

SKILL *Insight*

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WOOD CARVING: *Profession preserving traditional architecture*

Wood work has been a part of Nepal's traditional architecture since the Licchavi period (300-879 AD). The art of woodcarvings have graced temples, monastries, palaces and residential homes since many centuries. Woodcarving in Nepal is par excellence a Newari art. Clans of Newars, old people from Kathmandu, Lalitpur, Bhaktapur, have been passing their wood carving skills from generations to generations and it is mostly prominent among Shilpakar families. Highly skilled and capable wood carver in Nepal use techniques and tools unchanged over the centuries.

Wooden craft products have not only graced the houses in the country but have also found a space in many homes and buildings abroad. Woodcarving of Nepal has reached all over the world. The traditional craftsmanship with human touch, alluring design and reflection of intricate piece of art work has escalated demand for such products in the country and abroad. It is a predictable fact that huge demand for such products are likely to increase demand for people with wood carving skill. In order to validate this assumption, SKILL –Nepal carried out sub sector analysis of this sector. The main objective of this study was to understand the wooden craft market, analyze the gap between the demand and supply of such products and identify the need for people with wood carving skills. The major findings of the study have been summarised below:

- The export rate of the wood craft product is 1.74% in total statistics for 2008/09 to 2009/10.(source: Nepal handicraft association)
- Majority of the wooden craft products are exported to the European countries, followed by USA. It is slowly penetrating in to Chinese market and some Dubai based Elite Nepalese have shown interest too.
- It has been estimated that there are approximately 500 wood carvers in Bhaktapur district (skilled and semi-skilled). Out of them, 15% are estimated to be female carvers. Many of them work from home. Most of the exporter/ entrepreneur/ local supplier take order and then sub-contract the work to home based carvers and pay them on piece basis whenever they have huge demand.



- On an average, the daily wage of semiskilled worker varies from Rs.60 to Rs.150 whereas the daily wage of skilled workers varies from Rs.400 to Rs.500 per day.
- The trend of passing the skills to the offspring have diminished with time. Consequently, people from other community besides shilpakars have been seen active in this profession.
- During the interaction with the entrepreneurs, it is found that there is huge gap between the demand and supply aspects of the wooden craft products. The demand is very high but the suppliers are not able to meet that demand due to very scarce human resources. Some even opined that due to the limited skilled workers, they have to complete their work using the semi-skilled or low skilled workers, which may hamper the quality of the product.
- Wood carving is a women friendly trade since it doesn't require heavy work and doesn't require women to be mobile.
- Wood carving task requires special set of tools that are not readily available in the market. They are made on special orders. It has been found that there is only one person in the entire Bhaktapur district with the ability to make quality tools.

The findings clearly depict that there is a huge demand for wooden craft products in the country and abroad but most of the entrepreneurs are unable to meet their demand due to lack of skilled human resources at their disposal. According to the entrepreneurs in Bhaktapur alone, they can absorb as many skilled workers since they have ample demand for the products but not enough craftsmen to meet their ever increasing demand. Wood carving is thus a potential trade in terms of employability and at the same time it is a suitable trade for many unemployed men and women who have limited access to work due to incomplete education. Thus, imparting wood carving skills to many such disadvantaged youths could open up wide employment opportunities enabling them to better their livelihood and empowering them from poverty to prosperity.



SKILL-Nepal's Intervention

SKILL initiated its first wood carving training for 14 girls and women in Bhaktapur for UNESCO's TVT-G project. SKILL highly promotes wood carving training for adolescent girls and women in consideration to the reality that there is very limited training choices opted by female group and segregated for female population by the society.



Based on the learning of the first event, training curriculum, mode of training and strategies for employment linkages were improvised. Further, with new outlook, two trainings were conducted in the month of June and August 2010 for Employment Fund Secretariat/Helvetas Nepal. In order to give more recognition to their skills, all the 35 participants were given the opportunity to go through skill test. Most of the graduates are employed in the local wood carving workshops in Bhaktapur, making an average income of Rs 3000 per month.



CASE STUDY

Sabina Nakheturu worked as a labour in the brick moulding factory along with her parents and her elder sister. Poor financial condition compelled her to forego her education and lend her family a helping hand in making some contribution. As a labour in the factory, she earned between Rs. 1000-1500 a month. With incomplete education in hand, she couldn't opt for any other job and neither could she enroll in any government led vocational skill training institute.

When Sabina heard about wood carving training being organised by SKILL-Nepal for girls with education below SLC and that too for free, she immediately applied. She was selected because she fitted well with the criteria. She completed the training learning the skill with full dedication. The vigorous training program with local trainer and ample opportunity to carry out individual practical work made it easier for her to imbibe the skill within stipulated training period. Along with the skill training, the course included business class and other components like HIV-AIDS, Reproductive Health and Life skills. These additional courses helped her become more confident in nature and after the completion of the training she went and searched for work with support from SKILL's local coordinator based in Bhaktapur.

Today, she works in Shine Wooden Industries at Tathali-9, Bhaktapur along with other 6 trainees from the same batch. Currently, they are being paid around Rs.3200 per month. The employer says that along with time and increase in quality of their product, their income range will also be increased. As she is not in a position to open up her own workshop due to weak financial condition she plans to continue working in Shine Wooden Industries for more time until she finds other good opportunities.

Sabina is grateful for having got this training opportunity. With skill in her hand, she feels that she can support her family now. She is thankful to SKILL for having designed training programs for uplifting uneducated and disadvantaged girls. Training is not just an opportunity for people deprived of healthy financial position and sound education, it is their weapon of survival, hope of a better tomorrow and a way of a better life.



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