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DWARF BAMBOO (RINGAL): A TRADITIONAL LIVELIHOOD OPTION FOR SCHEDULED CASTE FAMILIES OF GARHWAL HIMALAYA

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Abstract: *The present investigation deals with Ringal a dwarf bamboo species, used for preparing as traditional handicraft articles and utility items in marginalized hill area villages of Dewal block in Garhwal Himalaya. 4 species of ringal were commonly used on the basis of their characteristic. Among these ringal species Chimnobambusa jaunsarensis was mostly (40%) used by the ringal weavers (locally known as Rudiya) for making ringal based crafts and utility items followed by Thamnocalamus falconeri (30%) due to their smoothness, flexible and durable nature. Average 47.65% scheduled caste families were engaged as part time ringal weaving work out of total habitant schedule cast families of these study villages. The average income was between rupees 1398-1775/ family/ month, which play an important role in sustaining their livelihood as well as supporting their socio-economic status (Table 2). The main purpose of this study was to document the traditional knowledge and art of these schedule caste families, the Rudiya's or ringal weavers in the perspective of their ringal based crafts and articles and how much this art of theirs contributes to support and strengthen their socio-economic status from time immemorial. Another purpose of this study was to conserve their traditional art, this knowledge was depleting in their young generations, due to migration, decreased farming and farmland, low income from the sale of these articles and the less of the interest.*

Keywords: *Traditional livelihood option, Scheduled caste families, Ringal, Garhwal Himalaya.*

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INTRODUCTION

The forests of Garhwal Himalayas are the richest as far as the various natural resources are concerned. Among these forest resources, ringal (dwarf bamboo) is the most beneficial of the livelihood resources particularly for the scheduled caste families of the region. These families have retained ancient as well as traditional knowledge of ringal weaving work since time immemorial. ringal thus plays an important role in enhancing and strengthening their economic as well as socio-economic status as these families are directly or indirectly engaged in ringal weaving work. It serves to fulfill the various day to day needs of these communities like housing, utensils, food and agricultural products, and thus plays an important role in strengthening their socioeconomic status (Karki, 1998; Lobovikov, 2007; Kumar, 2009; Buckingham, 2009). It is also important to learn that information on traditional uses of bamboo species varies between as well as within regions.

India has the largest area of 8.96 million hectares under bamboo coves in the world (Anonymous, 2005). It is the second richest country in terms of bamboo genetic diversity, after China with a total of 136 species in 75 genera (Biswas, 2008, Rai, 1998). Considerable work has been done on bamboo and its traditional uses as well as socio economic status of tribal and scheduled caste families in the perspective of the Himalayan region (Ram and Tandon 1997; Singh et al. 2003; Upreti and Sundriyal, 2001, Sundriyal, 2002; Kumar, 2009; Sundriyal and Sundriyal 2011, Gairola, 2011).

Present study has been undertaken to investigate the traditional knowledge prevailing among the schedule caste families who have been doing traditional ringal weaving work (demand based crafts, agricultural tools, etc.) since time immemorial. Besides, the author also wishes to document details of income generated by these ringal weavers, which might play an important role in strengthening their socio-economic status.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Chamoli district is located between latitude of 30.74° N and 79.49° E longitude respectively with the elevation ranges varying between 800 to 8000 meters above sea level. The climate of the district largely depends on the altitude. The total geographical area of the district is around 7520 sq. km. The present study was conducted in six villages (2000-2400 msl) of Dewal block of Chamoli district between the months of Dec-2013 to January 2014. 5-6 families of ringal weavers "Rudiya" were randomly selected from each village for the

present investigation. The information was gathered using a questionnaire after long discussions with ringal weavers related to preparation of craft and utility items and their different domestic uses. Information was also gathered on the average monthly income generated from the sale of these items in the nearby villages, the socio-economic status of ringal weavers was also investigated during the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the marginalized hill area villages of Dewal block, a total of 4 species viz. *Himalayacalamus falconeri*, *Chimnobambusa jaunsarensis*, *Drepanostachyum falcatum* and *Thamnocalamus spathiflorus* belonging to Poaceae family which were being used for making handicraft and agricultural items (Table-1). Among these species *Chimnobambusa jaunsarensis* was mostly used and preferred by the ringal weavers (Rudiya's) for making articles due to its availability, durability and quality followed by *Himalayacalamus falconeri* due to its flexible and smooth nature, whereas *Drepanostachyum falcatum* which was abundantly available in the nearby forest areas of the study villages, was not preferred by the weavers due to its less durable nature and roughness of bark (fiber). Therefore, this species was less used for making craft and utility items. The species of *Thamnocalamus spathiflorus* was commonly used in covering and weaving roof of grassy houses (goth or chhani) and making hooka pipes and walking sticks (Table1).

