

# ISSUES AND PROSPECTS OF THE WOMEN HANDLOOM WEAVER: A SMALLER-SCALE LEVEL INVESTIGATION OF LAKHIMPUR LOCALE IN ASSAM

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## Abstract:

The paper investigates the issues and prospects of Handloom Weavers of the Lakhimpur region in Assam for the financial upliftment of the individuals. Ladies overwhelm the handloom weaving occupation in Assam yet men are likewise partaking in weaving like other spots of India and ladies are associated with pre-weaving exercises. The ladies' handloom weaver in Assam plays out various jobs to create handloom items. Ladies weaver of Assam laid their hard work in working physically. As a casual segment occupation, the ladies weaver jams culture and legacy to delivering customary materials in Assam.

The Handloom area assumes a considerable job in India's economy. It is a small amount of culture and legacy of a customary society in India and the biggest limit of retaining pay sources after the agrarian field for country individuals.

The Assamese indigenous network has a rich custom of weaving. An Assamese lady, regardless of being occupied with horde family exercises as the day progressed, is probably going to invest some energy in her loom each day. The ladies make articles of clothing, for the most part for regular use, on handlooms. They additionally weave tasteful items for unique events. Be that as it may, presently a day's Assamese ladies weave for the business reason as well. The customary toss transport loom is built under the conventional brace house. Through a repetitive procedure, the weavers produce wraps like *mekhela chador*, *Riha*, *ari cheleng*, *cheleng chador*, *stoles* like *gamosa*, other than some utilitarian things. Anyway, the handloom segment has still incapable to give fulltime business chances to the Assamese ladies artesian subsequently the Weaving is anything but feasible employment for them because of specific issues.

**Keyword:** Traditional weaving, women empowerment, Handloom weaver

## Introduction:

The Handloom sector has given a significant commitment to the Indian economy. It is an element of our way of life and legacy which gives one of the biggest monetary exercises after horticulture having the limit of engrossing a more prominent number of labor. The handloom part has given direct work to more than 65 lakh individuals in India which ladies are having a place 60.40% in 2009-10. It contributes about 19% of the complete material created in India and an advantage extensively to trade pay. The Handloom production of India is known for around the world. The different great handloom production of India are as Assam's silk textures, Silk Brocades of Varanasi, the tie and color results of Rajasthan and Orissa, the cotton and silk material from Tamilnadu, Madhubani crafts of Bihar, the prints of Farrukhabad, the Maheshwari sarees of Madhya Pradesh and the Patola sarees of Baroda.

The handloom segment in India gives a huge work age as a casual part. According to the Third National Handloom Census of Weavers and Allied Workers 2010, there are 23.77 lakh handlooms in the nation, giving work to 43.32 lakh handloom weavers and subordinate laborers. This incorporates 38.47 lakh grown-up handloom weavers and subordinate specialists, of which 24.72 lakh are locked in full time and 13.75 lakh on low maintenance premises.

Handloom weaving is one of the significant family units' exercises after farming in rustic Assam. Essentially it's restricted to ladies part of the general public and the Assamese people are demonstrated their skill in this recorded. The vast majority of the Assamese families have been occupied with handloom exercises completely or mostly. Customarily, weaving in the Assamese people group was for their utilization. In the current circumstance, Assamese handloom items are much popular and they produce in business reason as well. Their handloom items are wraps like *mekhela chador* and *gero*, *Mibu-Galog (male shirt)*, *stoles* like *gamosa*, and *Muffler*. Other than the customary wraps, presently the ladies weave cloaks, stoles, decorative liners, draperies, texture for a shirt, and kurtas in differing structure and shading blends. Lakhimpur is one of the noteworthy locales in Assam for creation silk, muga and so on it is situated in the north bank stream of Brahmaputra with Latitude 27.2064'N and longitude 94.1514'E. Concurring 2011 evaluation all out population of the Lakhimpur district is around ten lakh forty-two thousand one hundred thirty-seven individuals with a topographical region of 2277 sqkm. The populace of the Lakhimpur area

involves the ancestral, non-ancestral, and plan to stand. The ancestral network incorporates the *Mising*, *Deuri*, *Ahom*, and the *Sonowal kacharies*. The financial status of this area isn't sufficiently sound. Although their word related structure is commanded by horticulture, anyway all practically every individual family is probably going to invest some energy in handloom weaving. By and by, the handloom result of Assamese ladies is meant as developing the business sector in the state just as outside of the state. In this paper, a modest endeavor has been made to talk about the issues that are defined by the weavers.

