



An Insight Into the Present Crisis of Traditional Handloom Weaving Of Cachar District.

Dr. Alok Sen

PROFESSOR, DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMICS, ASSAM UNIVERSITY SILCHAR

Tanaya Choudhury

RESEARCH SCHOLAR, DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMICS, ASSAM UNIVERSITY SILCHAR.* Corresponding Author

ABSTRACT

Handloom industry used to play a significant role in the rural economy of the Barak valley. It was not just another way of earning livelihood rather it could also earn fame by its products outside the country. Irrespective of the category and place of weaving, the weavers produce varieties of product. They are artistic and creative which they prove in the field of handloom and handicrafts. Handloom goods are no longer the choice of poor alone, but a weakness for the elite in India and abroad. Small-scale industries play very important role in the economic development of any developing or under-developed country. These industries provide solution of two important problem viz, solution of unemployment and checking the economic concentration in the hands of a few. The traditional village and cottage industries provide a vital means of livelihood to village artisans. The household based industry has great economic potential given its low capital and an energy requirement, the impact of handloom is far below its more modern competitors. But inspite of its importance, the small scale sector is beset with the problem of sickness. Like many other part of the country here also many of the industries has closed down and the remaining few are finding difficult to survive. Though the handloom sector occupies a distinct and unique place in the Cachar District, besides being the largest generator of non farm rural employment, the handloom sector indeed capable of exponential growth, with proper identification of its needs, a reasonable level of resource, input and structural attention. The study attempts to provide a field appraisal of the weavers involved in the industry as it obtains in different villages in Cachar District. Such an appraisal helps in the identification of the factors that are mainly responsible for its present crisis and also the specific needs of this sector.

KEYWORDS

Traditional weaving, Industrial Sickness, Cachar District

Introduction

Handloom weaving constitutes one of the richest and most vibrant aspects of the Indian cultural heritage. Handloom sector is a very ancient industry in India. Features of this sector vary across India. Till nineteenth century the handloom industry was the only supplier of clothing for the entire population of our country. From the time immemorial handloom industry has been playing a vital role in the economy. The traditional skill of handloom weaving was not only a status symbol for the society but it was also an indispensable aspect of the of the socio economic life. The economy of Barak valley particularly Cachar District is basically an agricultural economy. Naturally any development of the valley will call for primarily the development of its agricultural sector and allied activities along with the development of those village and other industries which would not require to much of skill of labourers or other facilities of highly modern technology. Traditional weaving activity has immense potential for providing gainful employment to the people and act as a vehicle of growth both in rural and urban areas of the Cachar district. But in spite of its importance, the traditional handloom weaving industry is beset with the problem of sickness. An industry is considered to be sick when its financial position is not satisfactory and it becomes worse year after year. There are mainly four types of industries, viz, Extractive industries are those that include activities where by various forms wealth of are drawn out, extracted or raised from the soil, air or obtained from beneath the surface of the earth. These include hunting, fishing, mining, agriculture etc. Genetic industries are those that include breeding farms, poultry farms etc. They engage in reproducing and multiplying. Constructive industries are those that involve in construction of buildings, roads, dams, bridges and canals. Manufacturing industry, they are engaged in the conversion or transformation of raw materials or semi finished products into to finished products. The cotton textile industry is an example for a manufacturing industry. Processing is a part of man-

ufacturing industry this include those industries where the raw materials is processed through different stages of production resulting in the final product e.g. textile, paper etc.

Here in Barak valley this traditional handloom textiles was exists and also quite a good number of peoples were engaged with this industry. In Cachar district the maximum weaver uses country looms. This was the traditional technology. The country looms are owned by individuals and families. In this production system, the weavers are not attained in favour of factory system. The family labour including that of women and child is the main source of production. Thus the quality and the production technology continued for centuries without many changes. In this process the weaver or the craftsman had to concentrate his eye, feet and hand and apply the mind in every minute. Then only he could make a finished good suitable for the market.

These traditional village industries provide a vital means of livelihood to village artisans. In some parts, it has attained the status of a mature industry, and in other parts, it is still an enterprise confined to the needs of the particular home. Handloom industry in Cachar District is having glorious past but questionable present and uncertain future due to lot of internal and external factors that are acting behind this. Though it employs a massive number of rural people, the handloom sector is considered a sunset industry. The main purpose of the study is to identify the problems of the weavers of handloom industry in Cachar district.

