the *Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage* (2001) and so on.

But now the question arises does cultural heritage encompass only the physical entity of ancient culture in the form of monuments, sites, etc. or also include the non-physical or intangible aspects of it. Japan was the first country who had taken a step in the post second world war era to save its "living treasures" which include tangible and intangible cultural properties and people by enacting an act titled *Law for the Protection of Cultural Properties 1950* to preserve their national identity (Kurin 2004: 67). In 2003 UNESCO finally adopted the *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*. India is also rich in diversified traditional intangible heritage which attributes an unequalled cultural identity to our country in this world. As such India has also joined as a state party in 2005. According to UNESCO's definition traditional craftsmanship is one of the major domains of intangible cultural heritage which is required to "safeguard" from the threats of "destruction, deterioration and disappearance" due to the process of "Globalization and Social transformation" and a lack of funds to protect them (UNESCO © 2014).

Craft traditions are the most remarkable example of the synthesis of tangible and intangible cultural elements. However, there are some heritage crafts practiced in India that used natural resources as raw materials. For example ivory craft, shell carving, sandalwood carving, rosewood carving, etc. Murshidabad, a district of West Bengal, was internationally famous for its ivory craft. It had its own signature artworks created by the master craftsmen belonging to a small community or sub-caste who were solely involved with this craft and the knowledge and technique were transmitted from generation to generation through their families. It was one of India's most famous ivory carving schools that once gained international fame for its excellent and unique workmanship. However, the high demand for ivory articles in different parts of the world led to the ruthless killings of elephants. The cultural use of ivory for a long time

became a major threat to the very existence of the animal. As such a conflict of interest grew up regarding which one should be protected? However, to protect the elephants a bold step was taken by banning all kinds of trading, making and possessing of raw ivory or ivory products in India (*Wild Life (Protection) Amendment Act 1986 (Act no. 28 of 1986, 1991 (Act no. 44 of 1991) and 2002 (Act no. 16 of 2003))*). As well as the inclusion of African elephants in Appendix I of CITES in 1989 completely banned the international ivory trade in 1990. The honourable Supreme Court of India stated in the judgment of the case of *Indian Handicrafts Emporium And Ors vs Union Of India (Uoi) And Ors.* on 27 August, 2003 that the authority, i.e., the Central Government should take physical possession of the stock of ivory and the seized ivory artworks should be preserved and displayed in the museum as they were the “cultural and religious heritage of India” (Indian Kanoon © 2014). Due to the ban on the ivory trade as well as on practising ivory craft many of the craftsmen left the field of carving though few of them are still struggling to survive with alternative materials as substitutes for ivory and trying to carry on the hereditary profession.

This verdict obviously created new hope and a definite way to save the elephants and it also gave an additional measure to protect the outstanding ivory artworks. But one question remains unanswered- is the mere preservation of ivory artworks in the museums would be able to conserve the knowledge (design and measurements), the creative thought process, the technique and skill of the craftsmen which shaped the art pieces? On the other hand, it also cannot preserve the historical and cultural values of the objects by which these are related, received, recognized and respected by the society. Now the question is whether the craftsmanship of this craft in its true form can be “safeguarded” by the sustainable use of alternative natural/synthetic raw materials? If that is possible then how it can be done?

So, with this objective, an attempt is made in this article to reconstruct the comprehensive history of the ivory craft of Murshidabad to find out the reasons behind its origin and growth and the factors responsible for its decline as well as to understand the historical, social and cultural values of the craft embedded deep down inside the minds of the people of the community. Fieldwork was done among the present-day carvers working on alternatives of ivory to understand the present socio-economic situation of the craft and also to evaluate the “authenticity” (UNESCO 2020) of the continuity of craftsmanship in the form of knowledge and technique as well as the values of the objects to the society after the replacement of the raw material. Possibilities are discussed on how sustainable development can be made for this languishing craft in the future.

The data on the ivory carving industry were primarily collected from secondary sources like books, old official reports of the British Government and census as well as also by interviewing craftsmen who used to carve ivory. Data on the present day situation of the craft were collected by conducting fieldwork where the snowball sampling technique was used to identify the craftsmen. Primarily craftsmen were

interviewed and observed, and besides, the government officials, timber shop owners, carpenters and furniture manufacturers relevant to the purpose of the study were also interviewed to collect data. Both qualitative and quantitative methods were followed to analyse the data.

History of the Ivory Carving Industry of Murshidabad

Archaeological and Literary evidence: A brief overview of the archaeological findings of ivory objects from the area belonging to the modern Bihar, Odisha, West Bengal and present-day Bangladesh is required to understand the deep-rooted antiquity of the craft in Murshidabad. This whole area was very much politically and economically interconnected from seventeenth-century onwards up to the independence of India.

Ivory artefacts reported from the early historic period of four important sites of West Bengal namely Pandu Rajar Dhibi located in the Burdwan district, Chandraketugarh and Harinarayanpur in North 24 Pargana and Tilpi in Midnapore district. Only from the third period of Pandu Rajar Dhibi an ivory comb was unearthed which along with all the Chalcolithic features also bears a few iron objects (IAR 1962-63: 43). Ivory findings from these sites include ornaments, utilitarian items and decorative items. Among these, the plaques engraved with ornamented female busts are the most noteworthy findings found from all the sites except Pandu Rajar Dhibi. These findings suggest that ivory working was not only practised in various localities of early historic Bengal but also produced the same kind of objects with superb artistic skill (IAR 1958-59: 56, 76; Haque 2001: 403-404; Sengupta et al. 2008: 309).

Literary sources also provide substantial information about ivory objects like Bhatera copper plate inscription of Govinda Kesavadeva mentions the presence of ivory carvers during the 11th century in the area of modern Syhlet. Edilpur Copper plate inscription of Kesavasena found from the Vikrampur area of modern Bangladesh also mentions palanquin posts made or encased with ivory during the twelfth century CE and in the late medieval period uses of ivory bangles or bracelets as ornaments were found in the writings of Vidyapati's Padavali and Sankaradasa's Bhagavata (Dwivedi 1976: 17).

In Bihar, ivory objects were found from the Chalcolithic level as early as the 1st half of the 1st millennium BCE at Chirand (IAR 1963-64: 6, 1964-65: 7) and from the early historic level of other sites like Sonapur (IAR 1956-57: 19), Oriup (IAR 1966-67: 6), Champa (IAR 1971-72: 5), Apsad (IAR 1973-74: 10), Chechnar (IAR 1988-89: 9) and Ramchaura (IAR 1995-96: 6). A statue of an ivory elephant and a miniature stupa along with bangle pieces and discs were unearthed from the 9th-12th century monastic site Antichak (IAR 1960-61: 3; 1971-72: 4; 1972-73: 6; 1975-76: 7).

Ivory carving had rich and long antiquity in Odisha probably due to the rich population of elephants which provided the required raw materials easily and the patronage of a long line of Hindu kings up to the time of the late sixteenth century.

Evidence of ivory working as early as 1st to 2nd century CE was found from the site Sisupalgarh located near Bhubaneswar. With the discoveries of a number of archaeological findings as well as from literary sources, it is evident that during the medieval period (10th/ 11th century CE to the decline of the Mughal period) Odisha was an important ivory carving centre. In this regard, a copper plate inscription dated to the 10th century CE found in a village named Kelga in Odisha is worth mentioning. Its text contains important information about the importance of ivory during that period in Odisha (Dwivedi 1976: 17). The ivory findings displayed at different museums show the high quality of carving technology and variation in the subject matter. Secular objects like a three-tiered ivory stupa dated to the 10th century CE, two plaques showing a depiction of an amorous couple dated to the 12th century CE to 13th century CE, etc., sculptures of gods and goddesses such as a pair of figurines of *Radha* and *Krishna* and a figure of *Ganesa* dated to the 16th/17th century CE are excellent examples of Odisha style of carving. Other kinds of objects were identified as throne legs by various scholars from the early and late medieval period (12th century CE to 17th century CE) of Odisha. The throne legs were profusely decorated. An inscription on the Jagannatha temple at Puri further provided information that during the medieval period ivory throne legs were carved in Odisha (Dwivedi 1976: 112-120).

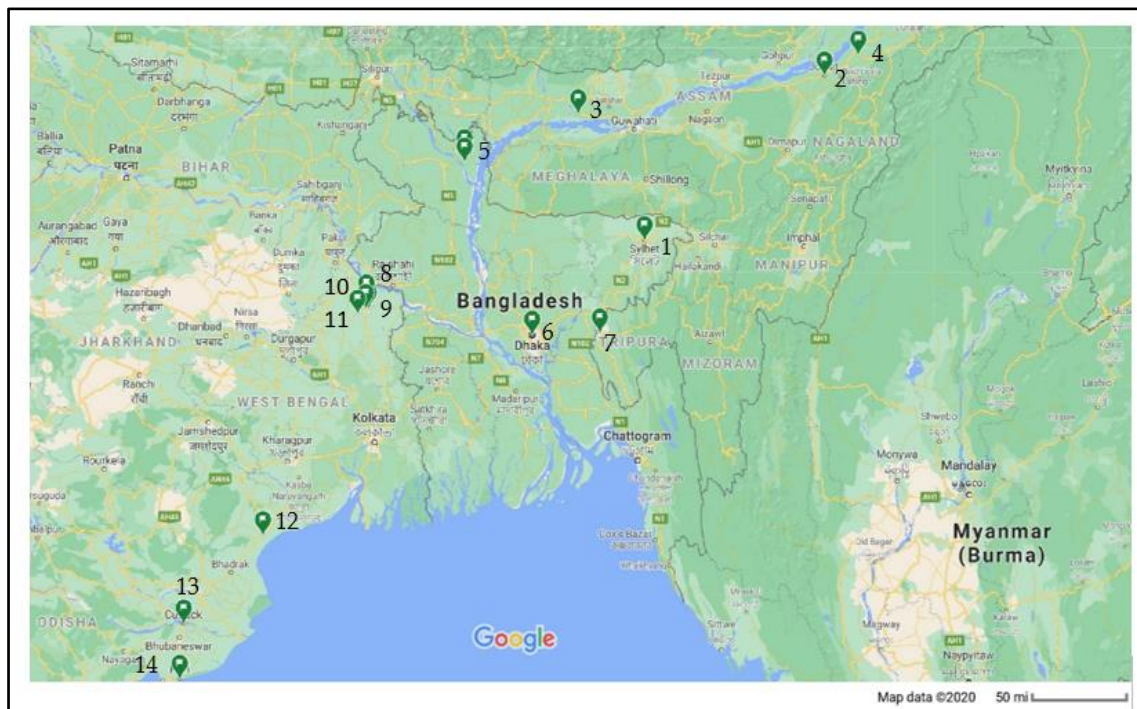


Figure 1: Map showing places in and around the city of Murshidabad where ivory carving was practiced (Source: Google Map)

Origin of the ivory industry and various influences from other ivory centres: There are several possibilities regarding the origin of ivory craft in Murshidabad. The areas around the city of Murshidabad (Figure 1) where evidence of the early ivory carving industry is found can be divided into two categories: 1. Eastern and northeastern parts

which include various places of Assam and present-day Bangladesh, and 2. Western and southwestern parts which include various places of Bihar and Odisha. Another possibility is from the Mughal capital Delhi as Bengal was under Mughals for 150 years. As such it is possible that either the art was originated from one of these places or the development of the art at least influenced by the artwork of these places.

