

Blacksmiths of Rural Nepal

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The Blacksmiths of Rural Nepal

Part One

Product

Blacksmiths in Nepal are skilled labourers with the ability to produce quality products and start a productive business. However, they lack the superior tools. Supplying blacksmiths with modern and improved essential tools will allow them to be efficient. A hammer is the most important tool to a blacksmith (Andrews, 1994). It carves and transforms the metal into a useable object. The Hammer, specifically a Swedish Cross Pein hammer, will be supplied from a small company called Thank Ironworks. Thank Ironworks is a small blacksmithing company that employs 4 hardworking Canadians based out of Floradalen Ontario. Thank Ironworks specializes in custom metalwork that often combines the traditional appearance of metalwork with a futuristic twist. They also supply many Ontario blacksmiths with essential blacksmithing tools ranging from gloves to charcoal and everything in-between.

The second main piece of equipment for a blacksmith is an anvil (Anvil Fire, 2013). The anvil is where the metal will be stricken and drawn out with a hammer and created into the blacksmiths desired product. Professional Farrier Supplies located out of Mono, Ontario will supply the 35-pound Cliff-Carroll anvil. This anvil is a basic model for all blacksmithing needs. It is also advantageous because it is small and light enough to be transported easily into remote locations either by foot or animal assistance. This anvil style contains a flat surface for striking and drawing

out metal and a round horn for bending the metal (Andrews, 1994). See Figure 1. Table 1 contains all the necessary contact information for both Thak Ironworks and Professional Farrier Supplies.

Shipment of these products is a global expansion for Thak Ironworks and Professional Farrier Supplies. It creates a new opportunity for small companies to magnify their supply business. It also creates awareness into the blacksmithing community in Ontario. Companies like Thak Ironworks create custom ironwork that ranges from pieces of sculpture and armour to house railings. This could generate custom sales in other countries and increase demand and profit for their work. This could also potentially lead to an expansion of employees within Thak Ironworks and create more jobs for Canadians.

Part Two

Introduction to Nepal

Nepal is a landlocked country located between India and China that covers 147,181 square kilometers (CIA, n.d.). Nepal is home to over 26 million people. It is divided into three geographical regions: Terai, Hilly, and Mountainous (CIA, n.d.). Nepal attracts many tourists due to the thrilling hikes the Himalayan Mountains offer, the vast diversity of wildlife to be observed, and the rich culture encountered in the small villages along the way (MCTCA, 2013). The predominate religion practiced throughout Nepal is Hinduism however, there also a strong presence of Buddhism, and Islam (NPHC, 2012). The 81.3 percent Nepalese of practicing Hinduism attracts Western tourists due to their bright cultural and religious

festivals. Nepal's Tourist industry employs 18% of Nepali people and makes up 48.7% of the gross domestic product (CIA, 2013).

In the Terai and Hilly regions agriculture is the prime source of labour and income for local residents. Agriculture amounts to Seventy-five percent of Nepal's work force and makes up for Thirty-six point eight percent of Nepal's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (CIA, n.d.). Farms are normally no larger than 2 hectares (Raja, personal communication, 2014) and are intercropped systems. The intercropping system of Nepal involves planting crops that will be harvested for the main food source for the farmers and their families. If there is crop left over from harvesting and will not be needed for food supply that year it will than be taken to the market and sold as a source for income. This is why the GDP of agriculture is so small but occupation agriculture is large. The type of crops planted varies depending on which region the farmer lives in. The Terai is planted abundantly with rice, covering up to 86 percent of arable land, next to wheat and maize [Prasai, 2010]. The Hilly region is plentiful with maize, and areas for grazing livestock like cows, sheep, and goats (Prasai, 2010).

Market Opportunity

In Canada the blacksmithing is considered a hobby or niche market. Blacksmithing in Canada is also often demonstrated in heritage parks as an example of the important role they played in the community. In Nepal blacksmithing is an essential resource for fixing or making new tools for rural farmers. The market for these products is specifically for blacksmiths. The new, higher quality equipment will allow blacksmiths to create their products faster and easier. In return this will

boost the income into the blacksmiths family income in not only based on the grain/service trade but also eventually to being paid in Rupees. The new implements for the blacksmiths will also enhance the quality of the product for the farmers. This in return will hopefully trickle down to the farmers being able to be more productive in the field due to better equipment, thus creating a larger food supply.

There is an opportunity, once the services of Nepalese farmers are met, that the blacksmiths may begin to create products for the tourist industry. These tourist products may range from traditional knives and swords (see figure 2) to household items such as hooks. Not only will this benefit the blacksmiths of Nepal but Nepal's tourist economy as well.

