



Manipuri Women Handloom Weavers in Hailakandi District of Assam – A Case Study

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Abstract

The Handloom Industry plays an important role in Assam economy as well as Hailakandi District also. The handloom sector is a part of our culture and heritage and one of the largest economic activities after agriculture and providing largest employment opportunity to the both rural and urban areas. The Handloom sector provides livelihood to the people of the State, especially in rural areas. In the words of **Henry Ward Beecher**, “We sleep, but the loom of life never stops, and the pattern which was weaving when the sun went down is weaving when it comes up in the morning”. According to the 4th Handloom Census (2019-20) shows that out of a total of 35.22 lakh handloom workers, 25,46,285 are female and as per Minutes of the meeting of district development committee, Hailakandi 6th May 2024 the registered entrepreneur was 41,466. The Central Government also launch different schemes for development of handloom sectors like National Handloom Development Programme (NHDP), North Eastern Region Textile Promotion Scheme (NERTPS), Handloom Weavers Comprehensive Welfare Scheme (HWCW), 10% Subsidy on Hank Yarn Scheme. However, the handloom Industry has been faced the various problems like inadequate infrastructure, lack of market place, financial problems and lack of trainings etc. The present study is aim to identified the various problems faced by the especially Manipuri women handloom weavers in the Hailakandi district of Assam.

Key Words: *Women handloom weavers, employment opportunity, market place, financial problems, training etc.*

Introduction

The North East India is known as Eight Sisters, they are namely Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura. The eight sisters that make up India's North East Region is around 6 percent of the total population of the country. The maximum of people above 75 percent are live in rural areas. In the words of **Anita Moorjani**, on handloom weavers “In the tapestry of life, we’re all connected. Each one of us is a gift to those arounds us helping each other be who we are, weaving a perfect picture together” and **Carl Sanburg**, “Poetry is a fresh morning spider-web telling a story of moonlit hours of weaving and waiting during a night”.

Handloom industry is a traditional cottage industry in Assam. It plays an important role in economic development and it provides in large scale employment in the both rural and urban areas. Handloom sector is an oldest traditional occupation as well as the largest sector next to agriculture. The fourth major Manipuri community in the district Hailakandi. The Manipuri community is take a large part in this regards. More than 85 percent households of Manipuri community have been engaged in handloom sector fully or partially. Traditionally, weaving in the Manipuri women was for their own use but these days, Manipuri handloom products are very much in demand by other communities in the district. The Manipuri handloom products are namely Kkudei, Fanek, Fi- matek, Haofi, Mufler, Lengyan fi, Thong Parda, Bedsheet, Table cloth etc. For the encouragement of the women handloom weavers the central government has launches several schemes from time to time. That schemes are National Handloom Development Programme (NHDP), North Eastern Region Textile Promotion Scheme (NERTPS), Handloom Weavers comprehensive Welfare Scheme (HWCW), 10% Subsidy on Hank Yarn Scheme and the Government of India in 2015, decided to designate the 7th August every year, as the National Handloom Day. The first National Handloom Day was inaugurated on 7 August 2015 by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Chennai.

Handloom Weavers in Assam

The land of Assam is famous for its silk weaving, a tradition that is said to date back to the 11th century. The Ahomiya kings introduced weaving here by bringing in members of the Tanti community who were traditional weavers. It was royal patronage that established Sualkuchi as a weaving village. Mahatma Gandhi was visited to Assam during the year of 1921 wrote that “Every Assamese woman is a born weaver ... and she weaves fairy tales in her looms”. The Government of Assam has introduced “The Textiles and Apparel Policy, Assam, 2025” for the development steps fostering industrial growth, creating employment opportunities, and ensuring sustainable development in the textile sector, reinforcing Assam's reputation as an emerging hub for textile manufacturing. Assam's silk fabrics have earned immense recognition from all over the world. The state is home to several types of silks, the most prominent and prestigious being muga, the golden silk exclusive to this state. Muga apart, there is paat, and eri, the latter being used in the manufacture of warm clothes.

Objectives of the study

The main objectives of the present study are:

1. To study the profiles of the Manipuri Handloom weavers in the district.
2. To identify the different challenges faced by the Handloom weaver in the district and
3. To offer suggestions for strengthening the Manipuri women handloom weavers.

