CHAPTER II

THE BAMBOO AND CANE CRAFT TRADITION

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Craft always has been playing an active role in the socio-cultural and economic milieu of a society. Handmade products have been a part of a society's culture, and crafts are often treated as authentic for the purity and direct human creativity associated with it. Thus crafts have been the medium of inspiration for the economically repressed ones. Craftsmanship has always been a very rudimentary activity of human society as well as fundamental part of human life. Even in modern times, many of the craft works are produced by the artisans purely to fulfill the aesthetic needs (Vidiella, 2011). This aesthetical activity of art and crafts are observed as a most important factor for social life of North-East India. The portion of North East India is a unique tapestry, amalgamated by the abundance and diversity of two natural resources, that of 'land' and 'water'. The geographical entity of a land is defined by its topographical features, i.e. the hills, mountains and forest territories. The traditional art of this region bears the insignia of nature's beauty (Deb, 2013).

It is strange to recognize that more than fifty percent of bamboos in the world are available in India. In India, nearly one hundred fifty types of bamboo are available, but out of these some few are collected from the outside. It is also very extraordinary to know that the Eastern and North-Eastern region of India is the treasure house for different types of bamboo. In Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, Tripura, Mizoram, Assam and Meghalaya as well as in West Bengal total eighty five types of bamboo are available. In Assam, about ten thousand (Sq. KM) places are available for bamboo cultivation (Chakraborty, 2005). Bamboo is also acknowledged as Green Gold in Asian countries. It has deep significance in the Indian as well as Chinese culture. India is the second richest country in the world in terms of Bamboo genetic resources, after China. Among all the states of North East, Mizoram has achieved highest position in the cultivation of bamboo production (Roy, 2011). Assam, the heartland of the whole of North East India is a colourful montage of numerous craft traditions. Next to Mizoram, Assam is one of the main bamboos producing state of North-East India. The leading bamboo growing areas of Assam are

the districts of Cachar, Karbi Anglong, North Cachar Hill, Nagaon and Lakhimpur Various types of bamboo and cane products are found in this state and bamboo is such an important natural element which is providing livelihood to many people of Assam and it is the part and parcel of poor people and their life style.

Dr. A.P.J Abdul Kalam, on the eve of country's 56th Republic Day, highlights the importance about the National Bamboo Mission. Dr. Kalam said that in Indian mythology there is a faith that there existed a tree which is well-known as *"Kalpovriksa"* and is capable of satisfying the wish of someone who stood under the tree and made a wish. Bamboo is the *"Kalpovriksha"* for the people of the North-Eastern religion. In today's India, the North-Eastern region has the largest production of bamboo. The country has focused its attention to encourage cultivation and utilization of bamboo to a maximum possible extent. The country now has National Bamboo Mission. Different states are also being encouraged to establish state level missions. The main Centre for technological input in respect of bamboo is located at Guwahati and it is named as "Cane and Bamboo Technology Centre".
(File:///c:/Users/HP/Downloads/452-1818-1-pB.pdf : 4.2.2014)

Bamboo is a plant with more than fifteen hundred documented uses .A large section of the society depends on bamboo for livelihood. Although the people of rural areas cultivate a few species of bamboo in homestead land to satisfy their domestic needs (Unnayan. 2015). The craft areas enjoy a distinct significance in the country's economy in terms of employment generation and earning of foreign exchange through trades. Barak Valley of south Assam is packed with bamboo and cane, most of its jungles are abundantly stocked with bamboo and cane of various species .The makings of bamboo and cane products are perhaps the most widespread of all the crafts and large amount of artisans scattered throughout the different villages within this valley. This is practiced as a household industry; bamboo and cane products are used for a wide range of purposes and extensively used in every household. Bamboo is such valuable material not only for the contemporary crafts, but also it was simultaneously important in ancient times too. Bamboo has multifunction qualities, the crafts items made out of bamboo are eco-friendly. Bamboo has religious and non-religious purposes in the human civilization. Bamboo is an age-old material; its versatility makes it applicable to different fields (Vidiella, 2011).

The strong point of Barak Valley's craftsman lies in their traditional skills, their understanding of their materials, their taste and of course, their grasp of the design, farm and decoration of their products, all acquired through generations. Bamboo and cane crafts provide part time employment to the cultivators in their spare time and full time engagement to few highly skilled artisans from time immemorial, the village bamboo and cane crafts have played a pivotal role in the social and economic life of the people of Barak Valley, besides providing ample employment to the people, these crafts played an important role in the process of decentralization of economic condition of the people of this region. Art and craft of Barak signifies the inner desire and aesthetical views of the people of Barak Valley. Like the other medium, bamboo and cane practices of Barak Valley have been working as a vehicle of self-expression and fulfilling the complete need of this valley. The production of bamboo and cane are not just a money oriented duty; it is a duty for novel cause, which provides a practical knowledge about social as well as ritual life. The bamboo and cane artisans are an important factor in Barak Valley. Their nature of job like weavers, because they are using the threads of traditional heritage with present needs of contemporary society of this region. Basically the crafts of Barak reflect the physical environment as well as the material culture of this region. The essential tools required for bamboo and cane craft consists of a *dao* (bill-hook), a knife and a **V** shaped wooden frame.

An artisan is mainly a discoverer of beauty. With his keen searching eyes, he looks for beauty hidden in the commonest of objects, in fact, in things that do not enter into the accepted category of artistic things (Chanda, 1987).Village bamboos form an important factor in the home garden systems that have been usually used in India for variety of purposes. Traditionally, bamboo resources of home garden and bamboo grove of Barak Valley have assumed great economic importance both commercially and locally (Plate 2.1) (Nath et al., 2009). Bamboo is a plant of hollow and woody with prominent knots, rapid growth, which can extent forty meters in height. It is a natural renewable resource that grows and matures approximately with the span of three years. When harvested, it need not be replanted, because it will grow a new short from its extensive root system. Bamboo grows on millions of hectares of forest land in India.

There were several kinds of bamboos growing in Cachar, among these the principal are the *Muli* and *Dolu.* These are found in the forests as well as in the villages, the *Betuwa* and *Bakal* are also grown in the villages. The *Dolu* is found in great quantities in the villages and it is used for fences and roofs of houses. Barak Valley is resourceful with different kind of bamboos, which are using by the craftsmen of Barak Valley for producing various items, which are actually part and parcel of the daily life of the villages as well as towns (De, 2006).

Profound variety of bamboos are available in Barak Valley, but *Muli, Dolu, Betuwa, Boruwa* and *Bakhal* are mostly used everywhere in this valley.

Muli: is the common bamboo in Barak Valley, its application also larger than the other bamboos and its fibers are thin but very strong. Mostly this bamboo is available in hill areas of Barak Valley. It is normally use as the medium for house construction. Apart from Barak valley and Brahmaputra valley, *muli* is also available in the states of Tripura and West Bengal. The length of this type of bamboo is around seven/eight meters and its diameters around six centimeters.

Dolu: is also available in Barak Valley and the utility of *dolu* is almost seen for the production of fences, roofs and baskets. Now a day the people of Barak Valley are using *dolu* as the substitute of *muli*. The length of *dolu* is almost fifteen to eighteen meters and its diameters are around ten to thirteen centimeters. This kind of bamboo is survived around three to four years only.

Betuwa: is used as the main material for houses. It is used as the pillar, beam and also used as the material for thatch. It is believed by the people of this valley that *betuwa* is more durable than the other bamboos. It is taller than the *muli* and *dolu* and diameter wise also it is digger. The fine strips can also made out of this bamboo. Beside Assam, this bamboo is also grown in the state Tripura in the name of *betuya/baari* as well as it also available in West Bengal. The total length of this bamboo is around twenty-seven meters and its diameter is around fourteen to twenty one centimeters. This type of bamboo is almost survived five to six years and after two years this bamboo is suitable for any works.

***Boruwa*:** Similar to *betwua* it is used as the medium of house making and basically it is used as pillar and beam. Skin is comparatively thinner than the *betuwa* and the colour of this *boruwa* is mostly dark green. There are two more types of

boruwas are also available, for instance, *Jai boruwa* and *shil boruwa*. Diameter wise these three types of *boruwas* are same, but the knots which are available in *shil boruwa* are comparatively more and closer to each other.