**Aims and objectives:**

The expansive targets of the current investigation are three:

- To the investigation of the financial state of ladies handloom weavers
- To distinguish the imperatives and troubles looked by the handloom weavers.
- To assess the possibilities of the Assamese customary handloom segment.

**Methodology of the study:**

The spellbinding procedure has been utilized in the current examination paper. The examination is essentially founded on essential information. It is additionally utilized of auxiliary information for better examination. The essential information is gathered through close to home meetings with a very much planned poll. Auxiliary information sources are viz. books, articles, diary alongside government records. The distributed reports resemble Statistical Hand Book, Assam, Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Govt. of Assam; Economic Survey, Assam; National Handloom Census of India 2019.

The all-out example size of the current examination is 50 individual handloom and the examples are suffocating purposively from the two advancement squares of the Lakhimpur area, to be specific Ghilamara Development Block and Dhakuakhana Development Block for research reason. Auxiliary information was gathered from both distributed and unpublished books.

**Discussion and results:**

The handloom area is a noteworthy commitment to the financial improvement of the individuals in Assam. The conventional weaving aptitudes are advance and jelly of the monetary state of the Assamese handloom weavers. It is one of the kind chances to give work to a huge number of country family units. The Handloom weaving is the second most elevated work openings after rural exercises. The report of the Fourth National Handloom Census of Weavers and Allied Workers 2019 uncovers that it was more than 31.44 lakh handlooms in the nation which giving work to more than 43.32 lakh handloom weavers and strengthening laborers.

It is seen that an enormous number of issues are looked at by the handloom weaver in Assam. The issues have been seen as low profitability, low wages, and lack of education condition, the association of brokers, and low correspondence with a budgetary organization or bank. Despite these issues, handloom weaver has attempted to create their work condition. The strategy producer and others are contemplating in what manner souls of the handloom business can. Since it witnesses that the handloom business has decreased of seriousness in the most recent couple of years. Be that as it may, customary Handloom weavers have enhanced to new thought and plan for the resuscitation of endurance and business in rivalry time. The Fourth All India Handloom Census uncovers that the absolute family unit of handloom weaver was expanded in contrast with the third enumeration in the Indian setting. The expanded number 31.45 lakhs structure 27.83 lakhs in the period. The Government of India has shown a significant drive to an expanded number of handloom weavers. Something else, the state of Assamese handloom weaver is additionally sound. The handloom weaving exercises and creations are notable in the period. It is appended with handloom weaving in different networks in Lakhimpur district in Assam. It uncovered that the handloom weaving was a significant business occupation in the country individuals of the Lakhimpur area in Assam. As an occupation, it is seen in different issues among the handloom weavers. In a customary occupation, the informal disposition, absence of competitiveness, low financial condition, and absence of market arranged exercise experience made difficulty among the handloom weavers. The following are some serious issues by and faced by the handloom weaver.

- Production, Employment, and Income:

It is examined that the nature of handloom production, employment, and economic contribution of handloom are identified as hindrances of the growth in Handloom product. Handloom Census 2010 reveals that the contribution of household income is only 19 percent handloom weaver in northeast India which is low at the national level. The national level is belonging 58 percent. Thus, it has needed to increase the average working hours for more income in Assam. The reports revealed that the handloom workers have involved working on an average of 140 days in the region. Otherwise, it is involved 245 days a year in other parts of India. It witnesses that Handloom weavers are

dominated to household fabrication about 62 percent in the area and the numbers of workers are working on a part-time basis. Otherwise, only commercial handloom productions are fabricated in the other States of India. The area has the highest proportion of redundant looms in India. As almost half (45.9 percent) of weavers worked in domestic production and thus, there is low productivity. Hence contribution from handlooms to household income remains marginal. However, the traditional weavers are supported by the family by supplying clothes that they are producing. The household has used these products for daily wear, festivals, and ceremonies. It is witnessed that the handloom weavers are primarily engaged in commercial production in comparison to other states. Thus, Assam has recorded low productivity. The low productivity of handlooms was on account of four factors.

