

# A Study of the Working of the Handloom and Textile Sector of Assam



Source: Textile Review

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**By: Dr. Jatindra Nath Saikia**

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*Handloom is one of the most important cottage industries of Assam. In rural areas, Handloom is regarded as one of the most important activities and most of the rural folks get engaged in weaving activities.*

*Handloom textile cottage industry plays an important role in the socio-economic life of Assamese people, particularly in rural areas of Assam. It is one of the major ways of earning livelihood next to agriculture of Assamese people.' As such the Govt. of Assam is paying more importance for the upliftment of socioeconomic status of the female by launching various schemes relating to handloom and Textile through the Department of Handloom and Textile. (H & T)*

## **Objective of Handloom and Textile Department**

The Directorate of Handloom and Textile, Assam is created by the Govt. of Assam in the year 1983. Previously it was known as the Directorate of Sericulture and Weaving. Weaving has been renamed as the Directorate of Handloom and Textile. The main objectives of this department are mentioned below:

- To upgrade the socio-economic status of poor women living below the poverty line in the rural areas.
- To make them self-dependent.
- To provide various types of looms and accessories and yarn by implementing various schemes relating to weavers.
- To make the women folks of rural areas economically sound empower them in real sense of the term.

## **Types of Garments Produced Through Handlooms in Assam**

There are large varieties of dresses in Assamese culture consisting of more than 100 tribes with their unique dress culture. All these groups are identified by their traditional designs and colours. Various dresses are produced by the Handloom & Textiles department through the Primary Weaving Cooperative Societies. These Societies are controlled by the Handloom and Textile department, Government of Assam. These are Mekhela and Patani (lower garment of woman), Chadar (upper garment of woman), Gmucha (towel) Dhoti, Bed sheet Eri Chadar (warm wrappers) Cheleng chadar, Riha, Woolen shawl, Chadar Mekhala-Jora, Shirting Handkerchief, Muga set, Pat set, etc. using different types of yarn. In tribal areas of Assam, tribal people produce Dokhona (Bodo dresses) Ribigacheng, Missing chadar-mekhala, Galook, Dumer (Missing). In fact, the tribal people of Assam produce their traditional costumes according to their needs through weavers belonging to co-operative societies.

Dresses made of Natural silk (Eri, Muga and Pat) are the part and parcel of Assamese society. The people of the NER of India living in rural areas have been practicing sericulture as one of the activities of livelihood since long. It has been playing vital role in

the rural economy by providing gainful employment opportunities to the poor and backward segments of the region. Moreover, the silk in general and Muga in particular has been associated with the rituals and traditions of Assamese society. So, the production of silk and its usage have become an important household activity. So far as the production of Muga is concerned, Assam's position is always on the top (95%) among the states of the NER of India. Meghalaya, Nagaland and Manipur are the major producers of Eri Silk apart from Assam. Oak Tasar is mainly produced in Manipur though all the states of the NER of India produce certain quality of Mulberry silk.

Assam, the gateway of the NER of India, is also known for producing all the four types of silk. But Assam specializes in producing Muga silk. Muga culture is endemic to Assam since no where in the world Muga is produced except Assam and a small amount in some sates of the NER of India. In this regard the department of Handloom and Textile, Government of Assam has also been helping the weavers and other people engaged in the production of such silk and dresses.

The study has been undertaken to study the workings of Handloom and Textile department, Government of Assam and to suggest measures to develop the sector.

### **Importance of the Study**

The study of Handloom & Textile Department is important because it plays a vital role in providing gainful employment opportunities to the people of Assam. Weaving is the only activity, next to agriculture, which provides livelihood to the people particularly in the rural areas of Assam. Weaving is an influential medium which plays an imperative role in developing the socio- economic status of the economically weaker section in rural areas of Assam.

Moreover, it is very important for Assamese culture to preserve our traditional & homemade dresses. As our dresses serve as a symbol of identify of our culture, it is important for the people of Assam to engage in this sector. Assam is burdened with a large number of unemployed people. But this handloom sector, which is labour intensive, would be able to engage a large number of unemployed people of the state. As has already been mentioned the Muga silk, which is endemic to the North eastern region of India, can be able to engage a large number of unemployed people of the state.

At present, it has been observed that a drive of women empowerment has gained impetus allover the world. Since hand loom sector is women friendly it provides employment opportunities to women to a great extent. So the hand loom sector helps women to be self sufficient and empower with earnings and social status, which is very important for a civilized society. From the above discussion, it can be said that the study of the department of Handloom sector is very important for the benefit of the society as a whole.

### **Problems of Textile Industry**

During the period of our study we have identified a good number of problems that are being faced by the Handloom and Textile industry of Assam. The major problems are mentioned below:

- Shortage of ski lied and expert weavers.
- Lack of capital and credit facilities.
- Lack of processing and finishing facilities

- Weavers concentrate too much on Govt. assistance rather than their own effort.
- Lack of efficient marketing facilities, modern designs, pricing and packaging
- Government schemes are not properly implemented.