Bakhal: In the other parts of Assam, *bakhal* is popularly known as *Makhal/Bijly*. The length of this bamboo is around thirteen to eighteen meters and its diameter is around four to seven centimeters (Chakraborty, 2005).

The old *Bengali* literature *'Charyapada'* mentions about bamboo crafts (Akand, 2013). Craft artisans of bamboo and cane of Barak Valley collecting their raw materials directly from nature and using them in their natural forms .The manufacture of cane and bamboo products are mostly carried in outdoors and the craft does not require any housing arrangement particularly in rural areas. But in the urban areas, however it is found that cane products are manufactured in workshops. The cane and bamboo products used for domestic purposes are prepared in every corner and place of this valley .The bamboos and cane which are used in contemporary times for the purposes of craft works in Barak Valley, these all the materials were the part and parcel of this valley since earlier time and *murta* cane was special among other canes. Some references are also available in the Assam District Gazetters, Vol-II. The cane and bamboo furniture of Sylhet is cheap and of a good quality, cane baskets are also to be obtained in the bazar and the leaf umbrella of Sylhet are quite special made out of *chatapatti* on a frame work of bamboo (Choudhury, 2010).

The bamboo and cane craft tradition has provided empower to the craftsmen of Barak Valley. Bamboo and cane are available in every village and these natural resources are maintained by the craftsmen. The bamboo and cane are mainly use for basketry, mat weaving, fishing trap, winnowing fan, sieve, *morah*, bridges, musical instruments, weapons, umbrellas, and many other purposes. These all items have significant utilitarian purposes in traditional, ritual and non-ritual events. These craft artisans of this region are developing their artistic skills and also including new designs and patterns in the traditional practices. Therefore, the demands of these crafts are increasing day-by-day, which is positive for the future of crafts of Barak Valley. In the villages of Barak-region the furniture made by bamboo and cane are very common phenomenon. Bamboo and cane is an essential craft necessary for basic existence, especially in the rural parts of Barak Valley. Even in the urban centers it exists as an object needed during many rituals. Bamboo and cane baskets are

specialized job. Bamboo and cane crafts, especially basketry is one of the oldest crafts in the world, where the materials are available, the people are involved with this crafts. Barak Valley has a rich treasure of these materials and the artisans and craftsmen are fulfilling the needs of this region through their crafts practices. Regarding basketry, hopefully there is really no area's in India where this craft does not exist or has not existed in the past.

It could be said that Mother Nature was the first basket maker; look at the way honeysuckle winds itself around a fence. Look at spider's webs, each species of spider has its own style of web, attractively made a new each morning. Look at birds' nests, they may at first appear haphazard, but watch a weaver bird in action. Using only its mouth, the male bird skillfully weaves each element of grass carefully in and out, one at a time, to build up a thin-walled, hallow nest with a tubular entrance hanging from the front of a plan. As well as the apes also weave. Every night a chimpanzee will climb a suitable tree to make a nest out of the reach of predators. They bend over branches and weave them together to create a safe platform and create a comfortable bed (Sentance, 2001). It is interesting to note that in these days of mechanical aids to handwork, basketry is one of the very few crafts which can still be supposed of as a pure handicraft (Christopher, 1954).

Bamboo made architectures of Barak has great impact in the development of socio cultural background of Barak region. The ancient literature of *Charyapada* as well as the mediaeval literature of *Mangalkavyas* refers to houses made of bamboo. Such houses often depicted extensive decoration work of split bamboo design ornamented with cane knots. These were, with *du-chala* or *char-chala* roofs, called *Bangla ghar*, probably the forerunner of the "*Banglow*" of the European wage. The ceiling of bamboo houses of Barak Valley is either made out of bamboo or made by *shital pati* (cool-mat). But, *shital pati* used as ceiling in bamboo houses in Barak are now rear. The concept behind the uses of *shital pati* in houses during summer is very popular, because it always keeps house cool. Most of the poor people of Barak Valley are still using bamboo as the medium for house construction (Haque, 2007). It is very interesting to know that these crafts which are made by bamboo and cane have various names in different villages. Perhaps it happens in Barak Valley due to the settlements of various communities in different areas. But, the utility of these craft items are more or less same in every community of Barak Valley.

Perhaps many of us are not aware that the bamboo has a motivating historical background, because of its being closely woven in with Buddhism. The bamboo was an honored tree in this country long before the sophisticated Japanese bamboo articles were introduced to us (Chattapadhaya, 1963). The bamboo furniture and craft whichever, we are utilizing in our daily life, it is hard to find out the accurate date, when these crafts was first made. Pictorial and literacy sources prove its existence in India as early as the second and third centuries A.D. and it was undoubtedly made in other countries to which the plant is indigenous at a similar date (Walking,1997). Perhaps, this was the beginning phase for bamboo crafts in Indian history. Cane is also considered as an associated material (Plate.2.2). Difficultly now being faced is about availability of good quality cane in sufficient quantity. With growth of population and increased tendency of deforestation, availability of cane is decreasing at running rate (Ghosh, 2008).

Women folk have accumulated knowledge of house hold practices over generations by observation, experimentation and by handling age old people's proficiencies and intelligence. Certain practices are unique to a given culture of a society and vary between countries, regions, villages and even communities (Karthikeyan et al., 2009). The participation of women artisans of Barak Valley in the craft profession has a great contribution (Plate.2.3). These women engage themselves from their childhood, with the help of their parents. When they grow up and mature their skill for this profession then they dedicate their whole life for this craft tradition. In many cases it is also found that these women artisans are the only member in their family, who is earning money through this craft occupation and maintain her family. Women those are associated with bamboo and cane crafts, they are the good sellers of their own products as well. At a time they produced the different crafts as well as went to the nearest bazaars for the marketing of their products. Many craftsmen of Barak have their own craft shop as well. They are acquiring many craft items from other craft persons of different villages and reselling those items through their shops. There are many shops are available, which are specially dealing the bamboo and cane made craft items as their selling products within the Barak Valley, regarding this Cachar is leading in compared to Hailakandi and Karimganj.

There are many handicrafts board and handicrafts development center are made by the government of India .Which deals broadly with the aspects of export, promotion, marketing, quality control, credit supply, co-operatives, planning and research, publicity, design development and technology. Undertake the imperative task of providing improvements in techniques (Bhavnani, 1993). The presence bamboo and cane crafts of this valley need such supports to make the global status.

2.2 VARIETY OF HOUSEHOLD BAMBOO AND CANE ITEMS

In the beginning of the civilization, every object was carried by some baskets which are prepared of bamboo and cane. Therefore numerous types of baskets always indicate the necessities of life (Sathyapal, 2011). And that necessity of life is yet same in every region of Indian states as well as in Barak region too. In Barak Valley, coiled and plaited basketry are made by the artisans along with other technics. Coiled basketry is the earliest form of basketry and has no similarity with any sort of weaving. It required two components, the coil and the sewing strips (Chattopadhyaya, 1963). In coiled basketry the foundation is first laid by twisting the cane/bamboo round a central care at the base and built up spirally, gradually widening the diameter of each until the desired height and form is attained. Plaited basketry is made by crossing the wrap and the weft. The main varieties of plaited basket work are known as check work, twill work, intertwined work and hexagonal work (Saraf, 1982). These intricate baskets grace everyday function with their natural beauty. Weaving of baskets is an art as earlier as the making of other crafts of this region, due to the preservation of various food items in daily life, artisans had started to prepare baskets. They developed special kinds of pattern according to the needs of the localities. The tools which are used by the Basket makers usually of couple of sharp cutter called *dao* and a few knives of various sizes and shapes. These are used for cutting, slicing and shaping bamboo and cane strips for different uses. The Bamboo and cane are split into the required widths and then the pieces are woven together, according to the size and shapes of the basketry. Various materials are available in Barak Valley for basket making, but in the manufacture of household items, bamboo and cane are the principal materials used all over Barak Valley.

In Barak region, most of the artisans use their crafts materials from their houses, because bamboo and cane are almost available in every village to this region. Very few numbers of artisans are purchase their materials from the local markets.