If the political history of Bengal is taken into consideration, then some of the events might have played vital role to establish the ivory craft in Murshidabad. In the early 17th century after the subjugation of Ahom Kingdom (1612-1682, Present day Assam), Sylhet (presently part of Modern Bangladesh) and Tipperah (1618, Modern Tripura) by the Mughals during the reigns of Emperor Jahangir and Shahajahan brought a long era (1628-1707) of peace, progress and prosperity in the undivided Bengal. After that the conquest of Chittagong port by a Mughal viceroy in 1666 over the Portuguese which increased the maritime trade of Bengal many times. At that time Dhaka (became Mughal capital of Bengal *subah* in 1610) also became important administrative center as well as trade centre of cotton goods and a number of English companies founded their factories there (Bhattacharya 1943: 273-315).

One of the most important ivory craft centres in the eastern part was Sylhet (1, presently located in eastern Bangladesh). The earliest evidence of the presence of the art is found from its reference in the Bhatera copper plate inscription dated to the 11th century CE. Bhatera is a village in the Maulavibazar subdivision of modern Sylhet. The inscription stated about an ivory carver who lived in a nearby village appointed by the king of Srihatta named Govinda Kesavadeva to a temple of lord Shiva. It can be interpreted from the text of the inscription that ivory working was a respectable occupation at that time and also considered auspicious as objects of ivory must be used in temples and were prevalent in and around Sylhet during that period (Ahmed 2014: 58). During the Muslim period also Sylhet was quite popular for ivory crafts with specialized articles like the ivory mat, fans, chessmen, etc. The mat was woven with the help of thin long ivory strips into various geometrical patterns with golden/silver borders (Ahmed 1999: 575; Hunter 1879: 304; Jackson 1883-84: 99). The workers were of *Khandikar* caste. From the middle of the nineteenth century, the art started to decline as evidenced by the writings of Allen et al. (1857: 84-85) that the ivory art of Sylhet was in very languishing condition and could only be obtained on order at Jorhat (2), Barpeta (3) of Assam and Sylhet. The class engaged in ivory carving was called *Kanikars* which included both Muslim and Hindu carvers. In the Dhaka National Museum collection there was an ivory mat which was previously owned by the Nawabs of Bengal. They probably procured it from Sylhet. This kind of ivory mat with exquisite carving was also found in the collection of a rich craftsman's house at Murshidabad which was practically made in Murshidabad during the time of Murshid Quli Khan, the Nawab nazim of Murshidabad (Nandi 1969: 97). Later on, the art of making of this ivory mat spread out other places near Sylhet like Manipur (ORCIE 1885: 90), Tipperah (7) (Watts and Brown 1903: 178). In 1903 at Delhi Exhibition Watts and Brown wrote that there were half a dozen mats exhibited some of them made at Murshidabad too. So, it can be

assumed that at least the art of making ivory mat and fan came at Murshidabad from Sylhet probably through Dhaka. When in 1612 Sylhet was subjugated by the Mughals, a strong political and trading relations established. Due to which the art form probably travelled from Sylhet to Dhaka (6) as the later became Bengal's most prosperous city. Later on, when the capital shifted from Dhaka to Murshidabad in 1716 it might have travelled there. G.C. Dutta (1901) who prepared a monograph on Bengal ivory carving industry also expressed such possibility that the art came from Sylhet. Ivory art works were also very much flourished during the reign of Ahom rulers but during the British period in the late nineteenth century it declined gradually. The specialty was comb, paper knife, bracelet, fans, chessmen, back scratcher, etc. (Donald 1901). Dutta (1901: 2-3) also mentioned in his monograph that in the village Panga (5) of the Rangpur division of modern Bangladesh there was a small community of ivory carvers belonging to the same caste group *Kondikars* who were all Muslims by religion. At that time the art was almost extinct and the carvers also forgot the technique of carving ivory mats and fans. So, it was found that the art of ivory carving was not only present in Sylhet but also in the Ahom kingdom, Rangpur in northern Bangladesh, Dhaka, Tipperah and Manipur due to the abundance of indigenous elephant population and influenced to some extent the Murshidabad school of carving.

Another theory was the influence came from the northern part of India regarding which a story was prevalent among the ivory carvers of Murshidabad that the then Nawab brought an ivory carver from Delhi for preparing an ear-scratcher and a local craftsman secretly learnt the art only by observing him. His son named Tulsi Mistry or Khatumber who was a devout Vaishnav went on pilgrimage to Jaipur, Benares and Vrindavan and learnt ivory carving technique from those areas. G.C. Dutta is somewhat not much convinced with this version of the story. If an effort is made to extract the historical significance of that exaggerated version of the story it is found that a long era of eighty years of peace in Bengal Subah in the middle and late seventeenth century surely did open a connection with the northern part of India and further, the conquest of Chittagaon port led to a movement of people like "scholars, teachers preachers, artisans and soldiers" from Delhi and Agra to Bengal and also Vaishnav pilgrims from Bengal travelled to Vrindavan, Jaipur and Kurukshetra (Sarkar 1943: 188-189, 316). Inland water transport was very organized in Bengal and boats were the main means of communication at that time for commerce as well as war (Mukherjee 2009: 398). The town Mukhsusabad (11, old name of Murshidabad) gained importance during that time and the Dutch (1653) and English (1658) founded commercial factories at Kasim Bazar (10) near it for opium and silk trade (Bhattacharya 1979: 53). Due to the prosperity in 1716, Murshid Quli Khan the then Subahdar of Bengal shifted the capital from Dhaka to Murshidabad. Kasim Bazar grew further as a commercial centre with an addition of French factory (Bhattacharya 1979: 53). This is beyond any doubt that this flourishing commerce attracted many artisans from Delhi, though Murshid Quli Khan was a pious Muslim and not a great patron of art but his later successor Alivardi Khan was a powerful leader and art lover. During his time many Mughal court painters were attracted to Murshidabad and developed there its

own school of art, as well as other crafts like metal craft, textile, jewelry and ivory nurtured under court patronage (Murphy 1990: 177). Later Nawab Nizams also spent a large amount of money on the construction of mosques, *imambaras* and other public occasions which provided employment and money to craftsmen, labourers and artists (Mukherjee 2009: 418). Some of the early ivory objects, which show marked Mughal influence, can be mentioned here like a five-legged armchair and table gifted to Mrs. Warren Hastings by Mani Begum the widow of Nawab Mir Jafar (1757 – 1765) with *Jali* work, a pen-box displayed in Indian Museum with patterns that recall the Mughal inlay work, caparisoned elephant procession with *howdah* and the attendants and the nobleman gave marked similarities with Mughal architecture and attire as described in the *Ain-i-Akbari*, the figurine of King as shown in the Mughal Miniature, etc. (Nandi 1969: 97-98). Two such pen boxes mentioned above are on display in the National Museum, Delhi dated to the 20th century made in Northern India according to the display label. One of them is engraved with noble or royal figures wearing Mughal Style attires (Acc. no. 59.278). Another one is carved with floral patterns in low relief (Acc. no. 56.103/1). So, with a background of all these historical facts, the story does not seem very imaginative. It was not entirely impossible to arrive ivory carvers from Delhi or Agra to the Bengal court and shared their knowledge with local artisans and also not absurd for a Vaishnav carver to learn or at least notice ivory carvings of other prominent centres during his pilgrimage. People not only came from Delhi or Agra, Gujarati merchants settled in the Kasim Bazar which was definitely a commercial town and residence of merchants and *mahajans* and the inhabitants of the town were prominently Hindus mostly Vaishnavas. Hunter (1876: 88-90) in his Statistical Account of Bengal stated that Kasim Bazar grew as one of the greatest commercial centres in the lower Bengal from the early seventeenth century because of producing the great quality silk and muslin. The climate was very healthy which suited the Europeans due to its prime location on the bank of Bhagirathi. A traveller wrote about Kasim Bazar in 1811 that it was noted for the production of silk, hosiery, koras and inimitable ivory work. Rajasthani merchants settled in another town named Azimganj (8) and its twin city Jiaganj (9) which grew as retail trade centres where they acted as the middlemen in the export business of Europeans as well as enjoyed the monopoly of internal trades (Bhattacharya 1979: 61). Walsh (1903: 126) identified the Legendary Tulshi Mistry as a forefather of an ivory carver he interviewed almost four generations ago who resided in the Enatuli Bagh of Jiagunge. It was also possible that the art form came along with those merchants as art objects or through artists who came with them. However, if all the information taken into account, the old writings about ivory carving, antique ivory art works and historical facts, it seems that the beginning of ivory carving industry of Murshidabad can be traced back to middle or early middle eighteenth century and strongly influenced by the art form of Eastern Bengal as well as Mughal work.

