



Original Article

# Weaving Livelihoods: Challenges and Prospects for Rural Shital Pati Artisans

Dr. D. S. Narayankar<sup>1</sup>, Abhijeet Ghosal<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Assistant Professor, Department of Geography, SSA College of Arts and Commerce, Solapur, Maharashtra, India

Research Guide under PAH Solapur University, Solapur, Maharashtra

<sup>2</sup>Research Scholar (Geography), PAH Solapur University, Solapur, Maharashtra, India

Manuscript ID:  
RIGJAAR-2025-0204019

ISSN: 2998-4459  
Volume 2  
Issue 4  
Pp. 95-98  
April 2025

Submitted: 10 Feb 2025  
Revised: 20 Feb 2025  
Accepted: 05 Apr 2025  
Published: 30 Apr 2025

Correspondence Address:  
Abhijeet Ghosal  
Research Scholar  
(Geography), PAH Solapur  
University, Solapur,  
Maharashtra, India  
Email:  
[Ghosal.abhijeet62@gmail.com](mailto:Ghosal.abhijeet62@gmail.com)

Orcid ID: 0000-0003-3142-5995

Quick Response Code:



Web: <https://rlgjaar.com>



DOI:  
10.5281/zenodo.16198781

DOI Link:  
<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.16198781>



Creative Commons



## Abstract

*Shital Pati (or Sital Pati) is a traditional handicraft of Cooch Behar district, which is handwoven from thin strips of the Maranta dichotoma plant. This mat is comfortable to sit or lie on in hot and humid weather, as it provides a cool feeling. The villages of Ghughumari, Barokodali and Nakkati-Pushandanga in Cooch Behar are the main centres of this industry. In 2017, Shital Pati of Cooch Behar was recognised as an 'Intangible Cultural Heritage' by UNESCO. However, the artisans of this industry are still facing financial difficulties and need government support to sustain their livelihood. Ahead of the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, the artisans have demanded a GI tag for Shital Pati, which could help protect the industry and expand the market. Migration from rural areas is quite prevalent in developing countries like India, as villagers often seek more profitable sources of income. Many farmers today are dissatisfied with their agricultural output and struggle to move beyond subsistence-level livelihoods. In this context, Shital Pati (cool mat) weaving has emerged as a promising enterprise for the creation of sustainable livelihoods in West Bengal's Cooch Behar area. With this in mind, a study was conducted between December 2023 and January 2024 in the villages of Ghogomali, Dholuabari, Deochorai, Barokodali, and Dhalpal in the Cooch Behar district. The objective was to understand Shital Pati weavers' perceptions of entrepreneurship in cool mat weaving. A total of 50 randomly selected respondents were chosen for the study, with 10 participants from each village. A planned interview schedule was used to gather primary data, while local panchayat leaders provided secondary data, intermediaries, literature, research articles, and online resources. The study found that many farmers had turned to Shital Pati weaving as a secondary agricultural activity to earn better remuneration and sustainably enhance their socioeconomic status.*

**Keywords:** Shital Pati, Developing Countries, Farmers, Secondary Agriculture, Rural Area, etc.

## Introduction

Murta (*Clinogyne dichotoma*, family: Marantaceae) is a plant that grows naturally and is also cultivated by artisans for crafting *Shital Pati*, also known as cool mats. These mats provide a cooling effect to those who sit or sleep on them, hence the name *Shital* (meaning "cool" in several Indian languages). These mats are deeply woven into the fabric of rural life. Regarding geography, Murta may be found in the Philippines, Peninsular Malaysia, Borneo, Bangladesh, Assam, West Bengal, Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam. In Bangladesh, it mostly grows in the swamp woods of Sylhet, whereas in India, it usually grows along riverbanks, like on Majuli Island in Assam. Hand-weaving mats is a traditional craft practiced in several countries, including India, China, Turkey, Iran, and Pakistan. Products are often exported to other regions. Murta is the primary raw material in this mat-making process. In the Cooch Behar, these mats are locally known as *Shital Pati*, and their production is largely a household-based enterprise. The mats have multipurpose use and historically were crafted year-round for various needs. According to local weavers, the tradition of making *Shital Pati* has been passed down through generations. In some families, it has become a cultural legacy. The art of mat-making was once considered auspicious, particularly in the Barak Valley, where gifting a *Shital Pati* during Hindu weddings is still a customary ritual. Murta typically grows in marshy, waterlogged areas or on damp hill slopes.

## Creative Commons (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0)

This is an open access journal, and articles are distributed under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International Public License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/), which allows others to remix, tweak, and build upon the work noncommercially, as long as appropriate credit is given and the new creations are licensed under the identical terms.

## How to cite this article:

Narayankar, D. S., & Ghosal, A. (2025). Weaving Livelihoods: Challenges and Prospects for Rural Shital Pati Artisans. *Royal International Global Journal of Advance and Applied Research*, 2(4), 95–98. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.16198781>

It is one of the many minor forest resources that provide raw materials for rural entrepreneurs to produce items like brooms (*jaru*), cane mats, and traditional cane hats (*japi*). Two varieties of Murta are commonly observed: one, locally called *Khag*, lacks internodes (joints), while the other has them.

