

Problems And Prospects Of Mising Handloom Weavers: A Micro Level Study In Majuli District, Assam

. Priyambee Swargiary & Dinesh Pegu

Abstract: Assam's indigenous tribal community Mising has a rich tradition of weaving. A Mising woman, despite being engaged in myriad household activities through the day, is likely to spend some time on her loom every day. The women make garments, mainly for everyday use, on handlooms. They also weave classy products for special occasions. But now a day's Mising women weave for business purpose too. The traditional throw shuttle loom is built under the traditional stilt house. Through a tedious process, the weavers produce wraps like mekhela chador and gero, stoles like gamosa, besides some utilitarian items. However the handloom sector has still unable to provide fulltime employment opportunities to the Mising artisan hence the Weaving is not a viable livelihood for them due to certain problems.

Index Terms: Handloom-Weaver, Mising-Community, Woman empowerment, Self-sufficiency, Livelihood, sustainable development etc

1. INTRODUCTION

Handloom weaving is the second most households' activities next to the agriculture in rural Assam. Basically it's confined to women part of the society and the tribal communities are shown their expertise in this filed. The second major tribe of Assam, the Mising community is mentionable in this regards. More than 90% percent households of Mising community have been engaged in handloom activities fully or partially. Traditionally, weaving in the Mising community was for their own use but these days, Mising handloom products are much in demand and they produce in business purpose too. Their handloom products are wraps like mekhela chador and gero, Mibu-Galog (male shirt), stoles like gamosa and Muffler. Besides the traditional wraps, now the women weave shawls, stoles, table cloths, curtains, fabric for shirt and kurtas in diverse design and colour combinations. Majuli, the largest River Island of India is became the first island district of India in 2016. Located in the river Brahmaputra with Latitude 26.57°0"N and longitude 94.10°0"E. According 2011 census total population of the island is approximately one lakh seventy three thousands with geographical area of 352km². Population of Majuli comprises of the tribal, non-tribal and schedule caste. The tribal community includes the Mising, Deuri and the Sonowal kacharies. The Mising tribe is major tribe residing in the district. They comprise almost 40% of the total population of the district. Socio-economic status of this section is not sound enough. Though their occupational structure is dominated by agriculture, however all most every individual household are likely to spent some time on handloom weaving. Presently, the handloom product of Mising's signifies as emerging market in the state as well as outside of the state. However due to certain hurdles the sector has unable to expand their market base and that is why the Mising weavers are cannot take weaving as their viable livelihoods. In this paper a humble attempt has been made to discuss the problems that confronted by the weavers.

2 OBJECTIVES:

1. To identify the constraints and difficulties faced by the handloom weavers households in Majuli.
2. To evaluate the prospects of Traditional handloom unit in economic development;

3 METHODOLOGY:

An empirical and analytical methodology has used in the present research paper and the paper is quantitative in nature. The study is basically based on primary data; however the secondary data also collected for better look into the study. The required primary data are collected from the sample households through personal interview with the well scheduled questionnaire. The total sample size of the present study is 66 individual handloom and the samples are drowning purposively from the two development blocks of Majuli, namely Majuli Development Block and Ujoni Majuli Development Block for research purpose. Secondary data were collected from both published and unpublished books. The published reports are like, Statistical Hand Book, Assam, Directorate of Economics & Statistics, Govt. of Assam; Economic Survey, Assam; National Handloom Census of India 2019.

4 Discussion and result:

The handloom sector is special as it nurtures and preserves ancient weaving skills which are unique to each state and region and also provides employment to large number of rural households. The handloom sector in India is a major employment generating sector after agriculture. As per the Forth National Handloom Census of Weavers and Allied Workers 2019, there are more than 31.44 lakh handlooms in the country, providing employment to more than 43.32 lakh handloom weavers and ancillary workers Further 90% of the handloom weaver household in the North Eastern Region (NER) are weaver households.

The sector has been witnessing with low productivity, low wages, low literacy levels, firmly entrenched middlemen and very little formal bank finance flowing to the sector. Large numbers of people including policy makers believe that the handloom industry is declining. However, the resilience which handloom weavers continue to show in terms of survival and ability to innovate indicates that the handloom sector can still be revived. According to the Fourth all India Handloom Census, the total number of households in India Engaged in

- Priyambee Swargiary, Research Scholar, Dibrugarh University Dibrugarh, Assam, PH-8724916072. E-mail: priyambeeswargiary701@gmail.com
- Dinesh Pegu, Assistant Professor in Department of Economics, Majuli College, Majuli, Assam. PH-9101541314. E-mail: dineshpegumc@gmail.com

Handloom activities is 31.45 lakhs which was only 27.83 lakhs in the third census. The main reason behind this increase is the various initiatives undertaken by the Government of India. The state Assam is well known for his handloom and weaving activities. The various tribes of Assam have been attached in this special sector. According to the latest all India Handloom Census, out of total Handloom weavers, approximately 19% percent are Schedule Tribes and more than 88% weavers' household from rural area. Along with the other economic activity many tribal women are taking handloom weaving as their major livelihood. However this sector has been witnessed many problems in operational level. In general, Some of the important drawbacks of this sector are economic recession, tough competition from power loom sector, changing choices of customers etc., and partly due to factors internal to the handloom sector like inability of the weavers to come up with new products, designs, market oriented production, etc. Following are the some major problems presently confronted by the handloom weaver.