From the western side, Odisha was a prominent ivory carving centre up to the early Medieval period (10th century to 16th century). However, the royal patronage ended when it was conquered by Afghans in 1568 and then by Mughals in 1592 (Sarkar 1943: 188). Though it had a different line of Mughal Governors from Bengal, but from 1651

both Bengal and Odisha came under the governance of Prince Suja who wrote a letter to his father Emperor Sahajahan stating that before his rule Odisha was a “desolated” country and it is him who brought progress and prosperity there (Sarkar 1943: 231-33, 333). Odisha was also governed along with Bengal from the time of Murshid Quli Khan up to 1752 when Maratha rulers snatched it from the Mughals (Sarkar 1943: 231-33, 467). During this time Odisha was very much well connected with Bengal and well developed. Shuja-ud -Din the Governor of Odisha had built several stone bridges over the rivers on the way to Murshidabad (Mukherjee 2009: 398). There was a constant flow of pilgrims from Bengal to Puri and Puri (14) was an important ivory carving centre as evidenced from the temple inscription. From 1742 it was under constant warfare mostly the city Cuttack which was an important ivory carving centre and became almost “barren” and desolated (Sarkar 1943: 466) and finally came under the rule of Marathas. In the late eighteenth century Maharaja Sukhomoy Roy donated Rs. 150,000 for constructing a road from Puri to Calcutta (Mukherjee 2009: 426). Ivory carving continued in Odisha at various parts of Cuttack (13) as mentioned in the Calcutta Exhibition (1885) in a flimsy state. Dutta (1901: 5) mentioned that during his survey he could not find out any carver except one at Balasore (12). In 1903 at the Delhi exhibition some old ivory artworks were displayed from Nayagur State of Odisha like a Tortoise, a Krishna idol and an infant Krishna (Watts and Brown 1903: 182-183). It was found that Odisha was very much connected with Bengal and during its turbulent period, it was not entirely impossible for craftsmen to come to Murshidabad or Kasim Bazar for better livelihood. Murshidabad also had a rich repertoire of ivory artworks of Hindu gods and goddesses, Jagannath *Rath yatra* which was completely different from its Mughal inspired artwork.

Caste Determination of the Ivory carvers of Murshidabad: Regarding the caste of the ivory carvers Dutta (1901: 4) stated that they were all Hindu by religion and Bhaskar or image maker by caste. Bhaskar according to him was actually a branch of carpenter. Before the introduction of ivory, they were wood carvers, stone and clay image makers or wall painters. Risley (1892) described “Bhaskars as a small caste of stone-cutters who make idols of stone, wood, or metal and occupy the same position as the Dhobis” and about the carpenter caste, he wrote they were called *Sutradhar* or *Chhutar* and they claimed their descent from *Viswakarma* or *Karna*. There was multiple sub-caste among them. In western Bengal their sub-castes were based on distinctions of locality whereas in Dhaka (Eastern Bengal) those were based on occupations. He said they were also employed in making images of gods along with various other kinds of occupation. Hunter (1876) said that the economic conditions of the ivory workers were much better off than agriculturists and silk weavers and they enjoyed higher social status.

Presently the ivory carvers of Murshidabad said that Bhaskar was their appellation given by the Nawabs. Their original caste is Sutradhar. It seems as Dutta said that they were originally Sutradhars or carpenters by caste but as special appreciations from the elite class uplifted their social status and economic condition as also pointed out by Hunter (1876), they made themselves distinct from other carpenter caste and used

surname Bhaskar. Dutta wrote that they never intermarried with other carpenter castes and considered themselves superior to them. But in the present time, it was found during fieldwork that they were freely intermarried with other sub-castes of Sutradhars, as very few of them are present now. Some of the aged ivory carvers of Murshidabad stated that their forefathers were carpenters but at that time the earnings of carpenters were very less and they did not get any respect from the society as people asked them to sit on the road while working. They were not even allowed to enter inside the house which is why they learned ivory carving from their distant relatives who were wage-earners at that time to improve their economic condition and to uplift their social prestige.

Growth of the Ivory industry in Murshidabad and its decline (From 1757 to 1900):

However, in and around the district Murshidabad ivory carving had been developed in Kasim bazar, Azimgunge, Jiagunge, Berhampore, Mothera and in the town Murshidabad itself. After the defeat of Mir Qasim, Nawab of Bengal, by the British East India Company in 1764 they built a Cantonment at Behrampore in 1767 to keep an eye on the Nawab. That Cantonment meant for the Europeans, actually increased the demand for ivory articles among them even after the fall of the Nawabs. There were many rich people to patronize the art. Clive wrote that the city of Murshidabad was as wealthy as London and populous; some of them were even wealthier (Ahmed 2005: 6). After the Battle of Plassey, Kasim Bazar regained its commercial importance where Europeans established many factories. Hunter in 1876 stated that in 1813 Kasim Bazar lost its importance when the river Bhagirathi changed its course. Within a few years, it became a ruin and an outbreak of malaria also killed many people. Hence, he found carvers only at Murshidabad and Berhampore. He said that the carvers were very talented and skilled. He also briefly described the articles, techniques and tools. He also said it was like that because there were capitalists and labourers both in the carvers and the capitalists supplied their own goods and also sold those from their own workshops. He could not able to give an exact figure of their earnings but said that except in the case of the silk and indigo manufacturers, there is no well-marked distinction in the district between labour and capital. Walsh (1903: 126) said that up to 1860 there were many ivory carvers in and around Murshidabad and the demand was so high that a well-established single farm required 6-7 maunds (1 Maund=37kg) of ivory yearly as raw material compared to 2 maunds in 1900. In 1852 Professor Royle (Mitra 1953: xxxii-xxxiii) wrote about the ivory carvers of Behrampore with reference to the exhibits sent to the London Exhibition (1851) that they were "conspicuous". They were creative as they made a little model of themselves at work, they could carve new things and the animal figures carved by them were so true in nature. They did all the carvings with a help of a few tools. Their work should fall under the category of fine arts. Birdwood in 1884 mentioned Behrampore and Murshidabad were two of the important centres of ivory carving in India. Collin (1890) remarked that Bengal was always famous for ivory carving though he was disappointed to find very few craftsmen at Azimganj were practising ivory carving and the price of the products was

very high. He said that the “speciality of Bengal ivory carving is the minuteness of the work, which requires the assistance of about eighty different tools, and the artists are unwilling to communicate their skill outside their own families.” It is mentioned in the official report of the Calcutta Exhibition (1885) that the ivory carving industry once famous for its workmanship was not in a flourished condition as during that time Murshidabad lost its old glory and importance as the seat of Government and commercial centre. The craftsman hardly had any stock of ivory. They worked on orders as such most of the time incapable to deliver on time. It said the old specimens contributed mostly by the Nawab of Murshidabad and Ray Banshidhar Rai Bahadur were “by no means extinct or incapable of revival”. The best specimens were images of gods like Ganesa, Siva, Jagatdhatri and Saraswati and models of boats. Walsh (1903: 126) gave three possible reasons responsible for the deteriorating condition of the industry; 1. Less patronage, 2. Less availability of raw materials and 3. Tendency to keep the knowledge secret among one’s own caste.

From 1900 to 1947 CE: In 1901 in the Census of India: Bengal (1903: 201) there were 415 people in the caste Bhaskar among them 22 were in Murshidabad whereas 232 ivory carvers in Bengal Presidency including the British States, Feudatory states and cities. Among them, Hindus and Muslims both were there.

Contemporary to Walsh a monograph on the ivory carving of Bengal was published by Dutta (1901) where he described meticulously the ivory carving industry of Murshidabad. His point of views also matched with Walsh’s.

He also said about the ivory carvers that they never shared their knowledge with anyone belonging to other castes whereas showed a helping attitude to their fellow caste men by encouraging them to learn the art or even by establishing a new unit for them. There were two classes among the craftsmen, the master of the workshop and the workman. The economic condition of the former was obviously better off than the workmen. The masters sometimes paid their workmen in advance. Senior or experienced workmen sometimes had extra earnings by fulfilling orders at home. They generally worked eight hours per day. Their life was easygoing.

Concerning raw material, Dutta (1901: 5) wrote they preferred Assam or Burma ivory which was light and soft compared to imported ivory from Africa. The price of Assam ivory was also a little bit higher than African ivory. They procured ivory from Calcutta or from local middleman Rai Meg Raj Bahadur of Azimganj. Donald (1900) showed that in Assam the ivory carving industry completely declined due to the scarcity of raw materials. This scarcity arose because of the implementation of the Elephant Preservation Act 1879. The only source of ivory left from the forest Headquarters where dead elephants’ tusks were submitted. Most of those tusks were purchased by Marwaris and sent to Calcutta. So, this can be concluded that those Assam ivories must be purchased by the Murshidabad ivory workers. The Elephant Preservation Act must be the reason which created a scarcity of local ivory supply which led to the ultimate

decline of many old and dying ivory centres around Murshidabad like in Orissa, Assam, Sylhet, Rangpur, etc.

Regarding the quality of carving Dutta (1901: 7-8) opined that the quality diminished even then Europeans admired the indigenous ivory carving especially of Murshidabad and Delhi because of its artistic quality and subject matter. According to him, the quality of the work and its prosperity were deteriorating because of the lack of royal and elite class patronage as the political and commercial importance of Murshidabad district was decreasing day by day. In the Calcutta International Exhibition Report (1883-84) it is found that from Murshidabad some excellent old ivory specimens were lent by elite people from their own family collection like Nawab Ali Kadr Sayyid Husan Ali Bahadur (Last Nawab Nazim of Murshidabad) from Murshidabad, Rai Sitab Chand Rai Bahadur of Azimganj, Maharani Swarnamayi Devi from Kasim Bazar, Raj Bari and Babu Radhika Charan Sen from Berhampore. These royal and elite families were the patrons of ivory work from the good old days and as Walsh (1903: 126) said "as the town became less rich and less important, the sale of ivory carving diminished." In the early twentieth century, most of the descendants of those families were moved from Murshidabad and settled in Calcutta for business purposes, as such, the Murshidabad ivory industry lost its royal and elite patronage and slowly grew as a market-demand based industry.