This basket making is not an individual activity of a single person; it is a collective activity of the artisan's family, where all the family members provide their efforts. Almost every farmer of all villages of Barak Valley are able to make basketry, it is like a job during leisure hours. But, some of the farmers and non-farmers of this valley are involved in basket making as their full time profession. Various shapes and sizes of basketry are available in this valley. In contemporary times, it is also fact that some basket makers have moved away from their traditional occupation because it is more laborious and not economically viable.

a) **Bamboo House:**

The history of architecture in Assam is as old as the history of human settlement in this region. In the hilly region of Assam, particularly, in modern state of Meghalaya and the districts of North Cachar Hills and Karbi Anglong, some natural caves have been discovered, but the caves bear no sign of human habitation. So, it may be concluded that the human habitation began in Assam when man had left out his cave abode (Ahmed, 1994). Bamboo is the medium of house construction as mentioned by the *Bengali* literature (Roy, 2010). Regarding dwellings, Rajput and Mughal have many influences to the curved roof of bamboo houses of Bengal; they put this pattern in *bastu-sastra* as the name of Reyoti (Chatterji, 2005). Mughal had also ruled over this valley. But, the present form of bamboo houses of Barak Valley and their patterns of roofs are little bit different then the Bengal, but the concept, method and materials are more or less same like Bengal. The bamboo houses of Barak are the part and parcel of every villages of this region (Plate.2.4). During the establishment of Silchar town in Barak Valley, bamboo houses were the only houses. During the period of 1853, one hundred native shops, houses and all were made of bamboo and grass. The bamboo houses have the evolutionary contribution for the rural as well as the urban development of this valley (Bhattacharjee et al., 1998).

The bamboo houses of Barak Valley have various types of *Chalas*, e.g., *ek-chala, Du-chala, tri-chala, char-chala* and *panch-chala*. Like the other parts of India, most of the people of Barak Valley are living in the villages, therefore the socio-cultural, political, economic views of these villagers are different than the peoples who are staying in the towns of this region. Bamboo is used as the prime material for village architecture. *Muli, Dolu, Betuwa, Bakal* and *Boruwa* are the common bamboos which are used as the medium of house construction. This bamboo houses are popular

among the different tribal and non-tribal people of this region. For the construction, minimum four and maximum eight posts made by bamboo are required for a house. In the villages, the houses are made for God and Goddess, human beings, animals, shops, house for granaries and house for ritual functions (Plate 2.5). The structures of roofs as well as side walls are made with the help of bamboo. Non-tribal people use earth as their floor, where as the tribal people made their floor above the earth, with the help of bamboo. Ceiling is made with the split of bamboo and bamboo mats (Plate 2.6). Previously roofs are made by the artisan with bamboo leafs, but now people are using straw as an alternative of bamboo leaf. Durability of this bamboo houses are more that after one or two years the whole construction can be altered without disturbing the whole structure. The bamboo houses are very much eco-friendly as well as it is resistant to any damage during earthquakes and in rainy season.

b) **Bamboo Fencing**:

Bamboo is a versatile natural medium, which is used for fencing. Shape and sizes of fences are different among different villages. The techniques which are used for fencing is very cheap and affordable for everyone. The places which are generally needed to protect through fencing are the compound of houses, vegetables gardens and paddy fields. The whole structures of fencing are made with bamboo split with various designs. Generally all kinds of bamboo can be used for fence, but *betuwa* and *bakal* are more durable and these bamboos provide the sustainable quality to the fences. Fencing around the houses provides the privacy to the landlord. Length and height are required according to the space or place of a particular land (Plate 2.7).

c) **Bamboo Gate:**

In civilized society, a gate has its own significant role. Generally a gate provides the privacy and security as well as acts as an entrance to welcomes the visitors. There are many types of bamboo gates which are still being used by the natives of Barak Valley in villages as well as in towns. Several types of gates are used; these might be decorative, simple sliding and hanged gates which are seen in the Barak Valley. The main structure mostly made by the *muli* or *betuwa*, because these bamboos provide the flexibility to the gate. The bamboo gate is very easy to install anywhere (Plate 2.8).

d) **Bamboo Bridge:**

Barak Valley is a place where so many channels, drains and small rivers are available which fulfill the necessity of fishes to this valley. But, during rainy seasons, these water bodies create problems for the people of this region. Rainfall of this valley is comparatively more than the other places of North-East. Therefore, the people of this Valley used bamboo bridges over these water bodies. These bridges need posts, cross beams, fencings and floors (Plate 2.9). Within the floor artisans made designs with bamboo strips, durability of these bridges are very short, maximum three to five years. But its manufacturing cost is affordable. Suspension bridges are now rare in this valley, but these bridges are most impressive around the different parts of North-East India, which are equipped with retaining walls and interlaced bamboo floors, which is more aesthetically viable (Sentance, 2001).

e) **Handloom Equipment:**

The Barak Valley is very rich for its textiles. In this valley, various parts of looms are made with bamboo, e.g., the bamboo posts are used in throw shuttle loom and the bench of throw shuttle loom is also made by bamboo to seat the weaver at the time of weaving. There are so many parts of loin loom which are also made of bamboo. Particularly different bars are made out of bamboo as well as shuttle of loin loom is also made through bamboo. Beside these tools some baskets are made with bamboo and cane which are used to keep the materials related to looms (Plate 2.10).

f) **Kitchen Equipment:**

Rural as well as urban people of Barak Valley use variety of kitchen equipment, which are made of bamboo and cane. There are some common kitchen equipments which are found all over the place in this region.

***Khorai* (Small basket):** The knitting arrangements of *khorai* are same everywhere in this valley, only the size of *khorai* determined by the demand of locality. The *khorai* is woven in plain and square form but it is gradually twisted in a round form at the time of final stitching by flexible cane slips. *Khorai* is made of fine bamboo splits for washing vegetables, fishes and many other things. It is used as a kitchen object in the village as well as in the towns, but the usefulness of this article is noticeable in the villages of this region. It is a small basket with provision to allow water and dust to pass out (Plate 2.11).

***Champai*:** *Champai* is an important craft item to keep *'muri'* (a kind of toasted rice) inside. The basic shape of this item is as same as *khorai* and it is larger than *khorai*. The stands are surplus within this item; bamboo and cane are the basic materials to produce this item. *Meitei Manipuri* is the best seller of *muri* and this craft item used by them very much in their houses as well as in the markets (Plate 2.12).

g) ***Haat Paakha* (Hand Fan):**

Hand fan is another glorious example of the craft work of Barak Valley. There are many qualities in hand fans; the craftsmen used two or three types of weaving patters as per the demand of the local markets, which always provides the aesthetic essence. Bamboo fans are made with handles to rotate easily. Bamboo fan is a craft product which incorporates an innovative design.The weaving patter of hand fans of this valley sometimes shows eclectic excellence of the craftsmen of this region. Because they visualize enormous designs, which resembles very much with the nature, e.g., waves, mountains, trees and flowers. Sometimes, the artisans also apply the different colours on hand fans which provides the visual dimension within designs besides its utility. Mostly circular, semi-circular and square are the common shapes of this craft. The hand fan is used to prompt a gentle air flow for the purpose of refreshing oneself (Plates 2.13 and 2.14).
(http://nbw.nic.in/pDF/Bamboo Craft Products-BTSGNFRI.pdf :21.1.2015)

h) ***Dhariya* (Kind of mat):**

Dhariya is plane with four conventional sides and two of which are longer than the other two. It is made out of bamboo splits and with interweaving techniques. The weaving technique of *dhariya* is based on *tidhara*; it is the local name of weaving pattern in *Bengali*. *Dhariya* has versatile uses in the society of Barak Valley and cream in colour. The permanency of *dhariya* is less and the price of this craft is depends on the variable sizes (Plate 2.15).

i) ***Chaati* (Kind of cool- mat):**

This is a diverse kind of cool-mat, which is used during summer and made out of *murta*. There are numerous sizes and qualities which are accessible in *chaati*. Its shapes and sizes are almost like *shital-pati*. Some prominent markets, which are known for this item are, Nutan bazar, Kabuganj, Bhaga bazar, Lakhipur, Jirighat, Babur bazar, Kathigora, Katlichra bazar and Patherkandi bazaar. As an alternative of

shital-pati occasionally it is also a special gift in the wedding ceremony of *Bengali* communities. The natural colours which reflect in this *chaati* are very close to yellow and brown (Plate 2.16).

