



## Nature, problem and prospective of conch handcraft industry in Murshidabad district of West Bengal

Uttam Sarkar

Assistant Professor, Department of Geography, Garhbeta College, Paschim Medinipur, West Bengal, India

### Abstract

The present research paper is based on primary survey conducted on conch shell industry of a Murshidabad district. The sample survey contains of 50 household units selected from the District. At present rural conch shell producers/suppliers are struggling to market their products and services due to various reasons. Rural manufacturers are facing serious problems about technical and marketing knowledge. They are also ill-informed about modern marketing issues like quality, delivery schedule, packaging, after-sales-service, etc. The paper suggests that if proper measures are not taken to help the artisans and provide support to them, then the beautiful art will have to face destruction.

**Keywords:** shell industry, rural manufacturers, beautiful

### Introduction

Handicrafts, also called artisanal handicrafts or handmade crafts is any of a wide variety of types of work where useful and decorative objects are made completely by hands or by using only simple tools. It is a traditional main sector of craft, and applies to a wide range of creative and design activities related to making things with one's hand and skills, including work with textiles, moldable and rigid materials, paper, plant fibers, etc. Usually the term is applied to traditional techniques of creating items (whether for personal use or as products) that are both practical and aesthetic. In other sense, handicraft industries are those that produce things with hands to meet the needs of the people in their locality.

India is known globally for her rich heritage of art and culture. India is one of the important suppliers of handicrafts to the world markets. The history of Indian handicrafts goes back to around five thousand years ago. There are numerous examples of handicrafts from the Indus Valley Civilization. The tradition of crafts in India has grown around religious values, needs of the common people and also needs of the ruling elites. In addition to this, foreign and domestic trades have also played an important role in the evolution of different crafts in India.

Handicrafts in West Bengal have a unique characteristics and beauty from the ancient time to till date. West Bengal is famous for its art form, and handicraft is one of the prominent arts of such artistic forms. In the time of British rule handicrafts of West Bengal had a huge demand over the European market as the manufacturing cost is less but the value is more. The finest handicrafts of Bengal are terracotta, clay dolls and pottery, brass and bell metal, cane and bamboo crafts, dokra, horn-bone crafts, mat, sitalpati, mask, kantha, wood carving, patachitra, stone carving, jute handicrafts, conch-shell products, lac crafts, lather crafts etc. West Bengal is well known all over the world for its rich resource of handicrafts. One of them is handicrafts made from conch-shell and oyster. Conch-shell is used as an ornament for married hindu. women, as a trumpet, as a musical instrument, a wind chime. The artisans of North 24-parganas, Purba Medinipur, Paschim Medinipur, and Bankura are used to make such crafts.

### Literature review

There is very limited study on the economics of conch shell industry in West Bengal.

Hunter (1875) <sup>[15]</sup> discussed the importance and the process of production of conch shell in the earlier time.

Hornel (1914) <sup>[13]</sup> wrote about the *chank (conch)* in Hindu life and various aspects of folklore and ethnology.

Haque (1984) <sup>[10]</sup> pointed out the designs of different *Sankha* products like bracelets.

Sen (1935) noted the use of conch bracelets by Bengali woman in ancient Bengali literature and he pointed out that conch craft developed independently in Dhaka.

Sen and Sinha (1961) <sup>[20]</sup> discussed economic behavior of craftsman and production process of conch shell industry of West Bengal and Sikkim.

Gosh (1999) highlighted the scenario of conch shell industry in Bankura district of West Bengal.

Heppell (2001) <sup>[11]</sup>, discussed about the chank shell industry in modern India.

Biswas (2003), analyses the pattern and basis of rural industrialisation in West Bengal. He discussed about technological change and the forms of production organization conch shell product industries.

Dutta (2011) <sup>[7]</sup> noted that Conch shell craft is neither unique, nor a new practice in India for creating marvels in decorative yet artistic pieces of utility items.

Sonali (2012) <sup>[21]</sup> highlights about conch shell craft of West Bengal and noted that the tradition of conch shell preparing and working is an ancient one. They have been used in India since Vedic times. Priests use them to drive away evil spirits, at the beginning of weddings, sacrifices, or at other Hindu rites. Buddhists also blow conch shells as a sound offering. This is why they are so common in India and Tibet.