- Nature of work pattern
- Technology
- Management and
- Market structure

For the growth of the handlooms sector, the impediments have to be addressed with government support and mobilisation of weavers to change their attitude towards more productivity. There is low access of mills and power looms, so there is less threat in the region. With proper intervention in terms of market access and organisation of weavers, the sector can be a source of livelihood for women who are either educated or uneducated. Besides this, handlooms being viewed as a cultural accomplishment, 30 percent of handlooms households in the region reported preferring their children to follow this traditional occupation.

A study of 50 handloom weavers in the study area revealed that the average monthly wages earned from weaving differ depending upon the nature of works. Comparing self-employed weavers, to weavers working under merchant and weavers working in cooperative societies it was found that the weavers working under the merchants get lower wages while the self-employed get more wages. The organization of weavers would serve as a mechanism to address such problems related to gender and household work-related problem, for justification of lower wages paid to the female workers.

- Dynamics of Change

It clearly witness that the enterprising handloom weavers have been pushed up to adopt modern technology. Yet, the scheme does not mention any measures to strengthen institutions such as weavers' cooperative societies that protect the interest of weavers. Thus, the new government policies that focused on the liberalization, modernisation, and globalisation of the industry ignored the livelihood issues about lakhs of traditional handloom weavers. The problem of the weaving industry which had often been an issue of handlooms versus power looms is no longer valid. With the liberalization of the market, the issue now is how to safeguard small and vulnerable sections from the big and strong segments. Weavers need to upgrade their skill and technology levels to face the changing market structure.

Both the government and weavers should become partners to derive benefits from government schemes, infrastructure development, diversification of products, and markets. For handloom products, designs add value and price of the cloth. With no training and inadequate infrastructure, weavers find it difficult to use the available designs in catalogs. As the market is globalized, the region also imports clothes and other textiles at a cheap rate from neighboring States and countries like Myanmar and Bangladesh. Thus, traditional weavers were lagging to cost, durability, and design in their products. On the other hand, male traders, especially the Marwaris handled the market. They also sometimes worked as cloth merchants. While they exported the finished products to places like Delhi and Rajasthan, exhibiting a broad marketing strategy, the restriction on women's mobility forced local weavers to struggle in the local market. Due to marketing problems, weavers sometimes prefer to work under merchant weaver despite getting low wages. The earnings from handloom are also used in household expenditure, hence can't invest in weaving business. Though financial institutions are ready to give loans, weavers hesitate to take loans, as they are not certain about their income. Other problems are the lack of adequate stalls in the market and lack of quality control. To solve the problems some weavers produce only after getting the order or organize *mela*, a process where weavers played the role of a producer, organizer, and distributor. It made the weavers economically secure and also helped the customers by allowing them to buy in bulk on an installment basis. This entrepreneurial spirit is a new development among the weavers.

- Social Significance of Handlooms and women handlooms weaver

In the primitive phase, people are depended on various occupations like huntsman, food gathering, and ancestors' care of women. But in the present phase, Women are working to produce several crafts like pot making, leather making, house building, and also the technique of cordage weaving. Cordage weaving is the initiating stage of the entire sequence of huge fabric engineering. Thus, women should be credited with developing the physics of spinning and the mechanism of the loom. Handloom has developed as a decentralized occupation consists of cloth productions.

The hand-woven textile played a significant role in making social and cultural identity, rituals, and habitat of the people in Assam. It is used in a ceremonial occasion or decorative piece in a different special social event. It also needs to gratify on the special occasion of family. The handwoven cotton Ghomsa is a significant product of Handloom ladies weaver in Assam. The Ghomsa is symbolized respect and honour in our society which offers to welcome the guest on special occasions. The wedding couple is offering Ghomsa to the elders during the time of marriage for showing respect and blessings. Handwoven design Ghomsa is an integral part of any special occasion like marriage, Bihu, etc. in Assam. Weaving is a criterion of gunwati women in traditional society. It is also one of the criteria for the selection of a companion. The weaving skills are an impact on the livelihood of the rural family of Assam. Thus, the inhabitant is focused to empower weaving skill of women. In that concern, the tribal family has preferred to empower hand weaving skills of girls.

The traditional weaving silk products are famous in the weaving of Sualkuchi village in Assam. It is the economic strength of the family in Sualkuchi village. The weaver of Lakhimpur district is also depending on handloom weaving for economic strength like Sualkuchi village. Thus, the dynamics changing handloom weaving is brought the conflict of interest in ladies' handloom weaver in that village. Last few years, it is observed that some of the conflicts are started between the local weaver and local import product sellers. The major example is incidents of violence of Sualkuchi village violence in 2013.