Ringal species play an important role in improving the socio-economic status of scheduled caste families of the marginalized areas of Dewal block. All the families not were fully engaged in ringal weaving work; sometimes they prepare ringal articles for their own use. However, about 50 percent families (Table 2) were engaged in ringal weaving work, who sells ringal articles in the nearby village areas on the basis of demand received from the farmers. The average income of a family from ringal weaving work was computed to be between rupees of 1398 to 1175/month.

CONCLUSION

The result shows that schedule caste families retain ample knowledge about the traditional art of ringal weaving work. About 47.65 percent (Table-2) families earned some monies from this art and craft based work. This generated income plays an important role in sustaining and strengthening their livelihood and socio-economic status since time immemorial. These families prepared about 10- 13 local demandable ringal articles of

different designs (fig- 1). But the younger generation does not seem interested in doing this sort of work due to migration, decreasing farm lands and practices as well as low labour cost output of these articles. The deterioration of this knowledge too has occurred during the last 1-2 decades. It is therefore, required to promote and conserve such valuable indigenous knowledge and art through the appropriate strategies.

Table 1- Showing species wise use of ringal (dwarf bamboo) for preparation of local hanicraft and agricultural utility items

Botanical Name	Vernacular name	Percentage (%)wise use (People's perception basis)	Special characters	Craft (handicraft and tools) wise use of dwarf bamboo (ringal)
Chimnobambusa jaunsarensis Syn.	Ginwas Ringal	40	More flexible, durable,	**Ghat ki Solti**- Used for carrying grains and other domestic utility things. **Moli or Gobar (dung) Solti**- Used for carrying cow dung, fodder, fuel, etc. **Sutari solti**- Used for carrying dry leaves from forest. **Koluyn**- Used for storage of all kinds of grains. **Jungada (Palaki)-** Used for caring small babies. **Bisawa**- Used for drying and cleaning of grains and pulses. **Kauna-** Used for collection of grains during the harvesting of crops. **Doli**- Used for worship of different goddesses during the Navratri and 'Nanda Devi Yatra'.
Thamnocalamus Falconeri (Munro) Keng f.	Deo or Dev ringal	30	Smooth, flexible, shining and soft nature	**Chhapri /Tokari (Basket)**- Used for keeping breds (roti's), vegetables and fruits. **Supa-** Used for cleaning rice, wheat, and pulses. **Fancy basket-** Used as flower pots and other ornamental purposes. **Mat (Motha/Matula)**- Used for drying ripe grains, pulses and mustured during harvesting period. **Goddess umbrella-** Used for preparation of goddess umbrella which is locally called "Chhantoli" which is used during the famous "Nanda Devi Raj Jat" Yatara in Uttarakhand?
Drepanostachyum falcatum (Nees) Keng f.	Gadh Ringal	20	Less flexible& durable and weak	**Solti-** Commonly used in absence of Ginwas and Dev ringal for making Solties (ghat ki solti, sutari solti and moli solti). **Roof covering**- Used for the covering of grassy roof of "Goth" or single floor houses (thatch). **Thangra**- Mainly used as stakes for vegetables vines -like beans and other leguminous vegetables, and as gourds.
Thamnocalamus spathiflorus (Trin.) Munro.	Tham ringal	10	Long durable and hard in nature	**Walking sticks**- Used by old persons for support in walking. **Roof Covering** –Used for covering the grassy roof of thatch. **Magico religious belief-** Some portions used as nails or chilka during the magico religious rites. **Hookas pipe-** Mature stick used for making hookas pipe.

Keys: Altitude wise distribution of ringal species: Gadh ringal (1500-2200msl); Ginwas ringal (2400-3000msl); Deo ringal (2200-3000msl) and Tham ringal (3000-3500msl).

Table 2- Showing the average per month income of villagers (scheduled caste families) from ringal weaving work

Village	Total SC families	Families engaged in ringal weaving work (for sale)	Working (Weaving) days /month	Total working days of families/month	Average income/day/family (Rs)	Total income of families/month (Rs)	Average income/family/month (Rs)
Mundoli	32	12	10-15	120-180	150.0	18000-27000	1500-2250
Bank	28	10	12-14	120-140	150.0	18000-21000	1800-2100
Wan	36	20	10-12	200-240	150.0	30000-36000	1500-1800
Sawar	44	22	9-10	198-220	150.0	29700-33000	1485-1500
Ghesh	37	20	10-12	200-240	150.0	30000-36000	1500-1800
Balan	42	24	6-8	144-192	150.0	21600-28800	900-1200
Total	**216**	**108**	**57-71**	**Total Average income**		**24550-30300**	**1398-1775**

Fig: Photographs of some traditional handicraft and agricultural utility items of the area

Key words: A=Moli (gober) and B=Ghat ki solti; C=Sutari solti; D=Tokri (basket) and E Supa; F=Kauna; G=Bisawa; H=Kolyuna (Koring); I= roof covering ; J=Fancy basket and K=Jharu (broom)

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