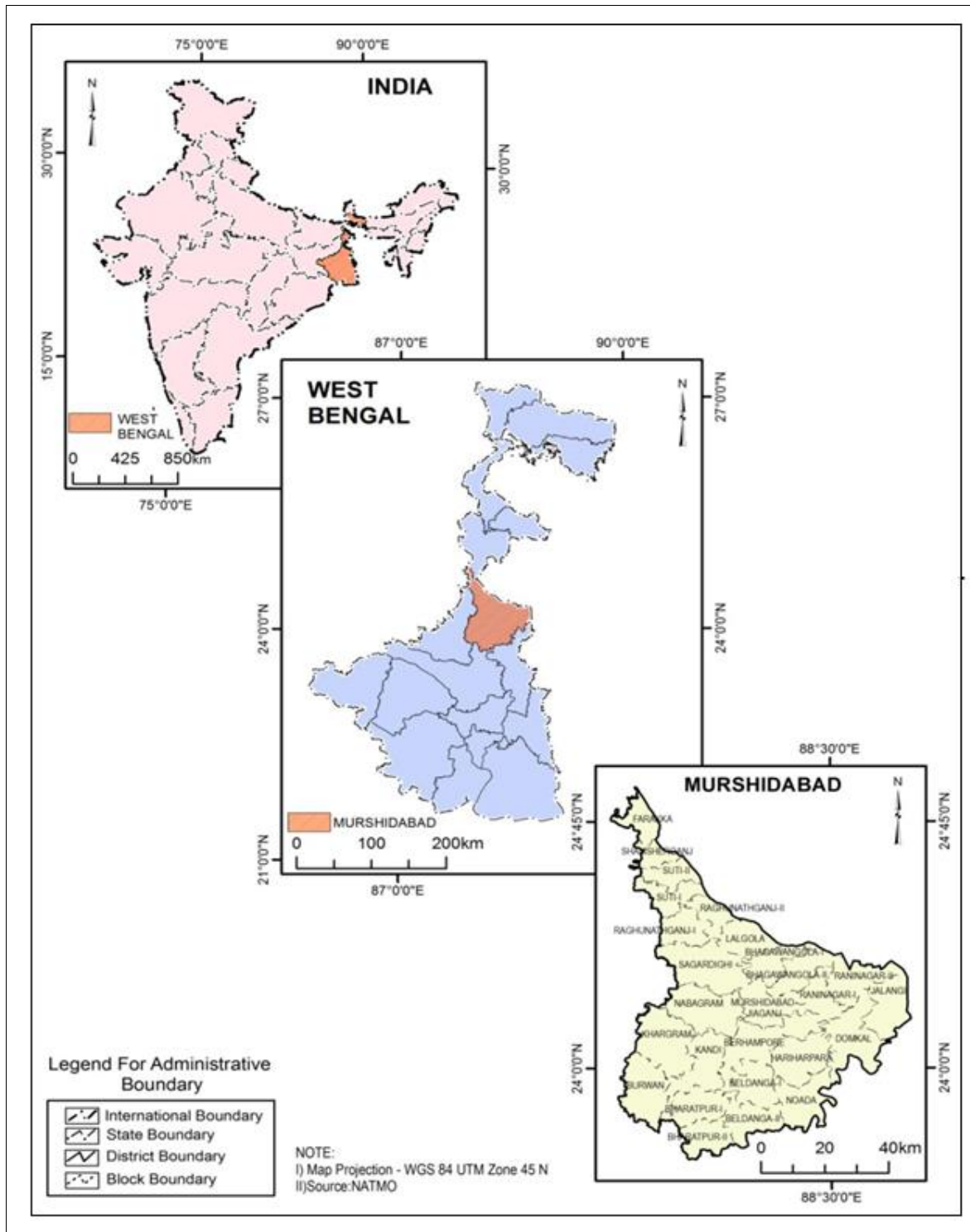
Tulsyan S. (2013) <sup>[23]</sup> pointed out that while not many Bengali women in urban settings can be seen wearing sankha (conch bangles), it is easier to find women-generally from lower class-from Bihar, Odisha and Uttar Pradesh sporting it. From the brief review of the existing literature it appears that problems and future of conch shell industry in West Bengal have not been adequately addressed.