Cost and Government Funding

The cost of a single Swedish Cross Pein hammer in Canadian currency, including tax is a total of fifty-one dollars and ninety-five cents. The cost of a thirty-five pound cliff carol anvil is a total of \$333.35 Canadian including tax. It comes to a total of \$385.30 Canadian before shipping. This price is equivalent to 21,205.72 Rupees. Transportation costs directly from Toronto to Kathmandu by airfare would add up to \$277.78 Canadian. From Kathmandu, it would have to be shipped by vehicle to the hilly region. If it is not able to reach the remote location of the blacksmiths due to lack of road infrastructure, the blacksmith would have to meet the carrier from the road and carry or have a cow, ox, or buffalo cart it up to their village.

The average blacksmith in the hilly region is traditionally paid by a barter system called Bhaga Bali (UNDP, 2009). This system frequently pays blacksmiths in grains opposed to Rupees, therefore the cost of these items seem unrealistic based solely upon the blacksmiths income. However, International government programs allow this idea to potentially become a reality. The Canadian department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Canada offers funding for International Development Programs. Nepal falls under the list of countries that may be supported by this type of national funding and could be considered under a priority for funding in developing countries. The priority group to receive funding for this project may be located under stimulating economic growth. Other sources of funding may also come from the United Nations Development Program.

Competition

Blacksmithing in Canada is a niche market and there are limited suppliers. However, China is a major competitor in selling anvils and blacksmithing hammers. Suppliers in China contacted through alibaba.com sell anvils and hammers at a cheaper price than Canadian producers can afford. The price for an anvil if ordered in a set of fifteen from a company in China called Qingdao Hainuo Metal Products would cost forty-five dollars U.S per 25-pound anvil.

Challenges that will arise

Challenges that will be faced in the exportation of this product are the cost of the product and shipping, the decreasing number of blacksmiths, and the social/cultural issues accompanying the blacksmiths. The cost of shipping and these

products are not a realistic price point for poor Nepal blacksmiths. Many are paid based upon a bartering system trading their service for grains (UNDP, 2009). However, funding from international development programs may assist in drastically reducing the purchasing and shipping costs. Secondly road infrastructure into the hilly region in Nepal is scarce. This would make transporting multiple items, like an anvil, difficult and strenuous for the blacksmith and potentially an animal assisting in transportation.

There is a rapid decrease in the number of blacksmiths in Nepal yearly because many young family members are pursuing a higher education. This means that they are leaving the traditional work of blacksmithing in hopes of a better more productive future. Also, the need of blacksmiths is decreasing. In regions located close to city centers farmers who make enough money are able to go into the closest hardware store and acquire new equipment (Raja, personal communication, 2014).

Last but not least blacksmiths have had to confront the social issue of the Hindu caste system. The Hindu caste system is divided into 4 main classes, however, it is theorized that it is divided into over three thousand castes based upon occupation (Gold. A, 2014). Blacksmiths are located at the bottom of the caste system formally named as the Dalit's. A Dalit, often referred to Schedule caste or the untouchables, and are considered ritually impure (Gold. A, 2014). Many of the higher castes avoid business with the Dalit's because it is believed that they will share this impurity. This prevents blacksmiths from creating business with local hardware stores or gaining the communities respect and support to create their own profitable business.

Unknown

Information that is unavailable to be seen or collected plays a major role in this products ability to be critically analyzed. Unknowns for this product include the impact on Canadian makers and producers of the products, legal import/export restrictions, and transportation services from Kathmandu to the Hilly region in Nepal. The companies that supply the anvils and hammers are Canadian based resellers however the impact on other Canadian companies is unknown. Unaware if the raw metal material is manufactured than forged into these products by Canadian based companies. Information specifically on the importation or exportation of blacksmithing supplies is unavailable. Last but not least transportation service from Kathmandu to the Hilly region of Nepal is unknown. Nepal lacks road infrastructure into the rural Hilly region. Importing heavy supplies into that untamed region can be demanding. Researching companies via the Internet willing to travel that path are not easily come by. Therefore, traveling to Nepal and directly contacting companies that provide a delivery service of that sort would be extremely beneficial. Other unknowns to be considered as well is how much international development funding, dollar wise, is available, how many blacksmiths there are, and if rural Nepalese farmers are switching over to modern commercialized methods of obtaining farming equipment.

Future Studies Past Studies

In order for this export to be a success more specific and measureable data of blacksmiths should be collected. This survey for data collection would include the region they live in, who work for, how they are compensated for their service, and

which tools they most often use in their field of work. Other areas of the survey could include, family size, religion, if they cultivate any food, and level of education. This would allow insight for the demand of this product and allow for speculation of developing a new niche tourist market.