During that time there were not more than 25 carvers in the Murshidabad district mostly from Khagra at Berhampore and Jiagunge. Dutta (1901: 11) stated the noted products manufactured by them were Goddess *Durga* with all associates, *Jagannath* Cart Procession, Palanquin with bearers, Chessmen, Bullock carts, Elephant single or caparisoned, Peacock Boat, other deities, secular figuring, animal statues, jewellery and small utilitarian items. The speciality of the technique was that they carved out from a single piece of tusk without any joining, that is why their labour charge was higher than other centres of ivory carving in India. Murshidabad carvers charged 25 percent of the value of raw ivory as their labour charge.

Later on, the main source of raw material was probably imported ivory from Africa as it is mentioned in the Delhi Gazetteer (1912: 156-57). It is also mentioned that in previous days Delhi's ivory work lacked expression and pose but now the quality improved and the ivory works ranked as high as Murshidabad.

Mitter (1934: 374-378) also discussed the ivory carving industry of Murshidabad. He said that during that time ivory articles made in Japan and China were very popular with the Indians. Many carvers went to Delhi for better earnings and to learn new techniques as Delhi became an important centre for ivory carving producing popular items like miniature paintings and inlay on ivory. In the Survey on Indian Handicrafts (1954) conducted in 1953, it is mentioned that before Second World War (1939-1945) there were only one big and two or three extremely small units but during the war as foreign troops stationed in India which created a large demand not only for traditional

items but also for cheap utilitarian items. After the war, the industry faced a slump but again revived after 1948 due to the increasing number of tourists and foreign demand. It also reported that Murshidabad was one of the five important ivory carving centres of India.

From 1948 to 1990 (The Ban on Ivory): From 1948 to 1960 there was a boom in the Indian ivory carving industry. A report on the Ivory Industry in Delhi State showed (1955) it was because of the steady growth in the export of ivory articles in America, South Africa, Europe, Middle-eastern countries, etc. and a temporary boost to Hong Kong and Japan as the allied troops stationed there. In 1961-62 the export was worth Rs. 34 lakhs.

There were 21 establishments that provided employment for 36 carvers in Berhampore town, Murshidabad district as mentioned in the survey report on the ivory carving industry at Berhampore conducted in 1963. All the carvers belonged to Bhaskar community. However, it is interesting to find out that out of 21 establishments 3 were using power-operated machines whereas the rest of the establishments had traditional tools. While discussing marketing, the survey revealed that they manufactured articles according to the orders as well as according to their own choices and sold through different government and private agencies in Calcutta. There was a very little local sale. The products were peacock boat, caparisoned elephant, elephant bridge, oyster shell with the life of *Buddha* engraved within it, bullock cart, idols of gods and goddesses, etc. One skilled carver took 15 to 20 days to carve an elephant bridge of 20'' and a peacock boat of 18'' with all fittings. The labour charge was 25% of the cost of raw material.

Regarding raw material it was reported that the carvers preferred imported ivory rather than indigenous but due to import restrictions they had to work with indigenous ivory. 34% of the total ivory consumed by the industry was provided by the All India Handicrafts Board and the rest of the ivory they had to purchase from the wholesalers of Calcutta who by taking advantage of the shortage of raw material raised the price of the stock available with them.

To understand the downfall in the availability of raw material it is necessary to review the import graph of ivory in India. After World War II, India was the largest importer of African ivory in the world (246 tonnes between 1946 and 47) which dropped in 1960 (50 tonnes) due to various reasons like the revolution in Zanzibar (the main source of import), strict controls on import licenses, and high import duties (Martin and Vigne 1989). The market was taken by Hong Kong and Japan. The import restrictions were due to the shortage of Foreign Exchange. The government tried to implement some scheme to revive the industry but the export fall from Rs. 34 lakhs to Rs. 7.49 lakhs in 1965-66.

Another report published in 1969 (17-27) on the ivory industry of Delhi by the Planning and Research Section of All India Handicrafts Board under the Ministry of

Foreign Trade and Supply stated that the subject matter of articles manufactured changed a great deal from display objects to utility items and the dealers also bought items from other prominent ivory carving centres of the country. There was no stock accumulation. The carvers sold their products within a day to the dealers or exporters. Dealers or manufacturers charged very low margin for fast moving items such as jewellery and for utility items charged high margin varied from 30 to 40 % whereas 100 to 300 % for special kind of items.

UBI (1971: 26) conducted a fact-finding survey in Murshidabad district in 1970s which reported that there were 45 and 25 units in Berhampore and Jiagunge respectively. The report stated that almost 99% of the finished products were sold at foreign markets through some export houses which act as middlemen. During that time All India Handicrafts Board provided only 7 to 8% of the total consumed ivory as such the export houses which controlled the market charged the absurd price for raw materials which resulted in the high cost of the finished products. The list of the industries prepared by the bank where there was the scope of development did not include the ivory industry (UBI 1971: 26). Martin and Vigne (1986) stated in their article that during 1970 the legal import of ivory fell to 20 tonnes per year and the import duty rose to as high as 120% in 1978 whereas in Hong Kong ivory was duty-free. As such Indian exporters faced hard competition in the international market while exporting finished ivory articles to foreign countries.

Report on the working groups of Handicrafts: 6th year Plan (1978-83: 39, 60, 62, 143) mentioned about two main restrictions; 1. Import of unmanufactured ivory from African countries and 2. Export of ivory artware made of ivory of Indian origin. Those restrictions created a severe raw material shortage. They also recommended shifting the ivory craftsmen to allied crafts and to substitute the ivory with suitable raw material. During that time ivory craft almost became an export-oriented craft and the production shifted from decorative items to small utility items. In Murshidabad, there was approximately 125 carvers at that time with an annual average production of 3 lakhs.

Just before the ban on the trading of Indian elephants, a re-survey was conducted by Martin and Vigne (1986) and they stated that the number of ivory workers at Murshidabad was only 40 and most of the artisans shifted into sandalwood carving. Though the demand was always high even then the industry was slowly declining due to various reasons like import restrictions, high import duty which actually lowered the profit of the Indian exporters in the world market, complicated rules and restrictions on ivory, etc. In 1987 sandalwood was Rs. 86/kilo and within three years it became Rs. 176/kilo (Rai 1990: 68).

However, a complete ban on ivory is not enough to eradicate the practice as evidenced by a survey conducted by Traffic India in 2001 (p. v). The report stated that Murshidabad was a major centre of illegal ivory carving and the carvers cum traders

supplied their products to the handicraft outlets of Kolkata, Delhi, Darjeeling, Mumbai and Nepal. They took orders by showing photographs of ivory carvings through various exhibitions of sandalwood craft.

Present Condition of the Carvers and the Craftsmanship

The craftsmen: In Murshidabad presently the former ivory craftsmen or their descendants are mostly using wood, bone and artificial or synthetic ivory as raw material for carving. Very few families are currently in the handicraft profession. The artisans said that most of the ivory craftsmen left the handicraft field after the ban and joined other professions like small businesses, transport, etc. However, 14 families who are presently engaged in this profession were interviewed. The main areas where most of the craftsmen lived are Khagra Bazar of Berhampore and Enatuli Bag of Jiaganj. In addition to that one family at Kashimbazar and another one at Islampur were also interviewed. They moved there from their ancestral home at Berhampore due to personal reasons. The craft is still practised only by men as it was before. There are 19 artisans among the fourteen families of House Hold Units. Children below fourteen years are not found among the artisans. Maximum numbers of artisans are above the age of 60. It is found that only 15.8 percent of artisans are below the age of 30, 42.1 percent of artisans belong to the age group of 31 to 60, and 42.1 percent of artisans are above 60 years. The literacy rate shows that 68.4 percent of the artisans were educated up to the school level.

Training: During the survey, it was found that most of the artisans (89.5 percent) took training from their family members whereas 21.1 percent of them took training as apprentices under experienced carvers in workshops. In ancient times this later type of training was known as *Gurukul* System where the apprentice had to do all the household chores of the *Guru* and in return *Guru* taught them the art of carving. 10.5 percent of artisans availed both kinds of training. Before, the artisans who were experienced and self-employed had their own workshop and apprentices used to learn under them but now only one apprentice is learning under one self-employed artisan.

Duration of training: A long time period is required to become a skilled artisan so most of them started at an early age and slowly involved into the family profession that is why most of them are educated only up to the school level. It is necessary to have knowledge of drawing, anatomy (human and animal) and proportions as well. These were taught at the beginning then handling or gripping of the tools were practiced on some cheap material like coconut shell and in the end after learning all those skills the learner was finally allowed to carve on ivory or sandalwood. Proper understanding about the characteristic features of the raw material is also very essential like the direction of the fibres, the nature of the wood, the quality of the wood and so on.

Nowadays a Central Government sponsored training programme is conducted under the scheme of Government by the Master Craftsmen which is only for six months.

Within this short period of time, it is impossible to learn the craft. Students only come for the stipend and after the training, they do not even continue the craft. It is found that artisans took training for three to ten years before starting a professional career. It is obviously varied according to products. The most difficult is making human figures secular as well as religious. Starting age of training varies from 10 to 15. L.C. Jain (1986: 886) stated that in Karnataka one to ten years of training is required to be a skilled artisan on sandalwood while four to seven years in the case of rosewood carving.