Review of literature:
While preparing the logical framework of the study, the different literatures reviewed are:

Rayudu (1992) made an attempt to analyze the industrial cooperatives and the marketing structure of the cooperative handloom industry in Andhra Pradesh. The book criti-

cally examines the evolution of industrial co-operatives and their importance in the present context of industrial set up. In this outstanding book, the author has aptly analyzed and discussed the role of co-operation as a balancing sector. The book provides comprehensive information on the subject. The work appropriately demonstrates and among the issues discussed in this book are their working, financial management, organisation, marketing, State aid and industrial relations. The problems including those of artisans have been viewed. The author offers many workable suggestions

Abdul (1996) assessed that with the withdrawal of several subsidies so far enjoyed by the handloom sector and especially by winding up the Janata cloth scheme which not only provided cheap cloth but also employment to the vulnerable section of weavers, the old and law skilled, the economic reforms have contributed to the worsening of conditions in the handloom sector.

Roy (1999) made a study to analyze that whether a sufficiently general and convincing account of the artisanate to be found? The book suggests that traditional industry modernized and played a creative role in Indian industrialization. Traditional industry can play such a role is a familiar theme in the economic and social history of early modern Europe and pre-war East Asia. In conclusion the study tends to assessed that there is a rise of export trade and one outcome of trade was changes in craftsmanship and related strains, further more there were adaptations in trading production system. Thus in the inter war period, this premises of the European factories and Indian karkhanas.

Karunakaran and Karthikeyan (2002) in their study assessed the nature and also extent of use of handloom fabrics and also analyse the factors influencing the buying behaviour of consumer and to find out the post purchases behaviour towards handloom products cotton fabrics have always greater demand in the market compared to other handloom products such as polyester and silk fabrics.

Kumar (2003) pointed out the need for the expansion of domestic and international market for Indian handloom products. It is argued that in the era of globalization when the market is flooded with textiles from China and other countries, the regional specialization of handlooms, of which the list is endless, can be used to provide a well defined product identity. For this purpose the identities of handloom fabrics must be respected, protected, and reinforced.

Singh and Naik (2008) in their study examined that though the Banarasi silk products are enjoying a ready market both at home and abroad, they are grey areas demanding immediate attention to sustain and further improve this traditional craft and to help the Banarasi weavers to achieve new heights. The present study an effort has been made to trace the weavers' socio economic condition, marketing practices and problems faced by them. The study results revealed that the situation of weavers was pathetic; they were suffering due to illiteracy, financial constraints, marketing bottleneck and Govt. support.

Pandya and Thoudam (2008) examined that hand woven textiles have always been a rich sources of one's tradition. In the Northeast region of India each tribe or community has its own specific designs and motifs. Manipur enjoys a distinct place amongst textiles zones in India. Women folk are practicing weaving in Manipur. The crafts are woven with culture and spiritual beliefs of the natives of Manipur since time immemorial. But due to social changes incorporated with modern technology the traditional hand woven textiles of Manipur are few to be found and they are rapidly changing in terms of designs, motifs, yarns and processes. The study was an attempt towards the preservation of the textiles before they are completely depleted. The main objectives were to document the hand woven textiles of Manipur. The related data was collected purposively from three selected villages by using observation cum interview method.

Study area and Methods

Surrounded by hillocks and situated against the scenic background of Barail Hills and on the bank of meandering Barak Silchar the district head quarters of Cachar District and the commercial hub of Barak Valley, is an ever growing township. The handloom industry in the Cachar District has a long tradition in the socio economic life of the people for supplementing the family income to a great extent of the society. The Laichangphi, fanek mosquito net etc. produced traditionally by the weavers of Cachar District. The total rural population is nearly about 1243534 and the total urban population is 201387. At present, there is 1 Handloom Training Centre exist in the Dist Cachar at Kabuganj. Every year 30 trainees take training from this centre. There are 4 Weavers Extension Service Unit exist in the District these are situated at Silchar, Lakhipur, Kalain & Dholai. The no. of Handloom Demonstration Circle is 10.