**Table 1: Achievement under Central Sector and Centrally Sponsored Programme in Assam**

Name of the Scheme	Weavers Benefited (In. Nos.)	Expenditure in incurred (₹ In lakh)
1. Work shed-cum-Housing	1966	138
2. Deen-Dayal Hathkargha Protsahan Yojana	16400	394.05
3. Project Package Scheme	2552	178.66
4. Integrated Handloom Training Project	N.A.	N.A.

### **B. Under State Sector Scheme**

1. Production of Handloom Fabric (2006-07): 145 Million Meter.
2. Employment: 167000 Nos.
3. Publicity and Advertisement
  - a. District Level Fair: 14 Nos.
  - b. National Handloom Expo Organized: 1 No.

In the next section of the paper the management of the Handloom and Textile department, Government of Assam has been discussed.

### **Role of Management**

In order to complete an activity successfully by a team or a group of people the role of management can never be overlooked. Whatever the nature of work may be, management plays a vital role. If different aspects of the work are not properly monitored we should not expect any good result out of the work. Every team or every group has one or a number of specific objectives to fulfill. In order to fulfill the already determined objective or objectives, the team or the group must be guided, motivated, monitored and directed. The aspect of management is very much in the functions of guiding, motivating, monitoring or directing. It means, to fulfill an objective the team or the group of people must be properly managed. People get engaged in different activities in order to satisfy his or her wants. On the other hand an individual can not complete all the necessary activities himself or herself alone. He or she must join in a group or in the form of an organization.

In this study we are discussing the management aspect of the Handloom and Textile department of Assam by analyzing its functions at different levels.

### **Functions of Handloom and Textile Department, Government of Assam**

The directorate of H & T department of Assam has been working since 1983. Since then the department has been undertaking various schemes for the upliftment and development of hand loom sector of Assam. This department has been extending significant helps to hand loom weavers by assisting them in different ways. As a result of this, a sound infrastructure has been built in the state for both qualitative and quantitative production of handloom garments. In order to develop this sector and to help the weavers,

the Government of Assam has been implementing a number of result oriented programmes.

Some of such major programmes are mentioned below

- Yarn supply.
- Production of cloth in hand loom sector to obtain a reasonable consumer prices.
- Marketing assistance to the weavers and to the cooperative societies engaging in this sector.
- Welfare schemes which also contribute to productivity in the handloom sector.
- Imparting training and education to the weavers and different personnel of the hand loom sector.
- Preservation of traditional handloom culture by encouraging all concerned parties in this sector in different ways
- Enforcement of Handloom reservation Act.

The Directorate exercises control over various organizations such as Assam Apex Weavers and Cooperative Federation (ARTFED), Apex Level Power looms Cooperative Federation (APCOFED) Assam Government Marketing Cooperation Ltd. (AGMC) and Assam Khadi and Village Industrial Board (AKVIB).

In every district, there is an Assistant Director to look after the official and field works of the department. Assistant Director is the superior authority in the district. There are also Clerical staff, Technical staff and Staff of different cooperative societies to help the Assistant Director (A.D). Technical staff consists of one inspector, one instructor, and two demonstrators in the Handloom Training Centers. The Cooperative staff consists of senior/junior inspector or auditors who take care of the Primary Weaving Cooperative Societies (P.W.C.S), District level cooperative societies and the branch of ARTFED. The senior/junior inspector or auditor is responsible for inspection, enquiry, supervision, audit, organization etc. of Primary Weaving Cooperative Societies and District Level Cooperative Societies. In fact they keep a vigil on the development of cooperative movement. In this way, Cooperative staff helps the A.D. in the smooth functioning of the office as well as the upliftment of the socio-economic status of the economically weaker women of the society.

Moreover, there is one Circle Inspector also along with three or four demonstrators in the office of A.D. to look after the technical works, different Government schemes.

In Handloom Production Centers, there is one Superintendent, one inspector, one instructor and two or three demonstrators for managing the functions of the Production Centers.

The office of the Assistant Director of Handloom and Textile is yet to be established in the districts of Bongigaon, Dhemaji, Morigaon, Golaghat, Tinsukia and Hailakandi. These offices are looked after by the Superintendent of Handloom & Textile who is Sub-divisional Level Officer.

### **Sub-Divisional Offices**

In every sub-division, there is an office of the Superintendent of Handloom and Textile, headed by a Superintendent of H & T department. He is responsible for execution of all schemes taken for development of hand loom and power loom sector of the sub-division.

The superintendent is assisted by the inspector of H & T (Circle), Deputy Handloom Officer and one or more senior or junior inspector, auditor, cooperative inspector and demonstrator of H& T department.

Sub-divisional offices are yet to be established in the following sub-divisions- Bilashipara, Bajali, Dhakuakhana Margherita Bokakhat Kaliabar, Nazira Dhansiri and Gahpur.