A similar export idea was and funded by a small grant from the United National Development Program. This development program, “Improving Economic Condition of Blacksmiths and Environment Conservation”, provided a blacksmith the knowledge on how to create their own charcoal and supplied him with a new hammer, blower, and hand smoother [UNDP, 2009]. These new technology and tools made available to him allowed his to work to become more efficient producing more farm equipment faster. This in return increased his profit, increased his families’ quality of life and recognition of the service provided among the community [UNDP, 2009].

Critical Summary:

Nepal is a small landlocked country between China and India rich in agriculture. Many of the farmers rely on blacksmiths to repair or create new farm hand farm equipment. However after critical analysis of this product I believe these products should not be exported to Nepal due to the decreasing numbers in the blacksmith population, the movement of farmers accessing farm equipment in local stores opposed to purchasing/trading local blacksmiths, and due to the unrealistic price point of the anvil for Nepalese blacksmiths. Many young people from the Nepalese blacksmithing community are leaving the trade due to the lack of recognition from within the community (UNDP, 2009). The Anvil is the most

important piece of equipment a blacksmith will own but also is biggest investment (Andrews, 1994).

Alternative export products to enhance blacksmith's livelihoods could include teaching new and efficient methods of producing high quality charcoal in an environmentally safe manner. Exporting smaller less expensive blacksmithing essentials would also be very beneficial. It would significantly reduce the impact of cost for the blacksmiths and reduce the dependence on international funding. An important item that will improve the blacksmith's efficiency is a blower for air supply to the coal. Improved blowers can allow the coal within the forge to increase drastically in temperature. This adaption allows metal to become softer and more malleable making metals easier to work with.

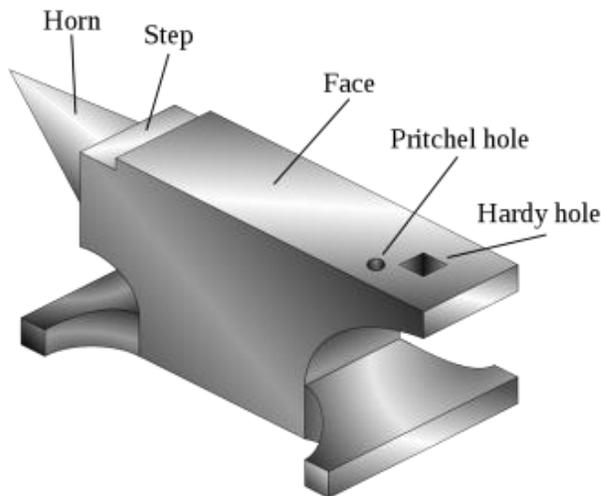
Supplying safety ware like gloves, aprons, eyeglasses and hearing protection are easy implements to reduce the risk of work related injury. Common injury associated with blacksmithing is often damaging to hearing, metal flakes called scale can cause discomfort and damage to the eye, and burning of the skin [Moore, 2014]. Personal protective ware is a cheap, light and accessible item that significantly reduces the risk of work related injury and can improve quality of life for blacksmiths.

These products should help enhance the quality of life for blacksmiths so that they may live comfortably. However, blacksmithing in Nepal has been and will be more than a technology gap issue. It is also a social issue within the Hindu caste system. Blacksmiths are of the lower caste and face inequality. They lack the respect within their communities and this inhibits their opportunity to expand and create a

successful business [CITE]. Understanding that Hinduism is an ancient respected religion around the world and certain practices have and always exist however, there should be separation between state and religion. This separation will could encourage lower castes to create something more of their work and create new unseen market opportunities in Nepal, and increase the economy in Nepal and the livelihoods of many rural Nepalese.

Appendix

Figure 1 Labeled diagram of blacksmithing anvil



<http://www.todayifoundout.com/index.php/2012/02/why-anvils-are-shaped-as-they-are-and-why-blacksmiths-often-tap-the-anvil-after-a-few-strikes-on-the-object-theyre-working-on/>

Figure 2 Traditional Nepalese knife: Kukri Knife



[http://www.swords24.eu/product/description/3585/Museum_Replicas_Traditional_BhojPure_Kukri\(401126\).html#.VHM35HjBHzi](http://www.swords24.eu/product/description/3585/Museum_Replicas_Traditional_BhojPure_Kukri(401126).html#.VHM35HjBHzi)

Table 1: Contact Information for Product Suppliers

Company Name	E-mail	Phone Number	Address
Thak Ironworks	info@thak.ca	519-669-0721 Toll Free:1-866-664-3622	2282 Floradale Rd. Floradale, ON N0B 1V0
Professional Farrier Supply		519-940-4247 Toll Free: 1-800-563-7862	23 Coles Crst. Mono, On L9W 5W2

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