**Location map of the study area**

My chosen Study Area is Murshidabad district which is situated on the Eastern peripheral plains of the State of West Bengal. It forms the Eastern international boundary of State bordering Bangladesh from 1947 when India became independent. River Padma creates the Northern and Eastern boundary, separating the district from the district Malda to the North and Rajshahi Division of Bangladesh to the East. Districts Burdwan and Nadia are in the Southern side and

Birbhum and the Pakur (Jharkhand) are on the Western side of the District.

Murshidabad District is lying almost in the middle part of westBengal. this district is the nethermost district south Bengal Murshidabad district extends from 24° 45' 30"N - 24° 52' 30"N Latitudes 87° 57' 30"E - 88° 46' 15"E longityudes(fig1).The District is bounded by Malda District on the north and Barddhaman and Nadia district on the south and Birbhum District and Jhark hand on the west.



**Fig 1:** Location of the study area

**Objective of the Study**

The specific objectives of the present study are:

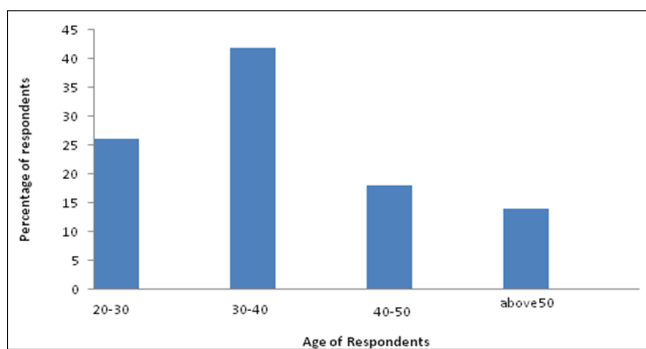
- To review the socio-economic conditions of artisans of conch-shell industry.
- To analyze the production and marketing structure of conch shell goods in Murshidabad
- To assess the cost and profits of the conch-shell production units;

- To examine the existing problems of this industry and highlight the way to remove the problems;

**Methodology**

The present study is an empirical one based on survey method. First hand data were collected from the field through questionnaire and observation. The schedule structured was extensively pre-tested. Primary data required for this study were collected from selected sample conch shell industry workers through personal interview method. The data was collected at conch shell industry in Murshidabad district, where many workers are employed. Fifty respondents were chosen from the list, using systematic random sampling method for depth study. Class interval technique was used to analysis the age, income, saving and expenditure.

**Discussion and major finding**  
**Socio economic analysis**



**Fig 2:** Age wise classification of the respondents

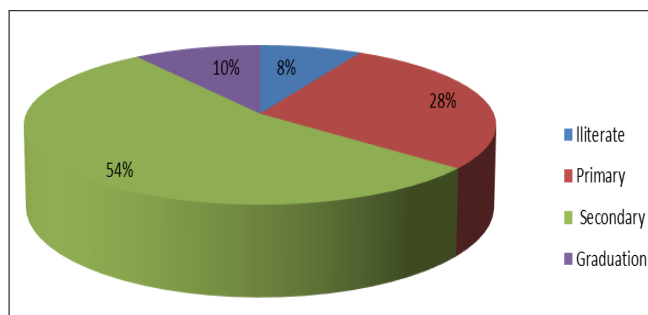
Above fig2 shows that 26% of the sample conch shell industry workers are in 20-30 age group, 42% of the respondents are in 30-40 age group than 18% of the respondents are in 40-50 age group, and 14% of the respondents are in above 50 age group. The average age of the respondents is 37%.

**Table 1:** Sex-wise distribution of conch shell industry work

1.	Male	28	56.00
2.	Female	22	44.00
	Total	50	100

Source: Author Calculation

From table1, it is inferred that the majority of sample respondents, that is, 56% were males and 44% of the female were engaged in conch shell industry.