1. Low productivity:

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

2. Tough competition from power loom sector:

The time and efforts in the traditional loom is 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 lower cost than that of traditional loom sector. However, the power loom sector has been enjoying economics of scale and their quantity of sale is higher than the traditional loom sector.

3. Inefficient Marketing:

Inefficient Marketing system is another important problem of handloom weaving sector. There is no uniformity of their products regarding quality, prices and designs. However, there is no any authority that can fixes prices of their products. The middle man who selling their product is fixes the prices according to their own fervors. The actual weavers are deprived of this process. They sale their product in local market only. However some middle man sale their products in different exhibitions or mela. 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.

4. Lack of banking facility:

The handloom weaver households have unable get banking loan to expansion their loom to a large scale. The banking authority also regrets to offer backing facility towards the traditional weavers. It is also found that only 65% weavers have bank account and remaining are out of ambit of banking. However, presently there are many schemes have initiated to helps to them.

5. Lack of research and development:

The traditional handloom products have been huge demand for their unique features. The modern power loom products are cannot fully replaced by these products. However for enhancement of this particular sector its needs some extents of research and development. But there is hardly found research and development activities in this regards.

6. Lack of training facility:

This particular sector has special as it has nurtures the traditional skills in the modern time. Hence, its needs of time to providing training and awareness program on handloom weave and traditional skill to the new generation. However, the new generation is hardly interest on this traditional skill.

7. Illiteracy among the weavers:

From the sample survey it's found that more than 55% percent weavers are illiterate and hence they are inability to come up with new products. They are unaware about the possibilities and challenges that may come in the sector in near future.

8. 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 regarding marketing of handloom products is not so much liberal. As a results they are hardly interest to modify their product so as to market oriented.

PROSPECTS OF TRADITIONAL HANDLOOM SECTOR:

In Assam, women feel proud to wear Mising handloom products, especially 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. But using simple technology and adapting to market needs, Mising women have made the prospects of handloom weaving looking bright. Based on the observation, the study has postulated following prospects:

1. GENERATING INCOME:

The handloom can be income oriented sector and it's low capital intensive, no needs of huge capital hence this is suitable for the growth of economy in state. The sector is basically labour-intensive and basically confined to women. 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.

2. Providing Employment Opportunity:

Handloom sector can provide huge employment opportunity and the highly skilled artisan can get full-employment opportunity through producing highly demanded products on large scale basis. The specialization and modernization of this activity will raise the demand of its products, and consequently production of handloom will get enlarged and this sort of enlargement will widen the scope of market and entrepreneur's quality and skill. With the growth of this industry, the migration of labour force from the rural areas can also be checked.

3. Development of Entrepreneurship in the State:

The process of development of a country highly depends on the industrial development and the industrialization is partially depending on the growth of entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurship development has made significant contribution in providing income and employment opportunity to a large number of persons. Depending on the local resources availability, there is huge potentiality of entrepreneurship developments in the state. It is observed that the traditional handloom products has good prospect for development through diversification of the product and process modernization. Future prospect of handloom sector with respect to employment generation depends upon certain

considerations regarding its modernization keeping in view its demand. In fact the local artisans need what is called market professionals; require education, investment, research and development, modern technology, design and product development, credit facilities, proper work places, market access and most importantly social acceptance, and thereafter, we can expect a favorable effect on this sector.

4. Cultural Importance:

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

5. SUGGESTION:

1. Specialization and Classification:

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

2. Providing Credit facility:

Banking inclusion and financial assessment towards the handloom weavers is another important step for development of this sector. Government and concerned authority 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 procedure should also be removed.

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

5. Training and Skill Enhancement Programme: For the development of handloom weaving a systematic training facility is necessary. In order to produce quality product, government as well as non-government organizations should initiate various programmes for the artisans.

6. Better Market Facility: Development of 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 entire North-Eastern region there is more than 90 percent households have involved in handloom activities. However it is very much backward in respect of socio-economic development and standard of living of the weavers. The main reasons behind such industrial backwardness of the region include absence of large investment in industry during the preceding plans and geographical isolation. The appropriate and time oriented initiatives to the weaving can turn it into a gainful occupation to a large number of people. However, dovetailing modern technology with the traditional skill of the weavers, handloom can provide a lucrative livelihood opportunity for the Mising women. With the objective of

bridging the demand and supply gap, and making handloom weaving a sustainable livelihood, Mising Autonomous Council and the Center for Microfinance and Livelihood with the Tata Trusts have been showing interest. The recent initiative shows handloom weaving could change for better the lives of the Mising people living in the flood-prone area of Assam. Now, the government needs to step in to scale up the initiative.

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