Methodology

The present study is based on both primary and secondary data. The primary was collected through the well structure questionnaires prepared for the different Manipuri women handloom weavers in the district. The primary data were collected from the sample of 60 registered Manipuri Women Handloom Weavers out of 128 during the period of 2017 to 2022. The secondary data were collected from the MSME and DI&CC published report, different research scholars articles, books, journal and different websites.

Review of Literature

A large number of research works conducted by different researchers, scholars and academicians relating to several dimensions of women handloom weavers and its faced different problems.

Swarqiary, Priyambee & Pegu, Dinesh (2020), in their paper “*Problems And Prospects Of Mising Handloom Weavers: A Micro Level Study In Majuli District, Assam*”.found that weavers faced different problems like Low productivity, Tough competition from power loom sector, Inefficient Marketing, Lack of banking facility etc. **Rao and Srudhar (2017)**, their paper “Problems of Handloom Weavers in Andhra Pradesh”: A Study of Krishna District. found that the study area was different problems such as financial problems, production problems, problems of machineries which decrease productivity, problems of marketing and health of weavers etc. Financial problems of weavers are most crucial one among all. **Baruah and Kour (2015)** in their study “A Study on Economics of Weavers’ Cooperative Societies of Assam” observed that the handloom sector is attacked by several problems such as inadequate technology, unorganised production system, low productivity, inadequate capital, lack of sales and production, lack of marketing place and competition I power looms etc. **Rao and Naqarqu (2012)**, pointed out in an article entitle “A Critique on the Promotion of Handloom Industry” that government deserves all appreciation for designing the schemes of yarn supply at mill gate price but supply is short of requirements. Moreover the yarn supply cost through the scheme is much higher than the prevailing market price. **Mohandas and Sumesh (2016)**, have conducted a study entitled “A study of women entrepreneurs and women empowerment in the textile and garment units in Kerala” which shows in Kerala the majority of the women managed readymade garments manufacturing units are run by owners themselves who are by and large not professionally trained for this purpose. Too many formalities, insufficient security and the delay in getting loans are the major problems related to obtaining loan from financial institutions. **Sangeetha & Charles.(2019)**, examined 120 Handloom wearers' problems and prospects in Thanjavur, Tamilnadu, India. Their research is based on both primary and secondary data using well structured questionnaire and the personal interview. Thei study aims to identified different issues faced by handloom weavers in Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh and found problems are the the power loom, capitalist domination, wages stagnation, and increased yarn price etc.

Profiles of Manipuri Women Handloom Weavers in Hailakandi District of Assam

Hailakandi is a district of Assam. It has four revenue blocks, the district is bounded by the river of Katakhal and Dhaleshwari. The principal linguistic community in the district is the Bengalee. The communities other than Bengali are Manipuri, Nepalies, Khashi etc. The total population of the Hailakandi was 6, 59,296 in 2023, out which Manipuri population was approximately 6700. The Manipuri community have 20 villages in the

Hailakandi district. The main occupation of Manipuri womens are mainly engage in agriculture, handloom, Government job and small scale & cottage industry etc. The institutions in the district are District Industries and Commerce Centre, ITI and Extension Training Centre are main servicing in the district. Hailakandi district is the industrially very backward area with comparison the other districts. However Hailakandi district has been providing several facilities for the growth of women handloom sector. The present study which aim to identified the Manipuri women handloom weavers for their problems and prospects to be become as good as development in the district.

The present study of the Manipuri Handloom Weavers profiles on their age, educational qualification, family background, having training and marital status etc.

1. Age of the Manipuri women handloom weavers

Table – 1

Age	No, of Entrepreneurs	Percentage
Less than 25 years	12	20
26 – 40 Years	32	53.33
41 and above	16	26.67
Total	60	100

Survey conducted by author.

2. Educational Qualifications

Table - 2

Educational Qualifications	No, of Entrepreneurs	Percentage
H,S,L,C	29	48.33
Higher Secondary	21	35
Graduate	06	10
Master Degree	04	6.67
Technical Education	00	00
Total	60	100

Survey conducted by author.

3. Marital Status

The marital status out of 60 Manipuri Women handloom weavers 41 are found married and 29 were unmarried.

4. Family background in business

The family background of Manipuri handloom weavers found only 36 are have good background and 24 are not found good background.

5. Training

Professional as a handloom weaver out of 60 Manipuri women handloom weavers 21 are well trained under the Extension training centre, 11 are trained under the MSME, Imphal and 28 are yet not trained.