Orientation and Perception of Young generation: Eleven out of fourteen families (78.6 percent) are hereditary which means the present generation of artisans has adopted the family profession of carving. During the time of evaluation of young generation interest, it is found that 58.3 percent of offspring of the artisans' families have chosen other professions, 12.5 percent of them knew the art of carving but discontinued the family profession and chose other alternatives whereas only 20.8 percent has chosen hereditary profession. The artisans said that previously those who were not attentive to education and had an interest in art usually came into this field but now even those who are not interested in education preferred other professions like small business, carpentry, goldsmith, computer work, bus conductor, etc. The survey indicated that among those who have preferred other professions 64.3 percent are educated only up to matric level. That means although they are less educated but even then, they have searched for other livelihoods and do not bother to continue hereditary professions. Those offspring who are still students (20.8 percent) all of their parents are unwilling to drag them into their family profession. They are not sure how long the craft will survive in future. At least professions like carpentry, goldsmith, computer-based work, etc. give steady round the year income and not going to be banned or stopped all on a sudden. They just want a secure future. Those who have chosen their family profession two of them are graduates. One among them was in service but due to some problem he had to leave the job and so he came back into this craft. Another one is preparing for competitive examinations and along with that getting acquainted with family business. He is not even interested in handicraft.

Occupation: In Murshidabad 42 percent of the artisans are wage earners, 21.1 percent of the artisans are self-employed, 15.9 percent of the artisans are working as wage earners cum self-employed whereas 21.1 percent of the artisans are working as both self-employed and dealer. They are also known as *Mahajans*. One of them is working as an apprentice but as he is getting a nominal wage so the researcher has included him in the category of the wage earner. Wage earners mean those who bring raw material from other artisans or dealers and after carving the items, again return to them. They either work at their home or at other craftsmen's workshops and get labour charges. Sometimes they also buy the raw material themselves but fulfil the order of a self-employed artisan. Self-employed denotes those who purchase raw materials themselves and make objects according to the order given by dealers or to current market demand and supplied at Government showrooms. Some of the self-employed

artisans also work as dealers. They make objects at their own workshops and also purchase products from other self-employed artisans and supply them to the exporters.

It is also found that 26 percent of the artisans, i.e., 5 out of 19 carvers have secondary sources of income and 32% of artisans have other earning members in their families to support them. Due to low income in wood carving, they have started practising other crafts such as Shola pith, handloom, making of clay dolls, etc. for additional earning. 100 percent of the artisans are not satisfied with the state of their conditions and 31.6 percent of artisans are looking for alternative employment while 5.3 percent of them have left the profession almost.

Assets of the Artisans: All of the artisans' families have brick-built houses with concrete roofs except one. His house is thatched. They have their own workshops inside their own houses, either in a separate room or in a corner of their drawing rooms or bedrooms. None of them has any kind of agricultural land except for one. Only five families have electrically operated tools. Three of them are dealers cum self-employed artisans and two are self-employed artisans.

Analysis of Raw materials: Though previously after the ban on ivory most craftsmen shifted to sandalwood (*Santalum album* L.), but presently during the fieldwork it is found that sandalwood became vulnerable plant species and expensive nowadays so artisans of Murshidabad have shifted into mainly *Gambhar* or *gambhari* wood (*Gemilina arborea*) while some of them are also using artificial ivory and animal bones. After the ban sandalwood was chosen for carving because of its dense fibre (Specific Gravity 0.96) (College of Forestry 2012) which enables to carve intricately without any breakage and its straight grain structure allows the tools to move smoothly. Its fine texture and golden brown colour give a bright and shiny look. It is mostly used to carve images because of its sacred value in Hindu and Buddhist religions. However, now most of the artisans are discarding sandalwood as carving material because it is highly expensive Rs. 10,000 to 12000/kilo (2012-13). Presently the production of Indian sandalwood has decreased abruptly due to various reasons.

Almost 90 percent of natural Indian sandalwood is found in the forests of the south Indian states like Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu. Due to its medicinal and aromatic value sandalwood has high demand in the cosmetics and pharmaceuticals business. By following the policies of the Sultans of Mysore the State Governments had a monopolistic rule on the sandalwood business. Due to this nobody except the personnel of the Forest Department had interest in the harvesting of sandalwood which led to the huge smuggling of sandalwood and the production of sandalwood has decreased abruptly from 4631 tonnes in 1971-72 (MRD 1986) to 400/ 500 tonnes in 2010-2011 resulting in a scarcity of raw material in sandalwood industry which increased the price from twenty four thousand (approx.) per tonne in 1975 (MRD 1986) to thirty seven/forty one lakh per tonne in 2010 (Kumar et al. 2012: 1411). Sandalwood

was categorized as a vulnerable species and included in the list of IUCN in 1997 (Kumar et al. 2012: 1411). In 1978-79 when Indonesia banned the export of raw sandalwood India captured its place (Forbes Life India, 6th August 2009). Excessive export and smuggling but very few initiatives for cultivation are actually responsible for the decline of the sandalwood population in India. Then in the 1990s the government ultimately imposed a ban on raw sandalwood export from India. However, after realizing the ill effect of the monopoly rule, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu state governments brought amendments to the acts in 2001. Now the owner has the full legal right to the sandalwood trees grown over his land and he can extract trees and sell them to the state governments after an inspection by the Range Forest officer (Section 108). The state governments are still holding a partial control but this relaxation of rules and subsidies given for sandalwood plantation promoted and encouraged people for sandalwood cultivation. A few years back large scale cultivation started in different states like Gujarat, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, and Rajasthan apart from Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Kerala (Kumar et al. 2012: 1415). However, now the main problem is the threat from the smugglers who steal the trees from the private land. The farmers are forced to invest a lot to fix the security of their trees. After 10 years the formation of heartwood starts inside sandal trees and after 15-20 years a reasonable amount of heartwood can be harvested (Rai 1990: 70). In the meantime, Australia started large scale cultivation of the Indian variety of sandalwood which already reached the age of harvest. Now Australia has acquired the international market of sandalwood as India lost it completely (Forbes Life India, 6th August 2009). However, recently in 2019 Kerala Government auctioned sandalwood from Marayoor Sandal Reserve Forest Office which is considered the world's best sandalwood. It was sold at the rate of Rs. 17802 -18,190/Kg (The Hindu, 5th September 2019).

Previously Manjusha the Sate Handicraft Department used to give sandalwood to the artisans as per quota in the subsidiary rate but now they stopped providing sandalwood to the artisans. Due to the excessive price of raw materials, the demand has been decreasing day by day. Legal problems and police harassments are everyday matters for the sandalwood artisans. It was found during the survey that many carvers still purchased sandalwood from the black market where they got the wood at a cheaper rate than the government depo. Only local sale is possible if the raw material is purchased from the black market without any proper receipt. So, they almost stopped making items of sandalwood and shifted to a local substitute of sandalwood which is far cheaper in rate.

Due to the light brownish colour of *Gambhar*, it has a great resemblance with sandalwood in its look. It is far cheaper (Rs. 1000 to 1500/cft) than sandalwood and as the tree is a local fauna so easily available in the local market. Though intricate carving on this wood is difficult to obtain because of its low density (SG0.43) (Simpson and Hidayat 1994: 11-15), even then skilled artisans are able to produce magnificent art pieces on this wood. It is probably due to its straight to irregular or rarely wavy grain structure which does not obstruct much the smooth movement of tools and as it is a

soft wood carving can be done quickly. However, if finer details are tried to achieve then the tiny parts of the image become fragile and broken easily due to less strength so extreme care is required to take while doing minute detailing. Previously it was found abundantly in and around Murshidabad but nowadays production has decreased. Good quality seasoned wood is very hard to find. Most of the time artisans are not willing to leave the raw material for 2 to 3 years for seasoning as their working capital is very less. In the summer season cracks develop easily if the wood is not seasoned properly. This wood has a tendency to develop crack more than other woods like rosewood or sandalwood (Personal communication with a timber merchant at Murshidabad). If cracks develop nobody is willing to buy the item but a cracked ivory item used to snatch more money as the dealer sold it as an antique by pouring it overnight in tea liquor.

Another raw material used by the Murshidabad artisans is the bone of buffalo or camel. It is very cheap and available abundantly in the market but has a limitation of size. As the structure of bone is hollow and the width is thinner than ivory, so small images in low relief can be possible to carve out. Only machine tool is used for cutting and carving. Small pieces of bones are encased on the wooden structure to make large-sized images and other decorative objects but the technique is completely different from ivory carving. Hindu artisans have strong restrictions on using bone as raw material for carving idols. Its porous structure is sometimes visible which gives the object an ugly look. Its foul smell is very disturbing, especially for those who are not used to it.

Artificial ivory is a synthetic material of ivory colour. It is harder than ivory and few carvers of Murshidabad are using this material to make images. It is imported to Delhi from foreign countries like Japan and USA. This material is supplied by the exporters or dealers of Delhi. As the material is very hard so artisans preferred to work with machine tools. Tiny pieces of fibres were usually coming out from the object as waste material and floating all over during the time of operating the machine tool which caused severe breathing problems to the artisans. Articles made of this material are gaining popularity because of their similarity with the look of ivory. Its wholesale price in Delhi is approximately Rs. 800 to 1000/kg but the retail price is Rs. 2000/kg. It comes in sheet form of 4x6ft in size (Table 1).

Table 1: Comparative analysis of the production cost (in Rs.) of different products between sandalwood and *Gambhar*

Product	Sandalwood	<i>Gambhar</i>
13" Ambari	33000	2500
4" Ganesha	6000	500

Continuity of the Craftsmanship: An attempt is made to determine the continuity of the craftsmanship, i.e., the knowledge and the art by examining different factors like the finished products, the technique of carving, the tools and the designs (Table 2).