In the production process, men usually collect and prepare the Murta stalks, cutting them into cane slips, while women handle the weaving. This craft is especially common in Assam, West Bengal, and other parts of north-eastern India. In Cooch Behar, many households rely on this activity for their livelihood. Besides mats, artisans also create baskets, pen stands, file covers, wall hangings, and other ornamental and practical objects. The mats are not only utilitarian but also culturally significant, often used in rituals and religious events. Women play a crucial role in this sector—approximately 90% of the workforce in the Shital Pati and *Madur* industries are women. Most families engaged in this craft operate from home, making it a sustainable and accessible form of income. It doesn't require large spaces or specialized infrastructure and can even continue through the rainy season if raw materials are available. However, Murta growers and weavers often face occupational health hazards, such as eye strain, snake bites during harvesting, and skin issues. A lack of awareness about these issues contributes to several health problems.

To improve workers' health and safety, awareness programs and local discussions are essential. Adequate lighting in work areas and regular medical check-ups should be ensured by government bodies to reduce occupational health risks.

With the increasing use of plastics causing harm to both society and the environment, eco-friendly crafts like Shital Pati weaving present a sustainable, economical, and socially viable alternative. This study highlights the livelihood opportunities presented by value-added Murta products, the sustainability of the craft, and success stories that demonstrate its economic potential.

### Methodology

The study was conducted in 5 villages of Coochbehar- namely Ghogomali, Dholuabari, Deochorai, Barokodali, and Dhalpal—during the period from December 2023 to January 2024. A total of 50 respondents engaged in *Shital Pati* weaving entrepreneurship were selected randomly for the study, with 10 respondents chosen from each village.

An exhaustive list of *Shital Pati* artisans was prepared with assistance from professionals at the Cooch Behar Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK). The study area is characterized by a mix of diverse communities. Primary and secondary data were collected through interviews and Focused Group Discussions (FGDs).

The collected data were analyzed using statistical tools such as percentage, frequency, and ranking for clarity and interpretation.

### Result and Interpretation

1. **Training:** The study revealed that the majority of weavers had not received any formal training in *Shital*

*Pati* weaving. Most had learned the craft informally from parents, grandparents, or neighbors, passing down skills through generations. Although in recent years, several micro-training centers have been established across various locations, and training programs on entrepreneurship development are being conducted at the block level, participation is largely dominated by younger individuals—around 85% of the trainees were young men and women. Interestingly, older weavers expressed the view that professional training is indeed important, as their knowledge and skills in the craft were inherited rather than formally taught.

2. **Previous Employment:** It was discovered that most of the participants had been *Shital Pati* weavers since they were young, having picked up the skill from their parents. Furthermore, it was noted that mat weavers engaged in rice farming, although solely for domestic use rather than for sale.
3. **Their Income:** The study revealed that the price of *Shital Pati* is largely determined by its size. Weavers produce mats in various dimensions, including 5x7 feet, 6x7 feet, and 3x6 feet. Standard-sized mats (5x7 feet) are the most in demand and fetch a higher market price. These mats are typically sold for around Rs. 750/- and require approximately 14 hours of labor to produce. In contrast, smaller mats such as the 3x6-foot variant are priced at around Rs. 500/-. Regular *Shital Pati* mats generally range between Rs. 450/- to Rs. 550/-.

According to the survey, the average-sized mats (5x7 or 6x7 feet) are sold by producers to distributors at around Rs. 500/-. After that, distributors sell these to middlemen for Rs. 750/-, who further sell them outside the state at significantly higher prices, often averaging Rs. 2,000/- or more.

4. **Marketing Channel:** *Shital Pati*, in particular, is the marketing outlet for handcrafted items is found to be unorganized and fragmented. Three main types of agencies are involved in the distribution process.

The first category consists of local collectors who purchase mats directly from the producers at relatively low prices, often at the producers' doorsteps. These collectors then sell the mats to the second category, which includes financially stronger agents acting as distributors. These distributors typically sell the products to third-party middlemen, who are present throughout the supply chain.

The distributors usually sell the mats to middlemen at local weekly or daily markets, adding a small margin. The **middlemen**, in turn, sell the mats outside the state, often at much higher prices. *Shital Pati* is in high demand in southern Indian states and even in international markets.

As a result, middlemen reap the highest profits despite contributing the least in terms of investment, time, and labor. In some cases, when producers have a larger stock of mats, they bypass the first-level agents and sell directly to distributors in local markets in an attempt to gain better returns.

5. **Value Addition:** In *Shital Pati* production is commonly practiced by entrepreneurs, especially when there is assured demand and the potential for better prices. The process of value addition typically involves enhancing the mat's aesthetic appeal through decorative elements.

However, despite its potential benefits, many weavers show limited interest in developing value-added products, often due to the extra effort and time involved.