The modernization of the textile industry has posed a threat to The Handlooms weaver in Assam. It is led to the high production of cloth competitively. The capitalist policies of textile are challenged to handloom weaver on behalf of discriminative and exploitative nature. In that concern, Gandhi is focused on symbolized handspun for self-respect. It has played a significant role war of Independence in India. After Independence, handloom weaver became the symbol of all decentralized industries and caught a great deal of attention from the government. Later on, under the Right of Articles for Production Act, 1985, 22 articles were exclusively reserved for production in handlooms and set up unions or cooperative structures.

**Problems of Handloom weaver:**

Given the above background of handloom weaver has faced different major challenges which are mention below:

**Raw Material Constraints:**

Easy availability of yarn at reasonable prices remains a persistent problem for weavers across the country, especially Assam also. Independent weavers have faced different problems like delivery of yarn, economic backwardness. Otherwise, they also belong to the informal sector.

**Sparse Credit exposure:**

A majority of handloom weavers operate outside the fold of institutionalized financing. Of the total households surveyed in nearly 44.6% were dependent on Master Weavers for their credit requirements, while 13.4% still relied upon moneylenders. Only 14.8% had access to institutionalized sources of credit. Further, the lack of even rudimentary financial literacy aggravates the existing credit-related obstacles faced by the weavers.

**Weak Organizational planning:**

The cooperative model of handloom weaving has not been successful in general and covers only about 15% of total weavers in the study area. There are three categories of handloom weaving in India. These areas mentioned below: first category states with the strong cooperative network- AP, TN, Karnataka, Kerala, and Himachal Pradesh; second, states where the weaving activity is strong but short term cooperatives are weak - UP, Odisha, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh; and third, states of the northeast where weaving activity is strong but institutions are missing.

**Low productivity of handloom:**

Low productivity has been witnessing in the traditional handloom weaver as comparing to the power loom sector. Although, huge demand for these products, the weavers are unable to supply that much of products. As a result, their annual earning becomes very low and hence they cannot take handloom as their sole livelihood.

**Tough competition from power loom sector:**

The time and efforts in the traditional loom are more than the power loom sector. The power loom sector can produce more products at lower cost and effort. Hence, the power loom sector can sell their products at a lower price than that of the traditional loom sector. As a result, the handloom sector has faced challenges from the power loom sector. Otherwise, the traditional loom is far away from quality and quantity in competitive nature.

**Inefficient Marketing:**

An inefficient Marketing system is another vital problem of the handloom weaving sector. There is no uniformity of their products regarding quality, prices, and designs. However, there is no uniform authority to decide to fix the prices of their products. The middle man has decided to sell the prices of handloom products to the interest of them. The actual weavers are deprived of this process. They sell their product in the local market only. However some middlemen are selling their products in different exhibitions or mela etc. Timely marketing of the products and

regular cash flow to the weavers remains a challenge. To overcome it, the marketing channel will have to be strengthened and better organized.

**Lack of banking facility:**

The traditional handloom weaver households have unable to get banking loan to expand their loom to a large scale. The banking authority also regrets to offer banking facility towards the traditional weavers. It is also found that only 45% of weavers have a bank account and remaining is out of the ambit of banking. However, they are unable to govt. subsidy for their empowerment.

**Lack of research and development:**

The traditional handloom products have been a huge demand for their unique features. The modern power loom products are cannot fully be replaced by these products. However, it is a big scope for the enhancement of this particular sector. It is needed some extents of research and development. But there is hardly found research and development activities in this regard.

**Lack of training facility:**

This particular sector has special as it has nurtured traditional skills in modern times. Hence, it's the need for time to providing training and awareness programs on handloom weave and the traditional skill to the new generation. However, the new generation is hardly interest in this traditional skill.

**Illiteracy among the weavers:**

From the sample survey, it's found that more than 35% percent weavers are illiterate and hence they are inability to come up with new products. They are unaware of the possibilities and challenges that may come in the sector shortly.

**Lack of market-oriented products:**

It's another important problem in the handloom sector. The weavers are producing their products to just fulfill their own needs of cloths. Their outlook of regard to the marketing of handloom products is not so much liberal. As a result, they are hardly interested to modify their product to market-oriented.