Table 2: Finished Products

Traditional Items on Ivory (Dutta 1901: 9)	Presently Available on Wood, Bone or Artificial Ivory	Extinct Art
Ivory Mat and Fan	No	Yes
Caparisoned Elephant with <i>Howdah</i> and attendants	Yes on wood	No
Elephant, Elephant bridge	Yes on wood	No
Carved whole Ivory	Yes on artificial ivory	No
Oyster Shell	Yes on wood. Only village scene	Episodes of Mahabharata, Ramayana, life sketches of Buddha or urban life not possible on wood
<i>Mayurpankhi</i> Boat	Yes on wood. Probably possible on artificial ivory also but not found	Not as big as ivory which had a natural curvature like boat.
Furnitures	Yes	No
Images of Hindu Gods and Goddesses	Yes on wood, on bone, on artificial ivory	No
Secular figures	Yes on wood, bone and artificial ivory	No



Figure 2: Bullock drawn chariot from Murshidabad displayed in the Albert Hall Museum, Jaipur, Rajasthan

Only the signature traditional items of Murshidabad were taken into account to find out the continuity. Some of these items have captured a piece of history in the form of art. The most noted ones are the caparisoned elephant with *Howdah* and attendants which portrayed beautifully the grandeur of Nobel Life during the time of Nawabs (one such life-size Howdah is still preserved in the Hazarduari Museum of Murshidabad), the peacock boat which is the representation of famous festivals carried out on the river of Bhagirathi at the time of Nawabs, hunting by the Europeans from the back of elephants, bullock drawn chariots with noblemen (Figure 2), etc.

Technique of carving and Tools: During fieldwork, experimentation was done to observe whether there is any continuity of technique and tools from ivory carving to present day wood carving? Therefore, the researcher asked a skilled artisan (National Award winner in ivory carving) to reproduce an art piece which once he had done before in ivory. It is found that the stages of carving are almost the same except for a few minor differences. In wood carving, the sizes of the chisels are a little bigger if the image is bigger in size. Though extreme precautions were taken while doing minute detailing like carving of the nose or lips small portions of wood were coming out. According to the carver, it is due to less strength of wood compared to ivory. Actually, ivory is denser than wood that is why a tiny portion has the power to get attached without breakage. Due to ivory's higher density, it is possible to carve vertically, i.e., towards the flow of the fibres as well as horizontally, i.e., intersecting the fibers but in the case of wood, the latter one is difficult to do mostly in smaller scale (Table 3, Figure 3A and B).

Table 3: Tools and Techniques in ivory and wood carvings

Different Stages of carving (Figure 4)	Tools used during ivory carving	Tools used during wood carving
Holding	Vice	Vice
Cutting	Hand Saw (<i>Ari</i>)	Hand Saw
Drawing	Pencil	Pencil
Rough modeling	Chisel of different shapes and wooden mallet	Chisels (<i>Batali</i>) of different shapes and wooden mallet
Rough shaping and smoothing	Different kinds of files 1. Half round File (<i>Girdi</i>)	Different kinds of files 1. Half round File (<i>Girdi</i>)
Finer tuning	2. Flat File (<i>Chorse</i>)	2. Flat File (<i>Chorse</i>)
Engraving of morphological features and designs	Small chisels and Awls (<i>Kalam</i>)	Small chisels and Awls (<i>Kalam</i>)
Perforations	Hand drill	Hand drill
Rubbing	Sandpaper, fish scale, rough dust of chalk and wet cloth	Sand paper
Polishing	Smooth chalk	



Figure 3: Engraving on ivory (A) and Wood (B)

An image of Lord *Buddha* sitting on an oval shaped stand (H-21cm) depicting the important episodes of Buddha's life was carved on *Gambhar* wood. The image has three parts one octagonal shaped base (HxLxW= 21x110x84mm), one oval shaped stand (61x96x69mm) and the seated figurine of Buddha. It took 20 days to finish the stand and the base.

Step One: The required size was cut down from a log of a *Gambhar* wood by a hand saw.

Step Two: A rough shape of the stand was given by a big chisel with a broad working edge (2cm) and wooden mallet (Figure 5 Right).

Step Three: Then the surface was smoothened first by *Girdi* (Anterior Tip 3.05x4.72mm, Posterior end 13.93x6.83mm, the gap between two teeth 2.31mm) and later on by *Chorse* (Anterior tip 2.81mm, Length 38.5cm and posterior end 13.64mm, the gap between two teeth 1.13mm) for fine-tuning. These are different kinds of files (Figures 4A and 5 Right).

Step Four: A rough sketch was drawn with pen/pencil (Figure 4B).

Step Five: The outline of the figure was incised by the corner of a suitable sized chisel and then the relief was achieved by pressing the working edge of a chisel of the required size vertically or horizontally in a slanting fashion and pushed forward to remove small flakes (Figures 4C and D). The size of the chisel to achieve the relief depends on the availability of the space between the figures. The detailing like features on the face, the detailing of the attires, the architectural designs, and the leaves on the tree all are carved with the help of a small-sized chisel with a 4.37mm working edge (Figure 4E). To carve out a round or oval shaped pattern, an oval shaped chisel was used with a diameter of 4.24mm (Fig. 4F). To make a long-incised line the hand saw was used. The perforations in the elongated ear lobes of the Buddha were done by a hand drill.

Step Six: Rubbing was done with sandpaper to smooth the texture.

Step Seven: All the parts of the statue were fixed with gum.

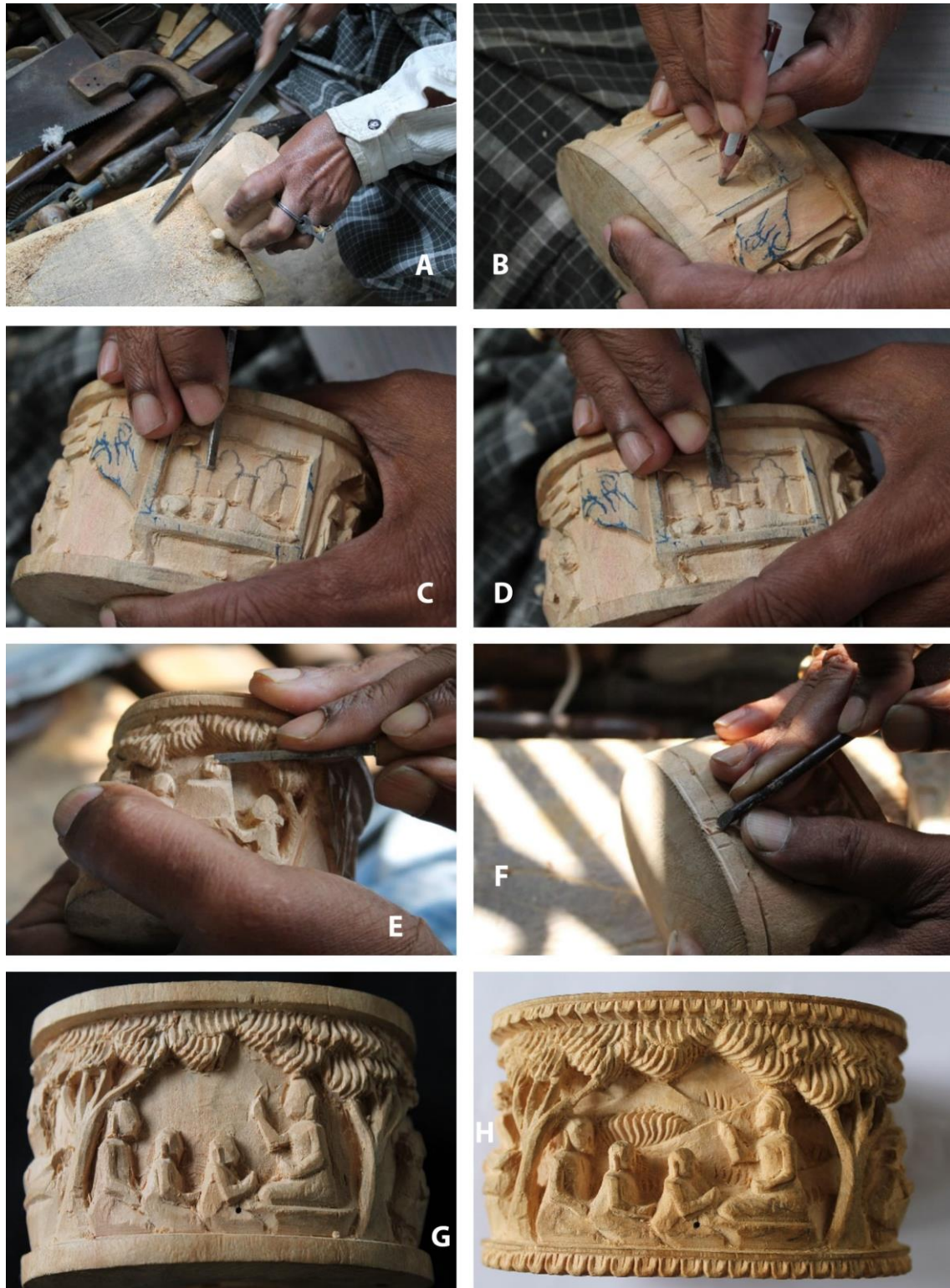


Figure 4 Stages of Carving (A to F); Low relief (G) and High relief (H) carving on wood

Observations

1. The carving can be done in low or high relief. It depends on the carver how much depth he wants to achieve. Considerable time is required to carve out the

composition in high relief. In high relief, the figures become more rounded and prominent which makes the art beautiful (Figures 4G and H).

2. A figure can be carved in wood more quickly than ivory especially on *Gambhar* wood as wood is softer than ivory, but while doing intricate carving one needs to be much more cautious as small fibres of wood continuously come off from the surface as the density of wood is low. This is not a problem with ivory because ivory is much denser than any kind of wood. If a small portion of wood like a nose on the face or lips breaks down then the whole face needs to be carved again, which delays the manufacturing process.



Figure 5: Tools of Ivory (Left)* and Wood carving (Right) (*Dutta 1901: 12)

Designs and Quality of carving: Traditional designs are followed mostly unless a special demand is given by a customer or dealer. Nowadays not many innovations are done regarding design. Though the carvers have the ability to make something new if they get an order. According to the carvers, traditional items are mostly in demand. It would be better to say presently carvings are done on a large and macro scale rather than micro. The quality of carving has deteriorated because of the nature of raw material as well as due to a shortage of time. It is difficult and time-consuming to execute intricate carving on wood or decorating with delicately carved ornamental pieces. Though at the initial stage carving can be done quickly on wood as it is softer than ivory, but at the finishing stage it has to be done slowly otherwise the minute parts would break easily. In the caparisoned elephant with *howdah* previously the *Chhatra*, the elephant was decorated with small hangings (*jhalar*), decorated chains were carved on the back of the elephant. Those minute parts are not possible to create on

wood (Figures 6A, B and C). In case of peacock boat also the representation on wood became very plain and simple. The intricacy of designs, the minute detailing, and the elaborate theme are absent (Figures 7 A and B).