**Table 1. Ranking of constraints faced by the entrepreneur**

| Sl.no. | Issues   | Frequency | Percentage | Rank |
|--------|--|-----------|------------|------|
| 1.     | Laborious and time-consuming   | 30        | 60%        | VII  |
| 2.     | Expectations are lower in terms of benefits  | 39        | 78%        | I    |
| 3.     | Women workers facing health issues   | 29        | 58%        | VIII |
| 4.     | It required land and buying the <i>murta</i> or slips from the outside market.                                   | 35        | 70%        | IV   |
| 5.     | No established market is available in the rural areas where they can get a satisfactory price.                   | 33        | 65%        | V    |
| 6.     | Less availability of modern technology   | 31        | 62%        | VI   |
| 7.     | Popularization and reduced plastic prices in the market threaten the cool Mat Weaver in the handicraft industry. | 38        | 76%        | II   |
| 8.     | The network of credit facilities by the financial institution to the micro and handicrafts sector is inferior.   | 37        | 73%        | III  |

6. **Enhancing Network:** Successful entrepreneurship relies on a strong understanding of production processes, marketing strategies, and professional skills. It also involves building effective communication networks to promote and market products by establishing strong linkages among middlemen, buyers, marketing professionals, government officials, and relevant organizations.
7. **Attitude towards Enterprises:** The weavers' overall satisfaction with their participation in the *Shital Pati* company was discovered. A key reason for this satisfaction is the ability to work from home, which not only saves time but also allows them to manage essential household responsibilities alongside production. Additionally, they can involve their children in certain aspects of the mat-making process. These factors contribute to a positive attitude among producers toward the enterprise.
8. **Diversion of Occupational Structure:** The Muslim community has also shown interest in this enterprise, as it is relatively less labour-intensive and allows for the involvement of family members in the production process.
9. **Challenges:** Rural *Shital Pati* (cool mat) weavers face several challenges in the course of their work. These constraints have been identified and ranked based on the severity of the problems experienced by the weavers.

The most significant issue reported is the non-realization of expected returns from the enterprise. This is followed by the declining popularity of *Shital Pati* due to the growing use of plastic mats and the lack of access to credit facilities, which limits their ability to invest in and expand their operations.

**Conclusion:**

It was observed that an increasing number of individuals are engaging in this enterprise as a means of income generation. Given its economic viability,

sustainability, environmental friendliness, and pollution-free nature, the government should place greater emphasis on promoting and popularizing *Shital Pati* weaving. This is especially important in the current context, where the growing use of plastic materials is contributing significantly to environmental pollution. To ensure the long-term growth of this traditional craft, there is a need for improvements in infrastructure, enhancement of entrepreneurial skills, provision of adequate institutional credit support, and the adoption of modern technology within the industry.

**Acknowledgment**

I am Mr. Abhijeet Ghosal thankful to Dr. D. S. Narayankar my PhD supervisor from SSA College of Arts and Commerce, Solapur and Dr. N.I. Dhyagode from Walchand College of Arts and Science Solapur for granting permission to carry out the work.

**Financial support and sponsorship**

Nil.

**Conflicts of interest**

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

Special thanks are extended to the local people for their assistance with data collection.

**References:**

1. ICH Courier online. Intangible Cultural Heritage Courier of Asia and the Pacific. *Sital Pati: A Traditional Handicraft of Bangladesh*.
2. Hossain, Ashfaq. Sylhet District. In Islam, Sirajul, Jamal, Ahmed A. *Banglapedia: National Encyclopaedia of Bangladesh* (Second ed.). Asiatic Society of Bangladesh; 2012. [Nov 15, 2017].
3. [https:// www.coochbehar.nic.in](https://www.coochbehar.nic.in)<sup>1</sup> World Checklist of Selected Plant Families.
4. <https://wcsp.science.kew.org/name/detail.do?nameId=263609> [November 15, 2017].



5. <https://coochbehar.nic.in/htmlfiles/Handicrafts.html>  
(Accessed on 31 January, 2018).
6. Nath PP, 2017. Sital Pati and its visual aspects; 2011. Available: <http://content/uploads/2011/09/issue-41.pdf>
7. Nurmianto E. Ergonomic intervention in handicraft producing operation. *Industrial Engineering*. 1987;1008-1011.
8. Rabha Pankaj Kr. Forest Resource Entrepreneurship- A case study of Goalpara district of Assam. *IJCAES Special Issue on. Basic, Applied & Social Sciences*. 2012; II:361-363. [ISSN: 2231-4946].
9. Sarkar, D. Status of Rural Women, Left Behind for Male Labour Circulation: An Empirical Study of Cooch Behar District, West Bengal, India, *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences*. 2012;2(9):103-111.
10. Saha Abhisek. A Study on Occupational **R i s k F a c t o r s** of Sital Pati Weavers of Coochbehar district of West Bengal, India. *Annals of Pharma Research*. 2016;284- 287.
11. Vyas VS. Financing of Enterprises in Unorganized Sector 'Access top Finance, Raw material and Marketing'. *National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganized Sector*; 2007.