

The Nature, Problems and Challenges of Handicraft Industry in Sri Lanka

Pushpika P. Masakorala¹

There are various development strategies, which have been tested to develop Sri Lanka. But still the country is in the category of poor countries. In the attempt of attaining development there are several problems. Therefore alternative ways are needed to overcome those problems. One alternative is the development of small-scale industries. In this study the possibility of handicraft industry as a small-scale industry as a solution to the present development problems is the focus. The scope of this study is to identify the problems and challenges of handicraft industry so that it can be integrated into the development process in such a way that it can be a partial solution to the present development problem.

In this study five handicrafts are selected. Mats making and woodcarving are wood-based industries while handloom, lace and batik are textile-based industries of which the nature, problems and the challenges are studied. Under the nature of handicraft industries the raw material and the tools and equipments used, the nature of the labour, how they are financed and marketed, the social economic nature of the craftsmen is studied. Besides the handicraft-related institutions and their role are also discussed. Under the problem of these industries the problems of access to raw materials, problems of labour attraction, problems of technology and finance and the marketing problems, the problems of institutions are identified. What do craftsmen suggest to overcome those problems?

However there are unique problems to each handicraft industry and there are common problems as well. Among the challenges of handicraft industry the scarcity and depletion of natural stocks of raw materials, the timely availability of raw materials and the finance, the discontinuity of craft skills, poor social recognitions of handicraft, poor income, migration to other jobs, reluctance to use new technology, inability to afford to buy new technology, competition of imported substitutes, high cost of production, the bureaucracy and the lack of extension programs of the institutions and the challenges of middle men are most important. When the current nature and the problems of handicraft industry are concerned, in some aspect it can be a solution to the present development problem but not a perfect solution. These industries are less attractive to youth and they are closed to the cities. Therefore handicraft industry may not be a solution for the unemployment in the rural areas. The handicraft industry can be developed if the tourist industry grows. The government intervention is needed to promote the local market for handicraft. There are some potentials, which can be utilized to improve handicraft industry.

Key Words: The Nature; Problems; Challenges; Handicraft Industry; Sri Lanka

¹ Dept. of Geography, University of Peradeniya, Peradeniya, Sri Lanka