Figure 6: Caparisoned Elephant in Ivory (Left) and in Wood (Centre and Right)



Figure 7: Peacock Boat on Ivory (A) and on Wood (B)

Elephants are analyzed from three different dealers to understand variations in designs but it is found that the designs are almost the same with very few variations (Figures 8A, B, C and D). All of them have mostly followed traditional designs which are influenced by old Mughal style building architectural patterns. Sometimes if the artisan gets an order for making a large-sized statue, then they put all their skills to carve the items. All the elaborations and accessories are carved as they used to on ivory but on a bigger scale.

Artificial ivory comes in a sheet form which the artisans pasted together to achieve the required thickness. It is very hard even harder than ivory. As such, carving on it with hand tools is very time consuming and tiring. The joining between the sheets is clearly visible on the idols. Power-operated machines are more suitable for carving on this material.



Figure 8: Comparison of Designs on elephant's back collected from three different dealers (A, B, C and D)

Market Study

Market Areas: 60 percent of the self-employed artisans are marketing their products through local or national dealers or exporters. They have contacts of dealers from Calcutta, Delhi, Mumbai and Bangalore. Only 30 percent of them are selling their products through state handicraft emporium, i.e., Manjusha or Central Cottage Emporium and all of them are award winners. One interesting feature is that 50 percent of the artisans get local customers to sell their products. Another marketing area is through Handicraft Fairs or stalls organized by State or Central Government.

Sale procedures: The dealers or exporters give the artisans order according to market demand. Sometimes they also provide raw material as dealers from Delhi supplied artificial ivory to the carver and also photo of the object they want to make.

Only registered artisans can avail the facility of selling goods through Central Cottage Emporiums. According to the artisans, registration is a long process for the newcomers

but if the artisan is National Award/ Merit certificate winner then he/she will get preference. Central Cottage emporiums have two ways of selling goods first they give orders according to current market demand to the registered artisans and the artisans get full payments after two months from delivery date. In the second way artisans can give their products of choice through consignments. In that case the artisans get payment when the products get sold out from the showroom. The rate of the item is decided by the purchase committee. Different categories are there. The artisan can fix a rate of his item and put in front of the committee if the rate is reasonable to them then they will agree otherwise not.

In the State Handicraft Department, i.e., Manjusha one can sell his items through consignments but as the demand is less so they have to wait a long time (6 months to 1 year) to get their money whereas in the case of private dealers they get prompt payment. So presently it is found that dealers or artisans are not very much interested in selling their items through Manjusha.

Market Demand: Inside Murshidabad, there is a steady demand for this artwork among local people. They have an emotional attachment to the objects. It gives them pride, a cultural identity that this artwork is their heritage. As such, whenever high ranked Government officials are getting transferred or retired or some important personality is invited for some cultural gathering this artwork is a common popular gift item. People also purchase images for worshipping. Such connections show the cultural value of the artwork to the society where it belongs.

Table 4: Income of the wage-earners

Products (wood)	Plain Elephant	Plain Ganesa	Plain Boat	Ambari
Size	3 inches	4 inches	8inches	12 inches
Rate	70	100	400	1000-1200
Timing	8am to 8pm	6am to 3pm	5 days	8 to 10 days
Production capacity	2 and 1\2	2	1	1
Per day income	175/-	200		
Per month income (excluding Sundays)	4375/-	5000/-	2000/-	3600/-

But according to the artisans, the demand for the wood carvings in the national or international markets is less compared to the ivory objects. Ivory objects had a huge demand in the international market. It was a complete export-oriented industry. Previously they used to get orders 2 to 3 times within a month but nowadays not even a single time in every month. The artisans have to give the same time and same labour to produce an art object in wood as they used to give in ivory but presently, they are not getting the same labour charge as ivory (Table 4). There is also a steady competition with Jaipur in Rajasthan where the same kind of material is produced in *kadamba* wood. The products like elephants, idols of *Ganesa*, lord *Buddha*, and bullock carts have comparatively high demand in the market.

Production capacity is low because most of the artisans are very old in age. The carvings are done by the dealers or the self-employed artisans who give them orders mostly by machines to minimize the labour charge and time. For those who work on artificial ivory, their wage rate is a little higher almost Rs. 7000 to 8000 per month. The artisans who are working on artificial ivory have a tendency to hide the source of orders or raw materials from other fellow artisans. Many of the artisans do not know where they can procure artificial ivory. The wage-earners complained that they did not get paid regularly. The dealers are also not eager to increase their rates. Previously the *Mahajans* used to give money in advance to the wage-earners so that they did not leave him, as skilled wage-earners were hard to find (Table 5).

Table 5: A comparative analysis of income between competitive fields

	Murshidabad	Jaipur	Murshidabad	Kolkata
Profession (Skilled)	Handicraft Artisan	Handicraft Artisan	Carpenter	Carpenter
Material	<i>Gambhar</i>	<i>Kadamba</i>	-	-
Tools	Hand made with traditional tools	Made with power operated machine tools	-	-
Rate	Rs. 20 to 23/inch	Rs. 8/inch for plain elephant Rs. 10/inch for special elephant	-	-
Time	8am to 8pm	7am to 10pm	12 hours	12 hours
Monthly Income	Rs. 3000 to 5000/month	Rs. 7000 – 14000/month	Rs. – 9500/-	Rs. 11,250/-

Fixed assets, working capital and Loan: Only the dealers cum self-employed artisans have machine-operated tools. The wage-earners mostly work by hand with many kinds of tools. Workshops are mostly inside the houses. The young wage-earners are eager to fix machine-operated tools in their workshop so they can increase their production. For that, they need to apply for the bank loan. As they do not get regular orders from *Mahajans* or dealers so they are really afraid to apply for the loan. They think they could not be able to pay bank installments regularly and it will be a huge burden for them. Some of the self-employed artisans also suffered a lot after taking loans.

Regarding inventory one dealer had huge stocks of finished items and the other two dealers with moderate stocks were found. The self-employed artisans also had stocks. Some of the objects became useless as cracks develop on them. The one dealer or *Mahajan* with huge stocks was a famous ivory carver. He said that he was holding the objects as he was not getting a good price for the objects. The dealers are really facing a

shortage of working capital which is why they are slowly engaging themselves with other kinds of handicrafts like Shola work or handloom or manufacturing clay dolls which have fair demand in the market.

Handicraft Fairs and Awards: Different handicraft fairs are organized by State and Central Government to promote the sale of Handicrafts. Among them, the most prestigious is Suraj Kund Mela. Artisans also can apply for a temporary stall at Delhi Haat a permanent shopping complex of handicrafts and handlooms with regional food stalls. First preferences are given to the National and State awardees to participate in Suraj Kund Mela and Delhi Haat. In the fieldwork, it was found that wage-earners or self-employed artisans never participated in any fair. Only the *Mahajans* have the financial capacity to participate in the fair. Artisans also informed that among them one dealer was there who generally participated in the fairs. He made items by giving orders to the wage-earners and then sold those items in the fair. It is needless to say that he earns most of the profit.

To encourage the artisans Government has introduced awards at various levels starting from the district level to the national level. The exploitation of intellectual property is common among artisans. It is mostly found that wage earners work under an artisan who is a self-employed cum dealer. The artisan provides them with raw material to carve art pieces. The object belongs to the self-employed artisan. Generally, the model is made by the wage-earner by hand and the engraving is done by the dealer by power-operated machines. If the quality of the carving is extremely good then he submits it for the award in his name without informing the wage-earner who actually made it. It is often found to be impossible to prove. It is very easy to provide photographic proof at the early stages of carving by taking photographs of another similar object. These kinds of incidents actually break the willpower of the artisans and they fear to give their best. In the present fieldwork, two such incidents of cheating are found.

Discussion and Conclusion

The ivory carving industry originated in and around Murshidabad as early as the middle of the eighteenth century probably during the reign of Nawab Nazim Alibardi Khan. The industry was influenced by the artwork of other famous centres prevalent at that time like Sylhet, Tipperah, etc. and probably also from Delhi, Jaipur and Odisha. Almost up to the late nineteenth century the industry was very healthy due to the patronization it got not only from the royals but also from European settlers, merchants from other parts of India settled in and around Murshidabad and other famous elite families. There was no shortage of raw materials as there was always an abundance of elephant population in the eastern part of India. During the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, the growth of the industry became slow as it lost the patronages of the royals and elites and faced a scarcity of raw materials because of the implementation of the Elephant Preservation Act 1876. As always very few people had been engaged with the industry so during the difficult

time it easily reached almost the verge of extinction. However, when the capital of British India shifted from Calcutta to Delhi, Delhi became an important centre of Ivory carving and the quality of finished products also improved as found in the Delhi Gazetteer 1912.

During the 1930s and 40s, many carvers from Murshidabad went to Delhi for a better livelihood and they established a good trade contact with the dealers and ivory businessmen in Delhi which actually helped the Murshidabad industry to thrive. However, during and after World War II an abundance of imported East African Ivory and huge demand from other countries for handcrafted ivory items from India gave the business a boom. After 1965, scarcity of raw materials due to import restrictions, shortage of foreign exchange and new complicated laws and regulations slowly led the industry towards extinction, however, there was never any shortage of demands in the market for ivory products even after the complete ban illegal ivory carving and trading was a serious problem to handle.