j) ***Iyam* (Kind of mat):**

This is an important craft item made by the craftsmen of this valley. It is also an object which has flat shape with four straight sides and two of which are longer than the other two. The knitting is done by the flat bamboo strips and that knitting pattern creates a beautiful design within the *iyam*. The utility of this artifact is commonly seen in the interiors and more specifically used as sealing. The aesthetic as well as scientific reason behind the uses of this article is to keep the house cool during summer.

k) ***Jakha* (Kind of cage):**

This artifact is used as cage, there is a provision in this craft which is easily passes the lights and ears to inside this craft. The visual of its top area is flat; around twenty eight numbers of flat bamboo strips are used to construct this object. More flat strips are used by fusing two flat services together and interlaced with the thin bamboo strips are used for providing the space within the weaves. The base of this craft is made with the flat bamboo strips, which gives the strength to this article. Simultaneously, the two bamboo strips are used on the lower portion, which also provides the strength to this craft object (Plate 2.17).

l) ***Khacha* (Kind of cage):**

This type of *khacha is* made by the artisans of this region and the shape of this *khacha* is completely different than the *jakha*. A circular door is made by the artisans on the top of this craft. The light can easily pass like *jakha* and this *khacha* is mostly used by the villagers to sell their pets in the local markets (Plate 2.18).

m) ***Morah* (Stool):**

Morah is very simple craft for the purpose of sitting and it is made with the combination of hard bamboo sticks and cane strips. The twisted as well as straight *morah* is made by the artisans of this region. The size of *morah* can be varied as per necessity and the uses.

n) **Ritual Crafts:**

The cultures of any place have grown up on the basis of village as well as town lives, the main contributions of the villages have come from spiritual feelings and philosophical ideas as well as the contribution of the towns by their true and laborious reality (Chatterji, 2005).The significance of cultural activities of Barak Valley is prominent in the life style of a village or town. Most of the crafts which are used in Barak region play a certain socio-economic functions to meet day to day necessities. The ritual activities have been taken a major part as well as few types of crafts are used in these rituals practices.

***Baser Basi* (Bamboo Flute)**: Music is a combination of sounds to give pleasure to the human ear and it is always plays a vital role in human society as well as it has a psychological and cultural affiliation. The musical instruments can be categorized into four kinds such as Stringed instruments, Percussion instrument, Solid instrument and Wind instrument (Barthakur, 2003). The bamboo flute of Barak is come under the category of wind instrument. Musical instrument and music is an important aspect in human life. It is described as old as new, it is always like contemporary. From the ancient times, flute has been a very popular wind instrument among people. Bamboo flute is one of the commonest instruments, in the musical tradition of Barak Valley. Flute has been frequently mentioned in *Vaishnava* literature and it is always associated with Lord Krishna. Flue is an instrument of a bamboo piece having six holes on it (Sharma, 2008). The playing of flute by Lord *Krishna* who was a famous flute player, whose music used to please the *Gopis* of *Vrindavan* was mentioned in the epic of '*Mahabharata*' (Barthakur, 2003).

***Kula* (Winnowing object)**: The *kula,* because of its association with life-sustaining rice and other grains, it is considered as sacred and is used for all kinds of rituals in Hindu homes in this region. The painted *kula* is used in the religious, cultural and social events; there is a great tradition to use painted *kulas* in various occasions. In the wedding ceremony of *Bengali* Hindus, the uses of painted *kula* are very common and various kinds of motifs are used by the artisans, which are mainly floral motifs as well as geometrical motifs. The weaving patterns of bamboo strips are more or less like *dala* as well as utility approach of *kula* is also similar like *dala* and the shape of *kula* is like the English alphabet 'U' (Plate 2.19).

***Kunja* (Kind of Structure):** Marriage is a universal social bond between two opposite sexes and marriage in Hindu *Bengali* community has diversification in parts of the country in different segments. Marriage has got a definite cause and curriculum which has a different characteristic in different societies, *Kunja* is the most attractive craft structure of a marriage. It is generally constructed with different varieties of bamboo articles and is decorated with attractive designs to draw attention of the marriage and it is round in size. Banana trees are placed in each corner of the *kunja*, total seven numbers of banana trees are required for a *kunja* and these are the symbols of *Astha Shakti* of ritual myth. Seven *ghats* filled with water, rice and *amra pallav* is placed in the seven corners of the *kunja* in front of the Banana trees, which fulfill the ritual as well as aesthetical desires of the peoples of this valley (Plate 2.20) (Bhattacherjee, 2014).

2.3 BAMBOO AND CANE: AGRARIAN USE BASKETS

The world's first civilizations were great because of their rich craftsmanship and artisanship, thus establishing their leadership in science and technology (Das and Nag, 2006). The Indus Civilization, which was contemporaneous with the Chinese, Egyptian, and Mesopotamian civilizations, grown in the North Western part of undivided India. Many excavated remains of an agrarian society with a certain degree of specialization in many crafts are the evidence of that civilization (Pathak, 2011). India is one of the ancient civilizations in the World with a kaleidoscopic diversity and rich cultural heritage. And the basketry is supposed to be one of the oldest craft in the craft practice of India. Even today, it is found that baskets are made and used in all the places of India by all groups of people. Even with the introduction of modern technology and in spite of the rapid pace of industrialization, baskets are perhaps the only article that is universally used for agricultural purposes and baskets are seen everywhere in India as the craft of agriculture. Carrying baskets, keeping baskets, storing baskets, winnowing fans, sieves, and hats are the major types of crafts that are found in every region of India. In Barak Valley as well these crafts are very common in villages as well as in urban centers (Singh et al., 1993).

Various steps are involved in the preparation of agrarian crafts. It includes collection of raw materials from adjoining areas of villages, making of splits, weaving of the crafts and finally giving the finishing touches. Bamboo of about a year old is generally used for this purpose, because it is comparatively smooth than the others.

The selected bamboo is cut with the help of *dao,* it is an iron made weapon, made by the metal-craftsmen of Barak region (Plate 2.21). The bamboo is cut at a place where the inter-nodes are elongated. The bamboo is cleared off the branches and leaves and then cut to the required lengths. The smaller splits are cut from the bigger splints into conventional sizes, as per the necessity of the crafts. The thicknesses of the splints are controlled by the manipulation of the hands. Smoothening of splints is done with the help of a *dao,* before being woven the crafts. Indigenous agrarian craft practices of Barak Valley play a vital role in sustainable agriculture development and are unique to a given culture of its existing society. Agriculture is the leading occupation of the people of Barak Valley and in agriculture the farmers use various kinds of utensils. Farmers have designed their own structures and methods with locally available materials and these structures are made of bamboo and cane. These traditional agricultural crafts are found to be economic in terms of labor, money and time saving. (Karthikeyan et al, .2009). Local knowledge connected to crafts used in farming can be defined as indigenous skills, knowledge and technology accumulated by the artisans derived from their direct interaction with the atmosphere (Das and Das, 2005). Agricultural tools are as old as the Stone Age. The Hindu epic *Ramayana* has also stated about the uses of agricultural crafts. Bamboo and cane craftsman of Barak region also contributed in developing entire range of food processing and storage structures (Das and Nag, 2006). Simultaneously it is true that the agricultural devices are also changed frequently (Bhowmik, 2010).

a) **Bamboo Mats:**

Weaving of bamboo mats involves substantial livelihood generation for rural poor in Barak Valley. Bamboo mats of various types are manufactured on a commercial basis in the three districts of Barak Valley, but mats of Cachar and Karimganj districts are more prominent. Long bamboos are cut into several parts according to the desired length of the mats to be woven. Then each part is splitted into several thin pieces and the splitting is normally done by a *hatu dao* (small bill hook), which is fixed on a **V** shaped wooden frame. In weaving bamboo mats, generally the twilled pattern is followed. This craft is found to be carried on by all members of the artisans' family. There are two types of bamboo mats are commonly available in Barak, which are locally known as *daam* and *dhariya*. *Daam* is used for paddy and other crops to dry on it (Plate 2.22).

b) ***Chaata* (Bamboo and leaf headgear):**

The basic structure of *chaata* is made out of bamboo, very nominal numbers of bamboo splints are required to make the shape. A *chaata* is more advantageous to the farmers and the other open air workers, because the farmers after putting it on their head free to work in any position. This craft item is like circular disc, *chaata* is usually made with open hexagonal weave which creates a strong surface and the palm leaves provide the water proof, finally sewing these materials with fine elements of cane. The central area of *chaata* is like a dome which helps to realize the rain drops. The craftsmen from all the places of this region used to make *the chaata* with various shapes and sizes (Plate 2.23) (w.w.w.ignca.nic.in/craft05@.htm :12.10.2013).