At District Level

The entire Cachar District is divided into 18 Circles and each Circle is under the control of a Deputy Director of Handlooms and Textiles / Assistant Director of Handlooms and Textiles who are in-charge of implementation of the various welfare and developmental programmes of department at the field level. In Cachar district there exist the

Office of the Asst. Director of Handloom and Textiles, Cachar Methodology

The study is empirical in nature. The empirical data have been collected for to investigating the problems that are encountered by the weavers of the handloom industry. Primary data are collected by using a pre tested questionnaire by personal interview with the weavers.

Construction of tools

The study is based on primary data. The primary data are used mainly for analyzing the problems of the weavers of handloom industry, for this a structured questionnaire is prepared for the handloom weavers keeping in view the objectives of the study.

Sampling design

The study adopts at the first two stage, the two stage stratified purposive sampling design ie block & villages from the first & second stage. In the third stage samples would be collected on random basis. The blocks in the district were selected on the basis of discussions with the officials of the Assistant Director Handloom & Textiles, Cachar Silchar, & the key informants. There exist total 18 blocks in Cachar district. Out of this 18 block, 10 blocks is selected purposively for the collection of sample. From each block 1 village has been selected for field work. The criteria used for the selection of villages include product diversification, working systems etc. finally at the third stage 10 weaving household were selected from each village i.e. 100 samples were selected by using lottery method of simple random sampling technique. First stage is the selection of the blocks and at the second stage selection of villages in the third stage the weavers working on the handlooms in these villages were interviewed (Table1).The sample in each block is spread over a number of villages.

Table 1: Sample coverage under the survey

Block	Villages visited	Number of weavers interviewed
Silchar (MB)	Assamibasti	10
Borjhalega	Irongmara	10
Borkhola	Dudpatil	10
Banskandi	Gobindapur	10
Lakhipur	Nayagram	10
Binnakandi	Kaptanpur	10

Udharbond	Pangram	10
Srikona	Hatirhar Part2	10
Sonai	Uttar Krishnapur	10
Kalain	Jalalpur	10

The field work & collection of data

The study adopts the survey methods. Survey method includes administering of structure household questionnaire to the selected samples of weavers. Strategic interviews were conducted with various weavers both within an outside the cooperative fold & from different self help group in order to collect the information about their working condition. Discussions were also held with officials & others involved in the handloom sector.

Data processing

After the completion of data collection field up questionnaire are edited properly to prepare a master table to incorporate all the information available in the questionnaire.

Frame work analysis

For presentation of facts tabular analysis is used. The problems of weavers of Handloom Industry in Cachar has done with the help of Percentage analysis through the responses which is collected from the weavers of the various villages .A percentage of the opinions altogether has been chosen in order to reach at the conclusion.

Results & Discussion

Table 2 represents the demographic or socio personal information of the weavers. Traditionally the country looms are used in Cachar. These looms required lots of energy or power and creativity, skill and patience. During data collection it is find that most of the weavers are female and they belonging to the age group of 35 – 55 years, minimum number of male members are involve in this occupation. The male weavers are now engaged in other occupation rather than weaving in order to maintain their family (42%). Younger generation in the weavers community preferred to take employment in the town other than handloom weaving. Therefore the involvement of the male member and the younger generation is very minimal in weaving. On the other hand involvement of older people is less conspicuous (5%) because of their physical health, strength and visual problem.

Table 2. Demographic information n=100
Sl. No. Demographic variables Percentage of respondents

(a) Age (years)		
1. Younger	(<36)	9
2. Middle age	(35-55)	86
3. Old age	(>55)	5
(b)Sex composition of the weavers		
1. Male	(42)	
2. Female	(58)	
(c) Family dependence on handloom		
1. Partially dependent		(48)
2. Totally dependent		(52)
(d) Educational level		
1. Illiterate (unable to read and write)		25
2. Primary (I-IV standard)		10
3. Middle school (V-VII standard)		16
4. Secondary (VIII-X standard)		30

5. Senior secondary (XI-XII standard) 19

6. Degree and above

-

(e) Family type

- 1. Nuclear (41)
- 2. Joint (59)

(f) Family size (members)

- 1 Small (upto3) 15
- 2 Medium (4-6) 54
- 3 Large (more than 6) 31

(g) Annual income from weaving (Rs.)