### **Suggestions**

- 1) The Handloom and Textiles Department, Assam should take up necessary steps to organize workshops and seminars on co-operative education frequently to make the weaver member of co-operative societies aware and educate on cooperation.
- 2) The Handloom and Textiles Department, Assam should pay special attention in implementing different Govt. sponsored schemes in real sense of the term. They should keep a vigil on the funds that are sanctioned to different cooperative societies and the selection of the societies for implementing the government schemes should be based on the past performance of the societies.
- 3) The H & T department, Assam should take various motivating programmes such as rewarding the highest profit earning Primary Weaving Cooperative Societies (PWCS) in the district level. A competitive spirits should also be injected to the leaders of different cooperative societies in order to bring a positive change.
- 4) Though the state Govt. has provided marketing assistance to the weaving co-operative societies which can not be regarded as sufficient. EXPOS and Trade fairs should be organized in different districts at least twice in a year.
- 5) Proper training on weaving using well-developed looms, developed design, dying system should be imparted to the weavers frequently. Apart from imparting training, the uses of Jacquard and Draw-boy loom should be given to the weavers of weaving cooperative societies, working under the Handloom & Textile department, Assam.
- 6) The Handloom & Textile department, Assam can open its departmental store or showroom for selling the products produced by weaving co-operative societies working under it.
- 7) Other Government agencies like Assam Government Marketing Cooperation (A.G.M.C) and ARTFED should also take more helpful steps in marketing the products of weaving co-operative societies of Assam.
- 8) To keep alive our handloom cottage industry in Assam it is necessary to inspire new generation to take weaving as a profession. It is very shameful for us that now-a-days Gamucha which is like the symbol of Assamese culture, is being imported to Assam from others states such as Tamilnadu, Karnataka, Orissa etc. As soon as possible it should be stopped by filling the gap of requirements with local products.
- 9) Besides producing only our traditional dresses modern dresses such as ladies western suit, chelwar suit, jacket etc. should also be produced through the department of Handloom & Textile, Assam to develop their products' market and for this it is very necessary to seek the help of high level fashion designers.

- 10) The concerned personnel of this department should also be given training of Marketing Management, General Management, Accounting, Finance, Human Resource Management, Salesmanship etc.
- 11) The most important aspect, in my view, is to study the taste and preferences of the modern consumers and accordingly different dresses should be made. Without being emotional, the weavers and the concerned persons of this sector should try to accept the reality.
- 12) The Government officials should be made to be sincere, dedicated, uncorrupted and efficient by a strict law. Then every rupee sanctioned in this sector would be properly utilized.
- 13) The department should ensure the remunerative wages for the weavers and more and more developmental as well as welfare schemes should be implemented in real sense of the term.
- 14) The department should be transparent and the government should ensure proper governance in the department. Those who are found to be corrupted should be given exemplary punishment.

## Conclusion

Handloom and Textile department of Assam is definitely a very important government department of Assam, which has been trying to sustain and develop the weaving culture of Assam. Though almost all the Assamese people living in rural areas are well acquainted with the weaving job, the people of Sualkuchi are especially expert in this weaving culture. This weaving culture and the handlooms are kept alive by the people of Sualkuchi since long.

The word "Bowa-Kata" is inseparably related to the Assamese people. It was regarded as a very shameful matter for Assamese women if someone does not know how to weave in the past. The alludes the instance of the Assamese women who were weaving armours within a night for their husbands enabling them to take part in battle. It is a tradition of Assamese people offering Gamucha and Bihuan to the seniors and beloved respectively at the time of Bohag Bihu -the national festival of Assam celebrated in the spring. Such customs reminded us that the weaving is running in the blood of Assamese women from time immemorial. Assamese women have a reputation of earning livelihood by virtue of weaving for maintaining their families. Therefore it is sure that weaving has gained a great importance in the Assamese society since long.





But now the time has changed. The life style of people has also changed as soon as the change of time. This change has influenced the dress materials, style of wearing, the fashion, the system of life style of Assamese society. We have lost our original characteristics because of the adoption of the changes. Assamese weavers have forgotten the old cultures, tradition, and dream of becoming the dream weavers. It is also true that to adjust ourselves as per the demands of the changes we have to give up some of our old systems. But it does not mean that we have to forget our traditional originality and characteristics for adjusting ourselves to the new atmosphere.

We have to try hard to bring weaving to such an extent that our past glory and reputation in weaving would be appreciated again in the world. We should try our level best to regain our past golden history of weaving by producing the best quality fabrics which can complete in the International market. The department of Handloom and Textile, Assam and weaving cooperative societies working under this department can take major initiative bringing back the pride, glory and reputation.

## References

1. Information collected from the Director of Sericulture, Govt. of Assam, Khanapara, Guwahati.
2. Information collected from the Director of Handloom and Textile department, Government of Assam, Guwahati, Assam.

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