c) ***Kula* (Winnowing fans):**

Bamboo made winnowing fan has many utilitarian purposes. It is prepared by flat bamboo splits for winnowing purposes in different sizes and shapes. The edge of the *kula* is made strong by fixing of two sets of one inch wide bamboo pieces wrapped up in flexible cane strips .Winnowing basket is quite common in India with various shapes. The main function of this basket is winnowing, i.e. separation of dust from food grains (Singh et al., 1993). Simultaneously, this Kula is also used in ceremonies in Barak Valley as well (Plate 2.24).

d) ***Dala* (Bamboo tray)**:

Dala is prepared out of flexible bamboo splits in twilled design. The shape of a *dala* is exactly like a disc, made with various sizes for different purposes. The edge around the *dala* is stitched in the same way like that of the edge of a *tukri*. Around two or three sizes of *dala* are produced by the artisans of this valley. The quality of *dala* depends on the utility of bamboo, besides the artistic sensibility, the rate of any *dala* depends on the type of bamboo used by the artisans (Plate 2.25).

e) ***Chalni* (Sieve):**

Chalni is woven with fine bamboo splits in a crisscross way and keeping some open spaces between the different splits as per required. *Chalni* is an important household object in Barak Valley. The *chalni* is a round shaped disc-like article and it is mainly used to reduce pebbles or paddy dusts. The adjacent portion of *chalni* is upwards, which does not allow the grains to move outside (Plate 2.26).

f) ***Jungi* (Storage basket):**

All the farmers of Barak region have one or more *jungis*, made of bamboo splits. Some special skill is needed to make the large but gracefully cylindrical shape of *jungi*. The bamboo used in *jungi* is seasoned by soaking the planks in the mud-bed of a pond for one month. Mostly the farmers of this region purchase their *jungi* from the local makers, because only skilled artisans used to make this craft (Plate 2.27).

g) ***Jharu* (Broom):**

The bamboo made broom is a very common craft of this region. The very tinny bamboo twigs are required to make this item. Around sixty to seventy twigs are required for a broom and the thickness is depends upon the utility of this craft (Plate 2.28).

h) ***Tukri* (Big basket):**

There are numerous types of *tukri* made by the craftsmen of this valley. The *tukri* of this valley is more or less looks like the bowl with a wide open top, used especially for holding food grains. The *tukris* those are used for preserving paddies are coated with clay and cow-dung for durability. Some other kinds of *tukris* are also used by the labours to shift the clay from one place to another, which are not coated. These *tukris* are simply made out of bamboo and cane. The grips are also used in the *tukris* which are used for clay; the last stage to make *tukris* is to stitch the edge along with flat bamboo strips with some flexible cane slips.

Farmers believed that cow dung has pesticide property, which would keep the seeds away from storage pests and also believed that its properties to increase ~~d~~ the germination (70%) and viability of the seeds considerably. Fresh cow dung has to be used for the effective storage of seeds (Plates 2.29, 2.30 and 2.31) (Karthikeyan et al., 2009).

i) ***Kathi* (Measure):**

It is a measuring unit and it is prepared in almost conical shape with fine bamboo strips, for measuring rice or paddy. Artisans make this article with very compact weaving for durability a ring which is attached to the bottom to enable it to stand on the ground. This is an important craft of agriculture to this land and as well as it has many significance in rituals (Plate 2.32).

j) ***Ugaar* (Paddy storage):**

Farmers of the villages of Barak region built the granary room with perfect plan during the construction of house itself. The bamboo and cane are the main materials for the granary room. The platform of this granary room is always made above the ground and the loading and unloading of the grains are done using a ladder through a door located at the side of the granary room.

k) ***Hupha* (Kind of Cap):**

This is a very interesting article made by the farmers of the valley and this craft is used as a cap on the mouth of cow. Some flat bamboo strips are used in vertical manner as well as small thin strips are used as horizontal manner for weaving. But these strips are woven in such a manner that makes provision for sufficient ears and lights for the cow (Plate 2.33).

2.4 BAMBOO AND CANE PREPARED FISH TRAPS

Fishing is not a new practice in India and the evidence of fishing was found among the pre-historic artifacts (Purkayastha and Gupta, 2014). It is predictable that there are about five thousand species of fishes living today (Yadav, 2006). The fishes are very important aspects for bamboo and cane crafts. Because, on the basis of them, so many bamboo and cane made finishing items are established in every parts of the country. Fishing baskets have a great significance in the North Eastern states, but its requirement is felt in an area where there are rivers, ponds and agricultural lands. The shape and size of fishing baskets are depends on the nature of fishing areas. The cost of fishing gears ranges according to their shape and size. These all finishing equipment is the part and parcels of craft traditions of Barak Valley (Sathyapal, 2011).

Indigenous knowledge has two powerful profits over scientific knowledge like it has little or no cost and is readily available (Karthikeyan et al., 2009). Finishing crafts made by the artisans of Barak is not special kind of artists; they are mostly from the background of agriculture and fisheries. Like the other occupations of Barak Valley, fishing is one of the major professions for many villagers. Therefore, fishing basketry has the great significance in the development of village economy of Barak. All baskets made for fishing are woven loosely enough to allow water to run out, but tightly enough to retain the captured fish. This technique is very common because it is

less time consuming and less maintenance is required and no physical attendant is required. The traps are accordingly designed that once the fish is entered it cannot escape. Various names are given to different designs of traps (Gurumayum and Choudhury, 2009). Traps are passive fishing gears in which the fish can enter willingly in such a manner that the entrance itself became a non-return device (Baruah et al., 2013).

Some common fishing articles of Barak Valley –

a) ***Kholai:***

The *kholai* is prepared with bamboo strips and the *kholai* is woven in the shape of an earthen pitcher, which is locally known as *kalas*. This is used for temporary keeping of fishes during fishing. The lower part of this craft item is flat, thus it should be stand and to keep it anywhere nicely (Plate 2.34).

b) ***Paran:***

This is a beautiful fishing trap which is look like a dome. There are two kinds of *parans*; viz., a) *Uba paran*, means vertical cage and b) *Paraparan*, means horizontal cage. The interweaving of this trap is very much transparent. Only small fishes are conceivable to trap through this artifact (Plate 2.35).

c) ***Dori:***

Aesthetical aspect of this fishing trap has distinction with the other fishing traps and it is looks like English alphabet U. The entrance of this trap also visualizes the English alphabet V. The huge numbers of thin bamboo strips are required for this trap. The top of this trap is open, but the base is made with flat strips. Fisherman in rural areas of this valley manufactures *doris* of various types, which is commonly in rectangular shape (Plate 2.36).

d) ***Chepa:***

This is a fishing trap and the *chepa* is made with bamboo sticks according to required size. The main body of this artifact is looks cylindrical. There is a blank space below the middle portion of this article and this trap is engaged in such a way that the blank space is always trace the earth and the water runs through that place. The blank space itself a main key for trap, only the small fishes are used to trap

through this article. Only the fisherman can realize the fishes through the additional bank space that is on the top of this article (Plate 2.37).

e) ***Polo:***

The use of this fishing trap is not regularly seen with other fish traps, because this trap needs special skill to grip. It looks like the shape of a dome and it is prepared by small bamboo strips fastened with fine and flexible cane slips. *Polo* is used for fishing in shallow water.

f) ***Changa:***

It is an artifact which is used to preserve the fishes; this craft piece is common, in the fish markets of this valley. The lower part of this article is flat and square. The middle portion of lower part is embossed, therefore when the fishes are preserved inside; the unwanted water is reduced through the corners of this article. Its top portion is widely open and it is woven with bamboo strips, which are placed horizontally and vertically. The two strips are jointly used for the purpose of vertical weaving, whereas single strips are also used for horizontal weaving (Plate 2.38).

All these fishing traps mentioned above are generally used in catching fishes in low water. Apart from these, there are some other traps made of bamboo and cane that is used for catching fishes in deep waters (w.w.w.ignca.nic.in/craft05@.htm : 12.10.2013).