**Prospects of Traditional Handloom Sector:**

The handloom weaver of Lakhimpur district is rich in traditional products of handloom. Some of the major traditional handloom products are mekhela chador, during special occasions such as weddings and festivals. Hence, the products are in great demand among people residing in Assam as well as outside the state. However, handloom weaving has not taken off as a thriving source of livelihood for various reasons. Based on the observation, the study has postulated the following prospects:

- **Generating more Income:**

The handloom weaving is income-oriented activities. As a low capital intensive, it is no need for huge capital investment. Thus, it is a suitable sector for the growth of the economy in the state. Handloom weaving is primarily labor-intensive and highly women's involvement. So, it provides subsidiary income to the rural people of the state. Thus, these industries have great potentiality about bringing up the per capita income and standard of living of the artisan.

- **Providing Employment Opportunity:**

Handloom sector can provide huge employment opportunity and the highly skilled ladies weavers can also get full employment opportunities through produced increased products on a large scale basis. The specialization and modernization of the weaving sector would raise the demand for its products and tools. Thus, the increased production of handloom would enlarged of widen scope market and weaver skill and quality.

- **Associate with Entrepreneurship:**

The process of industrialization has promoted industrial development. The growth of entrepreneurship is depending on the industrialization process. It has contributed to providing income and employment opportunities for the people. It is a huge potentiality to develop entrepreneurship in the availability of the local resources. Thus, it is observed that the traditional handloom products have a good prospect for development through diversification of the product and process modernization. The local ladies weavers are need of market professionals; require education, investment, research and development, modern technology, design and product development, credit facilities, proper workplaces, market access, and most importantly social acceptance.

- **Cultural Importance:**

The traditional handloom weaving has cultural importance in Assamese people and will survive as long as the existence of its culture. The various product of handloom is associated with the religious utility of Assamese society. So, as it has the spiritual importance of society, the modern large scale products have no chance to occupy the market of this loom product.

**Suggestion:**

The different suggestions are mention below:

- **More Specialization and Classification:**

A little bit of modernization of handloom weaving is a necessary step towards better market access. The specialization and modernization of the handloom sector would raise the demand for its products, and consequently, the production of Assamese weavers will get enlarged and this sort of enlargement will widen the scope of market and entrepreneur's quality and skill.

- **Providing Credit facility:**

Banking inclusion and financial assessment towards the handloom weavers is another important step for the development of this sector. Government and concerned authorities should give priority in the matter of financial allotment to these marginalized sections of the society. Interest-free credit or concession on credit should be provided to them in case of lending loan and complicated loan procedures should also be removed.

- **Construction of Cooperatives Society:**

The problems of marketing, raw materials, and finances can be solved through the formation of co-operative societies. The establishment of co-operative societies is essential for changing the socio-economic conditions of this marginalized section.

- **Training and Skill Enhancement Programme:**

For the development of handloom weaving a systematic training facility is necessary. To produce a quality product, the government, as well as non-government organizations, should initiate various programs for the artisans.

- **Better Market Facility:**

Development of the market system is another important measure of handloom weavers. For this better transport and communication facilities to link villages and other market places of Assam is essential.

**Conclusion:**

The Assam is taking a place in the national map for the handlooms sector and it could find a niche market if proper planning and policies are framed. Women weavers though largely dominated the handlooms sector in Assam, with changing market structure and competition, they face conflict and compromise. They are still using manual looms with low technology base which affects production. If appropriate action is not taken, then there is a fear of replacing the handloom products with imported materials. The responsibility is also with designers to focus on the handloom products instead of western garments to bring back a proud tradition. There is an appearance of feminism in Assam hereditary society which encourages women to be self-reliant, economically active, and collectively powerful. Thus, they felt that engaging in weaving which is a traditional feminine occupation increased their socio-economic status instead of sitting idle at home. However, a strong working organization among the weavers was lacking to safeguard their security and fight their rights in society. Mobilisation for forming weaver organizations may enable them to get government schemes, health insurance, credit, and market linkages. Efforts need to be made to make the cooperative society sustainable and effective. Increasing productivity by working full time rather than part-time will make handlooms production more sustainable for livelihood. Weaving being a traditional feminine occupation, many women, be they educated or illiterate, got jobs in this sector. Therefore, with suitable public policies for this sector, large employment opportunities can be created for the women in Assam. This will give an immense opportunity for raising the socio-economic status of the women in Assam.

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