**Fig 3:** Educational qualification of the respondents

Above figure3 shows that 8% of the respondents are illiterates, 28% of the respondents have completed primary

education, and 54% of the respondents have finished secondary education. only 10% of the respondents have finished a degree.

**Table 2:** Family size of the respondents

Sl. No.	Family type	No. of. Respondents	Percentage
1	Nuclear Family	36	72.00
2	Joint Family	14	28.
	Total	50	100

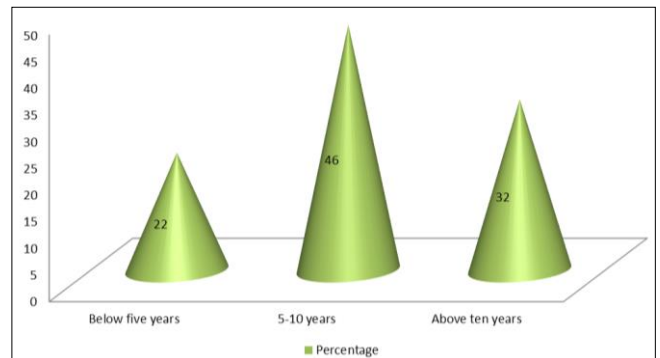
Source: Author Calculation From table2, it is clear that, in the study area, 72 percent of the total sample respondents had a family size of nuclear family, 28 per cent had a family size of Joint family.

**Table 3:** Marital status of the respondents

Sl. No.	Marital status	No. of. Respondents	Percentage
1	Married	38	76.00
2	Unmarried	12	24.00
	Total	50	100

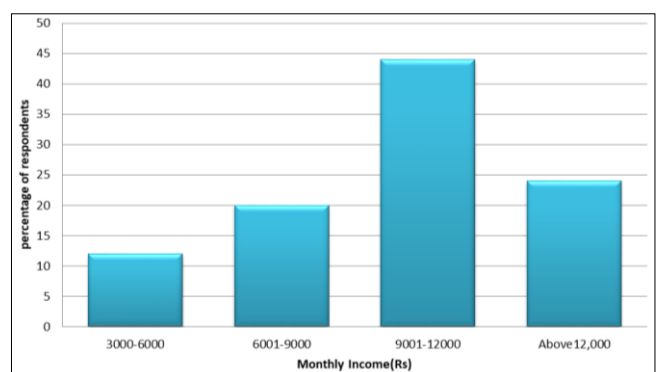
Source: Author Calculation

When marital status is concerned 76% of the respondents are married, and 24% are unmarried.



**Fig 4:** Experience of the sample conch shell industry workers

It is also inferred from the figure4 that 22% and 46 % of the respondents have the experience of below five years and 5-10 years respectively. While 32 % of respondents has the experience of above ten years and the average experience of the respondents are 8years.



**Fig 5:** Monthly income of the respondents

The study revealed (figure5) that 12% of the respondents are earning an income between Rs.3,000-6,000, 20% of the respondents are earning Rs.6000-9000 monthly, 44% of the respondents are earning Rs.9000-12000 monthly, and the others 24% of the respondents are earning above Rs.12,000

monthly. The average monthly income of the respondent's family is Rs.9, 900.

**Production Stages of conch shell works**

We divide this chapter in three parts – collection of raw conch shells, processing of raw conch shells and marketing of processed conch shell goods. In Murshidabad raw conch shell are basically purchased from Chennai which are basically collected from the beach of Tuticorin. The empty and dry shells are come to Kolkata and then to craftsmen. The production of conch shell goods are divided into five parts- cutting of raw conch shell, rubbing, pasting, again rubbing and polishing and then designing the processed conch shell. Two types of production units are basically involved in production of conch shell goods in this region. They are tied and independent. Tied units have been linked up with big independent units either by raw materials

purchasing or by sale of their products. They have no bargaining power for purchase of raw materials. Labourers involved in these activities are basically unskilled. These are their traditional activities. Their earlier generations were involved in these activities. They are categorizes as household industry workers. Most of the workers are seasonally employed. In lean agricultural season they involved in the production of conch shell goods. The other took these activities as part time job. The instruments they basically used are power operated cutting machines, grinding machines. Long ago, workers used hand grinders; cutters etc for cutting of raw conch shell, grinding polishing. They were not in a position to use electric operated machines. But, now they use power operated grinding machine for smooth functioning of the production process. Packing and sealing activities are done by the big merchants.