However, after the ban, most of the workers shifted to sandalwood which was also a good substitute for ivory. In 1990, sandalwood was only Rs. 176/kg. Though some of the carvers were found to engage with illegal ivory carving but most of them were satisfied with sandalwood carving. They were getting huge orders from State and Central Government marketing departments. There was also a cooperative society of ivory workers of Murshidabad through which orders were distributed among the member artisans. At that time sandalwood was far cheaper than ivory and abundantly available in India. In 1986, the wholesale price of imported raw ivory was almost Rs. 900/kg whereas the finished product out of it was sold at Rs. 3765/kg (Martin and Vigne 1989). In 1992, the self-employed carvers sold sandalwood finished items with almost 40% profit (58% of the cost of raw material) and the wage was 25% of the cost of the raw material (Ananda Bazar patrika 1993). However, within a few years all the following factors like overexploitation of sandalwood, wrong policies of the government, zero initiative for new plantations, excessive smuggling and irresponsible export of raw sandalwood combinedly made the tree vulnerable. The price became excessively high. The state department stopped delivering raw sandalwood at a subsidiary rate to the artisans. Later on, they also slowly reduced the number of orders on sandalwood day by day. In this condition, the terrorist attack on World Trade Centre in 2001 exceptionally declined tourism in India which badly affected the handicraft industry. Many carvers especially the wage-earners and small self-employed artisans left the carving profession then. The co-operative society also did not survive. In 2012 the government rate for raw sandalwood became Rs. 10,000/Kg. The retail price of a finished item would have:

Raw material 10,000/Kg (Approximately 8'' elephant can be carved)

Wage Rate 25% of 10,000 = 2500/-

Profit 58% of 10,000= 5800/-

Total cost = 10,000+2500+5800= 18,300 /-

An item made from 1 kg sandalwood becomes so expensive that very few people can afford it to buy. So, to minimize the retail price the craftsmen have to curtail their wage rate and profit margin. Even then it is difficult to sell. As it is a precious material flawless intricate carving can only attract customers to buy it. Lots of time is required to carve minute details on an art object. Adding up of labour charge with the price of raw material, the cost of the item becomes so high that it is hard to find out customer for that object. Not only that, but a carver also needs a huge amount of working capital to do carving on sandalwood. Sandalwood is more popular for its medicinal and aromatic value to the common people rather than its artistic properties. Now, the time has changed, the patronage that the artists used to get from the kings is no more, so the artists cannot afford many months to prepare one single object and then again, many more to sell.

Due to these reasons, the artisans who were still struggling, mostly the rich self-employed artisans cum dealers started to work on *Gambhar* wood which was a cheap replacement for sandalwood as well as on camel bone and artificial ivory. Artificial ivory is still not manufactured in India. It is imported from Japan by some businessmen in Delhi. It is yet not very much available in the market. Items made from *Gambhar* wood also do not have the same kind of market demand as ivory or sandalwood. Though the raw material is cheap time and labour required for carving on *Gambhar* wood are almost the same as ivory and sandalwood. Now the carvers are not getting satisfactory labour charges as they used to get previously on ivory or sandalwood. Previously the wage-earners used to get advance payments from dealers whereas now they did not get payment even after delivery.

Young people are not interested to learn the craft now even though there is no caste barrier as in earlier times. It is not possible to learn the carving within six months as the scheduled government sponsored training programmes are generally organized. At least minimum of two to three years of training is required. As such no one is presently willing to come forward to learn this art which required so much time, labour and in return gives so less earning. The industry is facing a real shortage of wage-earners.

People are more inclined towards crafts like shola work or clay models or cloth dolls which can be learnt easily within three or four months and have good demand in the market. In *Sholapith* craft the craftsmen of Murshidabad completely imitate the ivory work but the technique is entirely different. The plant is like a sponge so they just cut small pieces with a knife and join them. The raw material is very cheap. A truckload of shola plant costs Rs. 10000 only (Ghosh 2015: 59). Due to its milky white colour it looks exactly like ivory and is generally encased in a glass box. As the raw material is extremely cheap the craftsmen get a handsome wage rate for their labour. It is also found that many carvers left the handicraft profession and joined carpentry. Mostly because it gives job security, not required to invest anything, lots of job vacancies and per day Rs. 250 to 300/- wage rate for 6-7 hours. In Murshidabad only there is a lot of demand for carpenters as many of them have gone to South India for better livelihood.

It is also found that dealers are not ready to sell their items with less profit margin. Their emotional attachments to their good old days actually give them hope to increase their expectations that they will fetch good labour charge for their products as they used to get on ivory. Their expectations actually slow the sale process resulting in their working capital becoming stagnant, their stocks get accumulated day by day and the wage-earners do not get regular orders or payments. One dealer cum self-employed artisan (*Mahajan*) said that presently he was selling with only a 10 % profit margin to maintain the liquidity of his working capital, he had other sources of income from other categories of handicrafts because it is not possible to sustain on this craft alone. He was also upset about getting government benefits for one handicraft only. Most *Mahajans* are not ready to sell their product with such a low profit margin.

The craftsmen have to compromise with quality to minimize the profit margin or wage rate. As such not many variations in designs are found among the products between different dealers. The elaboration and variations in the subject matter of the specific items like in the caparisoned elephant, peacock boat or oyster shell are also missing. To execute such elaborate designs lots of time is required. Previously to fix this problem they produced large numbers of jewellery and utilitarian items in ivory which the dealers sold with almost zero percent profit margin. It provided a steady income to the wage-earners and encouraged them to produce masterpieces with sufficient time and labour. Nowadays there is no demand for those items in wood.

Only local demands cannot sustain an industry. Those who are popular national award winner craftsmen, local people only approach them if any special item is required for some local programme. Steady demand for mass production at the national or international level can only save the industry on large scale. Saha and Choudhury stated (2020: 83-102) that in Jaipur, Rajasthan this wood carving craft is very popular. They also made similar items like Murshidabad, such as elephants, caparisoned elephants, idols of Ganesa and so on. In villages like Niwaru and Ninder near Jaipur, almost every household is a small unit with power-operated machines. They work with minimum labour charge.

Most of them have agricultural land which gives them secure secondary source of income. They have also good marketing opportunities as Jaipur is a prime international tourist location and its proximity to Delhi gives a chance to fetch the Delhi market also. Their products are available in online stores like Amazon and Flipkart too. Not only that, their products can be seen as far as in the handicrafts showroom of Kerala also. They create lots of variations in designs and styles on the same traditional items to overcome the monotony. Whereas still in Murshidabad only 5 households have power-operated machines and all the wage-earners and small self-employed artisans carved with hand-operated tools which reduced their production capacity and earnings than other competitive regions like Jaipur. In addition to this, there is almost no variation in the designs carved on the back of the elephants as examined from the collections of different dealers of Murshidabad (Figure 8).

However, for the sustainable development of the craft, initiatives must be taken to form cooperative organizations or self-help groups among the artisans which can help the artisans to avail the facilities of different Government schemes such as loans or training programme, participation in different fairs as well as in marketing. Government officials of the handicraft department can make them understand how they can be benefitted by forming self-help groups, as priorities are given to such groups in every scheme of Government. It will also decrease the risk factor of taking the loan and help them to avail the full profit. It is really important for the artisans to increase their production capacity as well as to maintain a low production cost if they want to capture the domestic market. They can take the initiative to register their traditional signature items under the Geographical Indication of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 2003 to maintain quality and boost marketing at domestic and international levels. They also need to explore the e-marketing system to market their products in every corner of India and abroad. The artisans still possess the knowledge and skill to execute masterpiece. They cannot manifest their full potential due to the lack of proper wages. Even if a wage-earner or a self-employed artisan takes a loan by availing Central Government Artisan credit card scheme and establishing a workshop with power-operated machines it will not be easy for him alone to earn the trust of the big exporters or dealers or even make contact with them. Those positions have been fulfilled for a long time by the middleman or *Mahajans*. It will not be easy to compete with them alone. Hiding nature of the artisans about the source of raw materials like artificial ivory is actually preventing them to capture the market. It is not easy to produce a huge quantity of items unaided. The artisans of Jaipur are able to capture the market because they have formed self-help groups in every village and procured order through those groups which give them the capacity to produce on large scale.

The government officials who are working in the design development sector need to encourage the artisans to revive the old traditional designs having historical significance which still have a good market demand rather than motivating them to manufacture utilitarian items. The utilitarian and the decorative aspects can be combined to innovate some kind of new items like a bag on the back of the elephant for holding mobile phones or pens and pencils and so on. Six months of training is not sufficient for a newcomer in this craft. Training can be given to the existing artisans on how to operate the power-operated machines. Many artisans are eager to learn the technique of operating machines but are not encouraged by their fellow artisans who already have that knowledge. Collaboration with other departments like the forest department to ensure the smooth availability of raw materials is also required.

Regarding the continuity of values and feelings, there is no doubt that each piece of traditional art piece is carrying a little piece of history with them. The objects are the reminiscences of historical events that had occurred many years back in that particular region and are deeply rooted in the history of that particular community which transformed into the cultural identity of that region. As such, those are attached to peoples' sentiments which can be evidenced from the facts of their fair number of local

demands on special occasions. The people of Murshidabad still recognize this craft as their local heritage. Those artworks are accorded immense respect by the local communities due to their historical, religious and cultural significance. The traditional items like images of gods and goddesses have demands for worshipping purposes, which signifies their religious significance. In addition to that as different private and government organizations have purchased those art pieces for gift purposes showing their great significance as the identity of local culture conveying a message of gratitude for serving that particular community and a piece of memory from the land to the recipients.

It is also found that though the raw material has changed the knowledge of craftsmanship in the form of technique and designs is still continuing. The master craftsmen still can produce outstanding art pieces in wood if they can get better quality raw material and sufficient time. As such, there is no doubt that the authenticity of traditional craftsmanship and values are still embedded in this craft.

By taking specialized safeguarding policies, it is possible to revive the age-old craftsmanship in a sustainable way by using alternative raw materials. A little attention is required to motivate the artisans in the right way so that they can avail the facilities of the government schemes to their fullest and jointly help to revive this languishing heritage craft.

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