Problems of Manipuri Women Entrepreneurs in Hailakandi District

The Manipuri women handloom weavers are very poor percentage with comparison the other communities because of new technology power looms. Even today Manipuri women handloom weavers are use old home making looms. Not only technological looms also faces the raw materials, lack of marketing, lack of financial condition, lack of training etc. The various problems are stand in the way of handloom weavers in the district are as follows:

1. Financial Problems

Finance is the life blood of all business, without sound financial position a business never be success. This is the major problem faced by the all Manipuri women handloom weavers in the district. The under study are Table - 1

Table – 1
Financial Problems

Types of Problems	No. of Entrepreneurs	Percentage
Getting loan from bank and subsidy	38	
Delay in processing by bank	12	
Tight repayment system	10	
Total	60	100

Survey conducted by author.

From the Table no. 1 reveals that 38 highest Manipuri Women handloom weavers were faced getting loan from the bank and subsidy, 12 are faced delay in processing by bank and 10 are faced tight repayment system.

2. Raw Materials

The timely available of raw materials ensures the growth of every enterprises, without raw materials a business never be running successfully. It is also need a reasonable price and also depends on its cost price. Some of the problems faced by the Manipuri women handloom weavers are as Table – 2

Table – 2
Problems of Raw Materials

Types of Problems	No. of Entrepreneurs	Percentage
Transportation	25	41.67
Bandh / Strike	07	11.67
Natural Havocs	06	10
High rate of Yarn	22	36.66
Total	60	100

Survey conducted by author.

From the Table – 2 indicates that Manipuri women handloom weavers are residing in very interior remote area, maximum 25 have faced transportation problems, 22 are faced high rate of raw materials like yarn, 07 were faced bandh or strike and 06 are stated problems faced by uncertain natural havocs.

3. Marketing Problems

This is the major problems faced by the Manipuri women handloom weavers in the district. Their basic problem is also language and katcha road. No yet marketing organisation in the district which can ensure and prompt marketing or cooperative society to collect the goods produced by Manipuri women handloom weavers. Table – 3 shows their problems.

Table – 3
Problems of Marketing

Types of Problems	No. of Entrepreneurs	Percentage
Lack of knowledge how to market	16	26.67
Large number of competition	12	20
Exploitation by the middlemen	10	16.67
Language problems	07	11.66
Lack of sales avenues	15	25
Total	60	100

Survey conducted by author.

From the Table – 3 reveals that maximum of 16 have faced how to market the product and to whom, 15 are faced sales avenues, 12 were faced large number of competition, 10 were exploited by middlemen and 07 are do not know bengalee language.

4. Lack of Training

All the entrepreneurs under study were opinion that out of 60 entrepreneurs only 32 are trained under the Micro Small and Medium Enterprise Imphal and Hilakandi, District Industries & Commerce Centre and Non- Government Organizations and 28 are trained under the their senior.

Suggestions

On the basis of study , certain suggestions have been offered to strengthening the particular Manipuri women handloom weavers in the district. These suggestions are:

- 1. The commercial banks and financial institutions should be opened for providing easy finance to women handloom weavers.
2. The women handloom weavers should have good knowledge and be a good trained on handloom sector.
3. The Government of India have launches various schemes for women handloom sector should be knowledge to the weavers.
4. The Government as well as NGOs should arranged or provide raw materials time to time to the weavers.

5. The commercial banks also provide financial assistance to the women handloom weavers and also be arrange award for successful weavers.
6. MSME, DI&CC and NGOs should be initiate training for unemployed youths especially in rural interior area.
7. The Government and NGOs should arranges exhibition, mela time to time.
8. Specially the Manipuri weavers should learned other language also.
9. The cooperative society should be a good role for women weavers and they should collect their products to sale at the market.

Conclusion

The present study conducted has revealed that Manipuri women handloom weavers are facing large number problems and running their business with no loss no profit basis because of the reason behind for industrial backwardness of the district. The Government should join hands with other to conduct development programmes and guide to the weavers to protect this age old handloom sector. However, changing modern technology with the traditional skill of the weavers, handloom can provide a remunerative livelihood opportunity for the Manipuri women hanloom weavers. The recent initiative by the Government of India and Assam Government shows handloom weaving will be change for better the lives of the Manipuri weavers. Yes, Government should join hands.

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