**Fig 6:** Production Stages of Conch shell works

**Indigenous Production process**

The entire manufacturing process is indigenous and traditional and this has been followed down through generation. The process involved in traditional conch shell craft manufacturing can be divided into certain well defined

steps according to the nature of the operations. a) Collection of raw materials; b) Processing of the conch shell (washing and primarily shape); c) Final shaping of the objects with the help of power operated tools; d) Engraving or embossing various designing shape; Final polishing and finishing the

product; e) Packing and sealing and f) Marketing. Generally the articles manufactured in a unit are polished and finished by other groups of artisans in different phases. Thus there is

a continuous relationship and mutual cooperation among the fellow workers of this community.

**Table 4:** Production Stages of Conch shell works

Types of reduction	Type of unit	Nature of works	Types of labour	Machines and tools used	Mode of payment
Cutting of raw conch shell	Independent	Cutting of raw conch shell	Unskilled / Skilled	Power operated cutting machine /traditional system	Weekly / daily rate
Rubbing	Independent / Tied	Rubbing the outer layer of conch shell	Skilled, male /female hired and household labor	Power operated grinding machine or traditional tools	Per piece
Pasting	Independent / Tied	Pasting the rubbed conch shell	Skilled, male / female hired and household labor	Resin, hardener, zinc oxide	Per piece
Rubbing or Polishing	Independent / Tied	Polishing the pasted areas	Skilled, male / female hired and household labor	Power operated grinding machine or traditional tools	Per piece
Designing	Independent / Tied	Designing the conch shell in Various artistic look	Skilled, male / female hired and household labor	Grinding machine / traditional system	Per piece

### Estimated production cost of conch shell goods

In this section we examine the production cost of conch shell goods in the Murshidabad of West Bengal during the study period. We estimate the production cost after interacting with the sample craftsmen. This is shown in diagram below. Total paid out cost per pair sankha includes

cost of raw materials (cost of collecting raw conch shell), other material cost, wages of hire labours, and interest on loan. Total imputed cost includes wage of household workers, house rent, interest on working capital, and interest of own fixed capital. Depreciation cost includes cost of consumption cost of fixed capital and other costs.

**Table 5:** Estimated Cost per Pair Sankha Production in Three Sample Districts

	Items	Cost (Rs)
Total Paid out Cost (Rs. per Pair)	Cost of raw material (raw conch)	136.50
	Other material cost	19.50
	Total material cost	156.00
	Wage of hired workers	12.60
	Interest on loan	0.50
	Total paid out cost	169.10
Total Imputed Cost (Rs. per Pair)	Wages Cost of Household Artisans	10.10
	House Rent	0.35
	Interest on Working Capital	0.15
	Interest on Own Fixed Capital	11.50
	Total Imputed Cost	22.10
Depreciation Cost (Rs. per Pair)	For Consumption of Fixed Capital	0.11
	Other Depreciation Cost	0.35
	Total	0.46
Total Production Cost (1 + 2 + 3)		191.66

Source: Author Calculation

It is observed from the table that the costs of raw materials (raw conch) which are basically collected from the coastal areas of Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Andhra Pradesh through middlemen/traders are the same in all the craftsmen of the three sample districts. It is Rs.136.50 (per pair) in during the period under study. Total material cost is 196.66

### Output of conch-shell industry

Our sample conch shell industries in the districts produce various types of goods like Sonabandhanosankha, Hangurmukhsankha, Mantasasankha, Chursankha, Brasletsankha, Minichursankha, Surusankha, and others low quality Sankha. They also produce fabulous images of deities like Durga, Laxmi, Srikrishna, Lord Shiva etc. on each and every shell. In addition to that, they produce hair clips, bangles, brooches, earrings, necklaces, pendants, paperweights, boxes, agarbati stands, buttons, vermilion containers, cups, spoons, forks, door hangings etc. The market prices of their major products in the three districts are shown in table 3 below. It is observed that the products like Sonabandhanosankha, Hangurmukhsankha, Mantasasankha, and Chursankha have the larger market demand over the products like Brasletsankha, Minichursankha, and Surusankha.