2.5 THE ART OF CANE CRAFTS

Cane is woven fiber formed into a flexible material and most regularly used for baskets or furniture. Cane is often made of material of plant origin; natural cane is well known for its strength and durability. The production of cane furniture requires high degree of skill of the artisans and such skill is found to be traditional. In the manufacture of cane furniture, Cachar district enjoys a special advantage over the other districts of the valley as far as skilled artisans are concerned. Canes are the most commonly used materials in daily life of Barak Valley. This Valley has rich resources and most of its forests are richly stocked with canes of numerous types. Cane is a raw material of great versatility and forms an integral part of the lifestyle of this Valley and the large number of artists are scattered throughout the region (Plate 2.39). It is practiced as a household industry and cane products are used for wide range of purposes and extensively used in every house. This industry has carved for itself an

important place among the handicrafts of this land. It provides part time as well as full time employment to the artisans who produce only fine decorative baskets on a commercial basis. It is a common belief that cane enjoys auspicious character and has religious significance.

The manufacturing of cane furniture starts with making cane strips of various diameters. The artisans cut the cane into sizes of desired length with the help of cutting tools called *dao*. Cane length and thickness is adjusted with the help of different kinds of knives. The material thus ready is used for making frame of an article of furniture whereas pencil cane is used for designing and binding purposes. Different shapes of cane parts are then joined with the help of nails and a rough structure of furniture is thus crafted. Actual weaving of the structure so made is done with the fine flexible cane. The items created in cane are cleaned with the help of sand paper and polished with varnish. Skill of artisans determines how fine strips can be used in coiling and weaving. For flexibility of cane, the cane is heated on a slow fire usually with a Kerosene lamp (Nath, 2011).

The objects can be made in different forms, but before start the work cane is soaked in water for some time to give it a flexible character. In the cane craft, mostly furniture items are made which have a very good local demand in this Barak Valley.

A chair is an important article, which is used to seat a person. Chair making is always a part of craft activity and made out of different mediums, cane chairs of Barak are very sophisticated craft object. The various types of cane chairs are made by the artisans of this region; among them some are very common.

a) **Oval chair:**

The shape of this chair is very aesthetical; because it is looks like oval. Therefore it is known as oval chair and is very popular in this valley. Craftsmen use very strong round wicker to construct the structure of this chair and the legs are made out of large round wickers, some thin wicker splints are also use for weaving the seat as well as back side. Utilization of oval chairs always provides the smart look to the house.

b) **Garden chair:**

The name itself proposes its usefulness, but the utility of garden chair is exceptional in Barak region. This chair is also made out of strong canes and it

improves the sophistication as well as provides comfortable seat for relaxation (Plate 2.40).

c) **Rocking chair:**

This is a chair which has a scientific touch in its manufacturing. Rocking chair is a type of chair with two curved legs made by cane. This chair is commonly used by everyone because of its gentle motion. This chair is always distinguished because of its graceful shape, which is useful in indoor as well as outdoor.

d) **Hanging chair:**

This is a type of chair, which has no legs and it is commonly hang to a ceiling with chain and rope. The design of this chair is more or less looks like carrying basket and its utility is mostly seen in the urban areas of this region.

e) **Peacock chair:**

The design of peacock chair is more significant because of its spreading back and complicatedly woven details. It looks stunning due to its exceptional structure and sophisticated seating.

Besides these above mentioned chairs some other cane articles are equally popular in this region.

f) ***Morah* (Cane stool):**

Morah is very simple craft for the purpose of sitting and it is made with the combination of various sizes of cane. The straight *morah* with numerous designs are commonly seen through this region. The size of *morah* can be varied as per the necessity and the uses (Plate 2.41).

g) **Flower Vase:**

A flower vase is an open container made out of soft canes. It is made with innumerable materials, but cane is better and durable than others. It is frequently used to hold various flowers. There are numerous types of flower vases which are available to this valley (Plate 2.42).

h) **Table lamp:**

This table lamp is mostly used by the electricity. Table lamps are important craft articles which are not used only for lighting, but also to enhance the style of the

interior. The desk lamps are more demandable into this valley, because it provides the necessary task light for the works (Plate 2.43).

i) **Telephone stand:**

It is another important craft article, which has more demand into this valley. The shape of this article is very portable; therefore it is very easy to move from one place to another. There are various shapes and designs available into this craft (Plate 2.44).

j) **Tea table:**

This craft has been crafted in such a manner that it has extraordinary aesthetic appeal. Tea table is distinct from others, because of its smooth edges and glossy surface features. It is made by the craftsmen of this valley with brilliant workmanship. The various shapes like, circle, square, and oval are available in this craft.

k) **Sofa set:**

The cane splints are perfectly tied and bent together to make these artifacts. Varying thickness of cane is used for making this object. After completion of this craft set, the surface is smoothened and coated with varnish; therefore it always shows the glossy effect.

l) **Dining set:**

This craft article is extensively used in the towns as well as in the villages. The various shapes like disk, rectangular and elliptical are made by the craftsmen with sophisticated technics, which delivers outstanding looks and durability.

m) **Fruit basket:**

This basket is looks like a bowl and this is made to arrange fruits on it. This basket is used to serve as utilitarian as well as an aesthetical aspect, because its shape and size provides excellent visual when it is displayed on dining table.

n) **Tray:**

The utility of tray is multipurpose, but commonly it is used to carrying foods. It is made with flat shape with raised edges and mostly available in oval as well as in rectangular shapes (Plate 2.45).

Above mentioned all the items are not perishable. These items have long surviving qualities. If damaged somehow, these can be easily repaired by the artisans.

2.6 SHITAL PATI PRACTICES OF BARAK VALLEY

While Hiuen Tsang had visited Sylhet, the existence of *Shital- pati* was there, because Tsang had mentioned a type of mat in his discussion, which was perhaps the *Shital-pati.* Therefore, it should be assumes the existence of *Shital- pati* during 5th/6th century was legible in this region (Basu, 2001). Mymensingh, Faridpur and Sylhet were famous in *Sital- pati* production during pre-independent days. After partition the place which is famous for *shital-pati* production comes under the district of Karimganj of Barak Valley, which was previously a subdivision of Sylhet district of British India in late nineteenth century (Allen et al., 1979). Karimganj Town, the head quarter of the Karimganj district is the second largest town in the Barak Valley. Kaliganj is a village of Karimganj District is well known for its *shital-pati* practices. Kaliganj has its own market place which is very popular for mat dealing (Plates 2.46 and 2.47). In Barak Valley two places are very prominent for *shital-pati,* Kaliganj is one of them and other place is Katakhal and this Katakhal is very popular for its modern application of *shital pati* (Plate 2.48). The young people of Kaliganj and nearby places are now busy with this vocation as well as the senior people are also concerned with same profession. The *shital-pati* vendors are regularly roaming in the Barak Valley. Quality wise five kind of *shital-pati* is available in the markets of Barak Valley and these are in different sizes, for instance, 7X8 (feet), 4.1/2X6 (feet) and 3.1/2X6 (feet) (Nath, 2011). Artisans of Kaliganj are able to make six *pati* in a month. Approximately two to three hundred *murtas* are needed for a single *pati*. There are various types of *shital-pati* are available in Barak Valley for different purposes, e.g., *Jainamaz pati*, Burial *pati* and *Asan pati*. Jainamaz pati: Muslim community of Barak region is uses this pati at the time of offering prayers or *namaz*. This *pati* is around five feets long and two feest wide. Burial *pati*: It is a common practice in Hindus as well as in Muslims of Barak Valley to provide a *pati* along with the dead body. *Asan pati*: This type of *pati* is used during religious functions; it is spread for a newly married couple to sit on this to take blessings from elders and loved ones.

The noted *shital-pati* manufacturing centers of Bangladesh are Rajnagar, Balagani, Baralekha and Mollabazar in Sylhet district, Sonagazi, Madhya, Chandpurand Senna in Feni district, Sharupkathi in Borisal district and Satair in

Faridpur district. These places are important for the *shital-pati* practices of Barak Valley, because most of the *shital-pati* makers of Barak Valley were migrated from Sylhet and Faridpur. Major *shital-pati* artisans of Barak region are Muslims. There is a minor difference between *shital-pati* of this valley and Bangladesh. The quality of *shital-pati* is judged by its gloss and delicacy of texture. The artisans of Bangladesh often dye their strips in magenta, blue and green and weave interesting geometric floral and vegetal motifs producing *jainamaz* or prayer mat where the design characteristically represents a pointed indicating a *mihrab*. Sometimes in mats of other uses, animal motifs are woven. The *shital-pati* artisans of Barak region are not using colours as well as they are not utilizing any motifs for designs (Haque, 2007).