- 1. Low income (<2000) 30
- 2. Middle income (2000-4000) 60
- 3. High income (>4000) 10

(h) Preferences

- 1. Inherited 86
- 2. Job opportunity 8
- 3. Interest 6
- 4. Migration -
- 5. Training -

(i) Category

- 1. Independent weaver 53
- 2. Master weaver 6
- 3. Working with master weaver 10
- 4. Working in co-operative societies 31

(j) Type

- 1. Full time weaver 35
- 2. Part time weaver 65

More over (52%) of the weavers family totally dependent on handloom. (Table 2)

The weavers' communities now realize the importance of education now a day they are aware about their education and try to develop their career by education. About 30 % Of

the weavers are educated up to secondary level because all weavers can not afford to go in for higher education, due to family constraints, ignorance and encouragement from the family members. Such children are discontinue their studies owing to financial problem.

Family size and system are important features that contributed to the family income. It is find that the joint family system still prevails in the weavers' community with 4-6 members. The weaving occupation is one such profession which involves all family members from children to elderly, who contribute their valuable service in pre-loom, loom and post-loom processes. Handloom products are always having tremendous competition with power loom products. Many times there is set back for handloom products because relative price flow of variety of power loom inexpensive products in the market, lack of demand and fashion that in turn affected the socio-economic condition of the weavers. Approximately (60%) of the weavers' population in Cachar belongs to middle income group and others to lower income group. Cachar is predominated with part time independent weavers. A very negligible percentage of weavers either are working for master weavers or in co-operative societies. Very few are master weavers. Therefore the annual income from weaving of the family is very low (Table 2).

Weaving requires whole family cooperation. The family mem-

bers, irrespective of their age, stretch their helping hand to improve the family living. Weaver's children do work hard along with their parents. The children do not receive any particular weaving training. Maximum weavers in Cachar, who inherited weaving from their forefathers, insisted to continue the family profession, indeed whether weaving profitable or not. Their wish to continue traditional weaving is mainly to preserve and protect the inherited tradition alive.

Table 3. Weavers by use of production technology n=100

Sl. No.	Types of loom	
1.	Country loom	55
2.	Throw shuttle loom	38
3.	Fly shuttle loom	7
5.	Power loom	-

During the survey it is finding that most of the weavers uses country loom, which they made of their own. Loom is an integral part of their house hold furniture. They still use a bamboo and wooden spools. Each family in a village is equipped with one hand made loom, these looms are manually operated and it requires many skill to organize before going for weaving. Thus from the above table it can be seen that (55%) of weavers uses country loom for production which require lots of time and energy of the weaver to produce a particular unit of product causing low productivity and (38%) of the weaver uses throw shuttle loom and remaining (7%) of the weaver uses fly shuttle loom and the uses of power loom is nil because their income can not permit them to use power loom. The above data indicates that most of the weavers are still operating on a very small scale and do not have a commercially sustainable size of operation. (Table3).

Table4. Financing n=100

Source of starting capital

1.	Own saving	5
2.	Borrowing from friends and family	20
3.	Loan from bank	-
4.	Loan from private money lender	5
5.	Advance from parties	70

Handloom sector by its nature is not a capital intensive business, but majority of the weavers in Cachar is poor thus the initial capital investment is very less, they are not in a position to spend much for weaving after meeting their daily necessities, thus most of the weavers take advance from parties (70%) for production and remaining are borrow from friends and family (20%) and due to ignorance and the lack of proper opportunities loan from bank is nil (Table 4).

Table 5. Procurement of raw materials by the weavers n=100

Sl.No.	Raw material details	threads
a) Source of procurement		
1.	Master weavers	20
2.	Local dealers	52
3.	Co-operative societies	28
b) Mode of payment		
1.	Cash	10
2.	Credit	50
3.	Both cash & credit	40

Raw material plays a vital role in the production of any product. It is found that more than half of the weavers purchase raw material i.e. threads on credits from local dealers (Table

5). Purchasing raw material from local dealer is convenient for the weavers in terms of time, energy, and money saving. On the other hand (40%) of the weavers purchase raw materials on both cash and credit and very few purchases on cash payment. Factors like the socio-economic status of the weavers might have influenced the mode of payment.