**Table 6:** Different designed sankha products made by the sample production units and their expected market prices in local markets

Products	Marketing price (Rs.)
Sonabandhanosankha	496
Hangurmukhsankha	435
Mantasasankha	294
Chursankha	215
Brasletsankha	216
Minichursankha	156
Surusankha	133
Others Low Quality Sankha	125

Source: Author calculation

### Problems Faced by the Craftsmen

A lot of problems faced by the conch shell craftsmen in the production and marketing of their products. We thoroughly discussed with the sample craftsmen and identified the following problems. This is shown in table below. It is observed that the problems are mainly shortage of capital, primitive technology, unorganized market, irregular supply of raw materials, high input cost, lack of proper training to the craftsmen, lack of central and state government initiatives and excessive control of middlemen over the marketing of conch shell goods. Most of the respondent




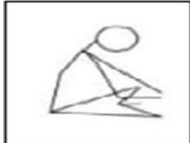

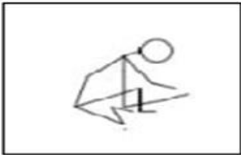

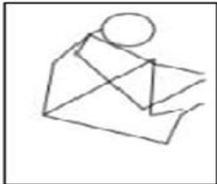


craftsmen opined a number of reasons for their miserability. As many as 39 sample respondents argued that shortage of capital, lack of government initiatives and unorganized output market are the main problems in production and marketing of conch shell goods. 36 respondents have their

opinion that presence of middlemen in both input and output markets and irregular supply of raw materials and their low quality are the main factors responsible for their survivability.

**Table 7: Problems faced by the Craftsmen**

Problems	Respondents (%)
Shortage of Capital	7
Primitive Technology	7
iii. Unorganized Market	9
Irregular Supply of Raw Conch	13
High Input cost	14
Lack of proper Training	13
Lack of Government Initiatives	09
viii. Presence of Middlemen	8
(i), (iv) & (vii)	31
(i), (iii) & (v)	39
(iv), (viii)	36
(ii),(iii),&(vii)	31
(v), (vi) & (vii)	34
(vii) &(viii)	30

Source: Author calculation

working posture	Stick Diagram	Activity	Action
		<b>Conch Shell Cutting</b>	<b>some strain near future HIGH</b>
		<b>Conch shell grinding</b>	<b>some strain near future HIGH</b>
		<b>Polishing of conch shell bangles</b>	<b>some strain near future HIGH</b>
		<b>shaping of conch shell bangles</b>	<b>some strain near future Medium</b>
		<b>Breaking of conch shell</b>	<b>some strain near future Medium</b>

**Fig 7: work related musculoskeletal problems among conch shell workers**

In the below mentioned presentation, the postural analyses of different movements of hand and leg movements of the workers while at work are represented in details. From the above pictorial analysis it can be concluded that most of the postures adopted by the conchshell workers are at medium to higher risk and needs investigation and implementation of change.

### Conclusion

Unlike the costing of other industrial products, the economic calculation of conch shell products presents certain peculiar problems which make the ascertainment of accurate, reliable and uniform cost of production of different products in the industry very difficult. Most of the conch shell unit owners in the industry are illiterate and ignorant of maintaining their accounts properly and correctly. As they do not maintain proper records of their expenses on various heads, the ascertainment of correct cost of production remains only a conjecture. The margin of profit in respect of certain important conch shell articles is expressed as a certain percentage on the total cost of production. The margin of profit is subject to the quality of the end product which is greatly determined by quality and species of intact conch. Low or sub-standard quality products are sold at prices ranging between 35 to 50 per cent less of the prices of the high quality or commercial quality products. The paper reveals that there is much potential for this industry in generating livelihood of the rural people.

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