A kind of grass is available in Assam state of India, known as *'morta'*, said by Dr. Ghosh, which is commonly known as *murta* in Barak valley (Plate 2.49) (Ghosh, 2013). The *shital-pati* is made with *murta* a long stemmed which is a knot les reed and mostly grown in the muddy areas. There are two kinds of *shital- pati* made by the artisans of this valley, for instance, boiled pati and non-boiled pati. Boiled pati is more durable then the non-boiled pati. The production of *shital-pati* is entirely a household industry. Generally men arrange the cane strips, while both men/women are engaged in weaving. The manufacture of *shital-pati* involves many complicated processes. First of all, the strips are needed to be wash with the help of soda. After washing, these cane strips are kept in the sun for proper drying. These are then divided into equal halves lengthwise, with the help of a *dao* (Billhook). These divided halves are again subdivided into four splits of equal length and breadth (Nath, 2011). After the reeds are split and washed, they are sized so that all strips to be used on a single mat are of the same width. The stems are then boiled and after three to four hours of boiled, it turn ivory-white, after a short period of boiling, become a light brown. These two colours of split provide a beautiful checked pattern in natural colours (Jaitly, 1990). It is a delight to see a *shital-pati* craftsman at work. One set of cane is positioned diagonally and another is placed above it in the opposite direction. With deft movement of fingers the crafts man weaves them together (Dhamija, 1970). *Shital-pati* is woven in simple check, twill, zigzag, diagonal, diamond and many other designs (Sen, 1994).

This mat has a distinct status in Barak Valley in many purposes. *Shital-pati* still finds a great variety of users in Barak Valley. In warm, humid climate, the *shital-*

pati is the most popular floor covering whether to sit or to sleep. Basic utility of *shital-pati* is to keep cooling. But, in modern times the users are expending this *pati* for *pandall* making for Durga Puja, Kali Puja, Saraswati Puja and many other pujas and as well as to prepare mobile covers, money bags (ladies and gents), file covers, belts, hats and lots of other products which are preferable in modern days. Besides Barak valley of Assam state, some other adjacent states are known for their *shital-pati*, for instance, Tripura and West Bengal. Bengal is known for the *shital-pati* mats with their gloss and delicacy of texture. The mats carry also designs, sometimes geometrical and sometimes found flora and even human figures (Chattapadhyaya, 1963). Like bamboo crafts, cool mat is also supposed to be prevalent since the primitive times of our human culture. *Shital-pati* is intimately connected with the everyday needs.

The eye is for observation, the ear is for catching sound, hands and feet and tongue all one there in order to understand all the numerous characteristics of the universe by catching the form, sound, touch and smell. The normal process is that the sensory organs armed with various weapons are engaged in keeping watch around the intellect of all living human beings (Tagore, 2006). These basic aspects of human being are always active within the craft artisans of this valley, therefore bamboo and cane artifacts made by the artisans of Barak Valley are the part and parcel of the living cultural heritage as well as living museum and library of this region. The museum is an institution which performs all or most of the following function, collecting, preserving, exhibiting and interpreting the natural and cultural objects of our environment (Bhargava, 2008). For the existing traditions of bamboo and cane crafts, only bamboo and cane materials are not enough to produce a large number of objects without advanced technology along with traditional techniques (Sathyapal, 2011).

2.7 CONCLUSION

Handmade products have been a part of a society's culture. Craft is efficient and helps the mankind in many ways. Craft always has been playing a vibrant role in the socio-cultural and economic condition of a society. Crafts are regularly treated as authentic for the purity and direct human creativity associated with it. Even in contemporary times, many of the craft works are shaped by the artisans purely to achieve the aesthetic needs. This aesthetical activity of art and crafts are regarded as a

most important factor for the social life of North-East India. It is also very astonishing to know that the North-Eastern region of India is the treasure house for varied types of bamboo and cane. Assam, the heartland of the whole of North-East India is a colourful montage of various craft traditions. Next to Mizoram, Assam is one of the biggest bamboos producing state of North-East India. Barak Valley of south Assam is full in assets and most of its forest is abundantly stocked with bamboo and cane of various types. Bamboo is such a valuable material not only for the contemporary crafts, but also it was significant through ancient times. Bamboo has multifunctional qualities, the crafts items and the houses made out of bamboo are eco-friendly. Bamboo has religious and non-religious functions in the human civilization.

The strong point of Barak Valley's craftsman lies in their traditional expertise, their understanding of materials and their taste and of course, their grasp of the design, farm and decoration of their products, which they achieved through traditionally. Bamboo and cane crafts provide part time engagement to the farmers in their spare time and full time employment to highly skilled artisans. Like the other medium, bamboo and cane practices of Barak Valley have been working as a vehicle of self-expression and fulfilling the entire need of this valley, artisans of this valley accumulating their raw resources directly from nature. The production of bamboo and cane are not just a money oriented duty; it is a responsibility for novel cause, which provides a pragmatic knowledge about social as well as ritual life. The manufacture of cane and bamboo products are mostly carried in outdoors and the craft does not require any housing arrangement particularly in rural areas. But in the urban areas, however it is found that cane products are manufactured in factories. The bamboo and cane craft tradition has provided empowerment to the craftsmen of Barak Valley. Bamboo and cane are available in every village and these natural resources are maintained by the craftsmen. In the villages of Barak-region the utensils made by bamboo and cane are very common phenomenon. Bamboo is undoubtedly the most versatile and useful of all plants. Bamboo and cane is an important craft necessary for basic survival, precisely in the rural parts of Barak Valley. Even in the urban centers it exists as an object needed during many rituals. Bamboo made architectures of Barak has great contribution in the expansion of socio cultural background of Barak region. Cane is also considered as an associated material. It is very interesting to know that these crafts which are made by bamboo and cane have various names in different

villages. Perhaps it happens in Barak Valley due to the settlements of various communities in different areas. But, the utility of these craft items are more or less same, in every community in Barak Valley.

The village woman of Barak region has traditionally used the basket sieve for winnowing their food grains; the rural house-wife all over the valley used the basket for carrying and storing their goods. Women those are associated with bamboo and cane crafts, they are the good seller of their own product as well. At a time they produced the different crafts as well as went to the markets for the selling of their goods. Many craftsmen of Barak have their own craft shop as well. They are purchasing many craft items from other craft persons of different villages and reselling those items through their shops. Knitting of baskets is an art as earlier as the making of other crafts of this region, due to the preservation of various food items in daily life, artisans had started to prepare baskets. They developed special kinds of pattern according to the needs of the localities. Baskets are made with a close weave or an open weave depending on their usages. Various materials are available in Barak Valley for basket making, but in the manufacture of household items, bamboo and cane are the principal materials used all over Barak Valley. Farmers of all villages of this valley are able to make baskets; it is like a job during leisure hours. But, some of the farmers and non-farmers of this valley are involved in basket making as their full time profession.

The history of architecture in Assam is as old as the history of human settlement in this region. The bamboo houses of Barak are the important for every villages of this region. These bamboo houses are popular among the different tribal and non-tribal people of this region. In the villages the houses are made for God and Goddess, human beings, animals, shops, house for granaries and house for ritual functions. Entire bamboo houses are very much eco-friendly as well as it is observed to be earthquake resistant and safe in rainy season. Bamboo fencing around the houses provides the privacy to the landlord. Length and height are required according to the space or place of a particular area. There are many types of bamboo gates which are still using by the natives of Barak Valley in its villages as well as in towns. Rainfall of this valley is comparatively more than the other places of North-East. Therefore, the people of this Valley used bamboo bridges over to pass the water bodies. The parts of loom of Barak Valley are also made by bamboo and cane.