Table6. Marketing practices n=100

Sl. No. Marketing practices Percentage of respondents

(a) Selling market		
1	Local market	62
2	Showrooms	10
3	Outside district	20
4	Export	8
(b) Frequency of selling		
1	Monthly	23
2	As and when necessary	72
3	Weekly	5
(c) Marketing channels		
1	Master weavers	5
2	Co-operative societies	40
3	Direct selling	45
4	Wholesalers	10

Note: Multiple responses possible

A vast majority of weavers (62%) during the survey reported selling their products in local markets. Around (10%) are selling to showrooms and only (20%) are selling outside the district and the export constitutes only 8 per cent (Table 6). The same table indicated that lack of storage facilities and poverty forced the weaver to sell their produce as and when necessary (72%). Further it is learnt from this table that, most of them go for direct selling because of want and need (45%) and rest in co-operative societies (40%) the remaining are to the wholesalers (10%) and a very few to the master weavers (5%).

Table7. Distribution of the weavers based on the problems n=100

Sl.No. Problems Percentage of weavers

1.	Electricity, inadequate work space	76
2.	Marketing	94
3.	Production	96
4.	Less profitability	66
5.	Health	30
6.	Incentives from government	19

Note: Multiple responses possible

The most common problems faced by the weavers community are inadequate marketing facility (94%), and interrupted supply of electricity (76%) and inadequate work space. During rainy season the floor of these houses often remain wet and sticky; the roofs start leaking at many places. As a result, the looms remain idle for most part of a day. It is observed that on normal days also the weavers are found to be working in an inhospitable

environment. In the scorching heat of the summer the weaver is found to be working in an ill-ventilated loom-shed and that too without a fan. In these households the loom shed is so gloomy that the weavers are forced to use electric lamp or tube light even during the day time due to insufficient light. (Table7). In addition, problems related to production were shortage of raw materials, hike in price of raw material, price instability and transportation etc constitute (96%) While data collection the researchers encountered other problem related to low remunerative (66%) and health and other constrain (30%). Lack of incentives from Government is other constrain as stated by few weavers (19%).

Conclusion

Results of the study revealed that the weaving is practice mostly by women in Cachar district. The study focuses on the condition of weavers and their traditional craft. However, the handloom industry as such faces a great crisis from the competition initiated by the power looms and their cheap commodity production based on mechanization. In today's fast changing fashion, traditionality being the fame and interest of the elite in the society, but less accessible and affordable for the middle and low income groups. Hence changes in design, production technology etc is more suitable for the weavers, which surely enhance and restore their tradition.

From the present study it is concluded that the Handloom weavers in Cachar who have inherited this occupation, are in pitiable condition owing to the poor socioeconomic

conditions. It is interesting to note that the literacy rate among the weavers community is quite encouraging, Almost sixty per cent of the community belonged to middle income group; who run their weaving independently. The basic raw material required for the production which they purchase from local market as and when necessary. Provision for raw materials at reasonable price, special training to improve existing weaving technology, knowledge about scientific and low cost techniques of weaving, dyeing and finishing, financial assistance and other necessary inputs is the need of the day as expressed by the weavers. Hence, to open a new panorama for these delicate and wonderful silk made ups the prevailing handloom weaving sector need to be centralized to enhance consistency, regularity and uniformity in the production so that an appropriate channel for marketing of their product can be opened. The weavers of Cachar district faces various problems most of these problems are outside the control and access of the average handloom weaver. Thus this industry needs immediate attention by the State Government to improve the socioeconomic status of local weavers. Further there is a necessity to publicize and expose through advertisement, exhibition, displays and trade fairs, to showcase their product in co-operatives, allied institutions and showrooms

REFERENCES

- Abdul, Noorbasha. (1996): "Handloom in Distress", Economic and Political Weekly, vol 31, No 23 pp 1384-1386 || Karunakaran, R. and Karthikeyan, N. (2002), Consumer's Behaviour Towards Handloom Textile: A Study, Small Scale Industries Vol – I Problems, Published by Concept Publishing Co. || Krishna Kumar Asha. (2003), A great Tradition in Decline, Frontline, September 12, 2003 || Pandya, Amita. and Thoudam, Joymati.(2008) , Handloom Weaving , The traditional Craft of Manipur, Indian Journal of Traditional knowledge Vol (4) , October 2010 pp 651-655 || Rayudu, C.S. (1992), Industrial Cooperatives, Published by Northern Book Centre || Roy, T.(1999). Traditional Industry in the Economy of Colonial India, Published by CambridgeUniversity Press || Singh, Amrita. and Naik, D Shailaja. (2008), Status of Banaras Weavers: A Profile, Department of Textiles and Appared Designing, College of Rural Home Science, University of Agricultural Sciences, Dharward Karnataka