Rural people of Barak Valley used a variety of kitchen equipment, which are made of bamboo. The articles found in Barak Valley have their own distinct appearances. Bamboo fan is a craft product which incorporates an innovative design. The cultures of any place have grown up on the basis of village as well as town lives, the main contributions of the villages have come from spiritual feelings and philosophical ideas as well as the contribution of the towns by their true and laborious reality. The bamboo flute of Barak is come under the category of wind instrument. Bamboo flute is one of the commonest instruments, in the musical tradition of Barak Valley. *Kunja* is the most attractive craft structure of a marriage. It is generally constructed with varieties of bamboo articles and ornamented with attractive designs to draw attention of the marriage.

Various stages are involved in the preparation of baskets and mats. It includes collection of raw materials from neighboring areas of villages, making of splints, weaving of the baskets and mats and finally giving the finishing touches. Agriculture is the prominent livelihood of the people of Barak Valley and in agriculture the farmers use various kinds of implements. Farmers have designed their own structures and methods with locally available materials and these structures are made of bamboo and cane. These traditional agricultural crafts are found to be economic in terms of labor, money and time saving. Weaving of bamboo mats involves substantial livelihood generation for rural poor in Barak Valley. Bamboo mats of various types are manufactured on a commercial basis in the three districts of Barak Valley, but mats of Cachar and Karimganj districts are more prominent. Fishing is not a new practice in India. Evidence of fishing was found among the pre-historic artifacts. The fishes are very important aspects for bamboo and cane crafts. Because, on the basis of them, so many bamboo and cane made finishing items are developed in every parts of the country.Traps are unique of their own as these are indigenously designed and fabricated by the craftsmen themselves, taking into consideration, the area location and behavior of the fishes. Like the other professions of Barak Valley, fishing is one of the major occupations for many villagers. Therefore, fishing basketry has the great significance in the development of village economy of Barak Valley.

The manufacture of cane furniture requires a high degree of skills on the part of the workers and such skill is found to be traditional. In the manufacture of cane furniture, Cachar district enjoys a special advantage over the other districts of the

valley as far as skilled artisans are concerned. Canes are the most frequently used materials in daily life of Barak Valley. This Valley has rich properties and most of its forests are abundantly stocked with canes of various types. Cane is a raw material of great versatility and forms an integral part of the lifestyle of this Valley and huge number of artists are scattered throughout the region.

A chair is an important article, which is used to seat a person. Chair is always a part of craft activity and made out of different mediums. Cane chairs of Barak are very sophisticated craft object. Various type of cane chairs are made by the cane craft artisans of this region. Kaliganj is a village of Karimganj district is well known for its *shital-pati* practices. Kaliganj has its own market place which is very popular for mat dealing. There are various types of *shital-pati* are accessible in Barak Valley for different purposes, e.g., *Jainamaz pati*, Burial *pati* and *Asan pati*. This mat is made with long stemmed, which is a knot les reed and mostly grown in the marshy areas. This mat has a special status in Barak Valley during weddings as it is exchanged between the two families and it is necessary for the brides and grooms to sit on this to take blessings from elders and loved ones. *shital-pati* is supposed to be prevalent since the primitive times of our human culture. The cool mat is considered auspicious regarding the rituals and religious purposes in Barak Valley and this cool mat is intimately connected with the everyday needs. The production of *shital-pati* is entirely a household industry in this region.

The bamboo and cane made artifacts made by the artisans of Barak Valley are the living cultural heritage of this region. As such, the large numbers of households in this industry has considerable scope for the development of various new products suited to modern tastes that can be manufactured out of bamboo and cane, because these indigenous materials are eco-friendly and safe both to man and his environment. By using the modern wisdom, these traditional crafts need to be standardized by keeping in mind the economy of the rural poor. Proper designing in accordance with the rural requirements will surely popularize these crafts in near future.

Plate 2.1: Bamboo groves of Ganganagar village, Cachar

Plate 2.2: The local cane (*sundibet),* of Barak Valley

Plate 2.3: Woman engaged in craft work

Plate 2.4: Cattle house made with Bamboo

Plate 2.5: Bamboo house of craftsman

Plate 2.6: Bamboo ceiling

Plate 2.7: Bamboo fence in house compound

Plate 2.8: Bamboo Gate

Plate 2.9: Bamboo Bridge

Plate 2.10: Uses of bamboo in loin loom of *Rongmei Naga*

Plate 2.11: *Khorai* (Small basket)

Plate 2.12: ***Champai***

Plate 2.13: ***Haat Paakha*** **(Hand Fan)**

Plate 2.14: *Haat Paakha* (Hand Fan)

Plate 2.15: *Dhariya* (Kind of mat)

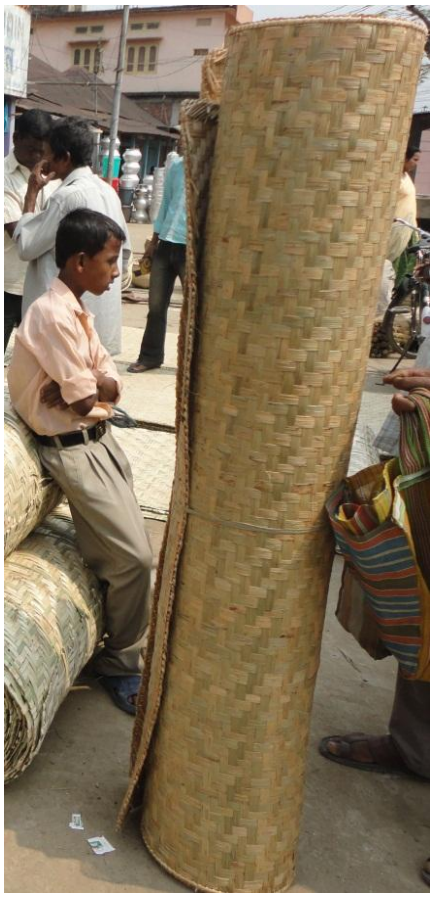

Plate 2.16: *Chaati* (Kind of cool-mat)

Plate 2.17: *Jakha* (Kind of cage)

Plate 2.18: *Khacha* (Kind of cage)

Plate 2.19: *Kula* (Winnowing object used in wedding rituals)

Plate 2.20: *Kunja* (Kind of Structure)

Plate 2.21: Craftsman making bamboo splits with *dao*

Plate 2.22: *Daam* (Bamboo mat)

Plate 2.23 : *Chaata*

(Bamboo and leaf headgear)

Plate 2.24: *Kula*

(Winnowing fan)

Plate 2.25: *Dala* (Bamboo tray)

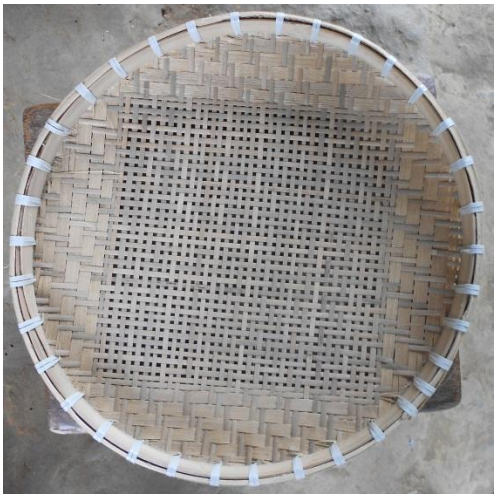

Plate 2.26: *Chalni* (Sieve)

Plate 2.27: *Jungi* (Storage basket)

Plate 2.28: *Jharu* (Broom)

Plate 2.29: *Tukri* for paddy

Plate 2.30: *Tukri* for paddy

Plate 2.31: *Tukri* for clay works

Plate 2.32: *Kathi* (Measure)

Plate 2.33: *Hupha* (Kind of Cap)

Plate 2.34: *Kholai*

Plate 2.35: *Paran*

Plate 2.36: ***Dori***

Plate 2.37: ***Chepa***

Plate 2.38: *Changa*

Plate 2.39: Artists are busy in their works

Plate 2.40: Garden chair

Plate 2.41: *Morah* (Cane stool)

Plate 2.42: Flower Vase

Plate 2.43: Table lamp

Plate 2.44: Telephone stand

Plate 2.45: Tray

Plate 2.46: *Shital Pati* market of Kaliganj village, Karimganj

Plate 2.47: *Shital Pati*

Plate 2.48: Hand bag made with *shital pati,* Katakhal

Plate 2.49: *Murta*