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**Self-Employment through Weaving:
A Study on Boko Development Block of Kamrup (Rural) District of Assam**
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Abstract

The word Handloom or Weaving derives its meaning from the process of operation by hand in a country made wooden structure called loom (Rao, 1999). Handloom is an important craft product and comprises the largest cottage industry of the country. The handloom industry is the most ancient cottage industry of India. In the entire country, there are more than 38, 00,000 handlooms. However in North-Eastern Region (NER), there are more than 15, 00,000 domestic handlooms. Handlooms in North and South India are geared for commercial production catering to the needs of domestic market and also for exporting their products. Today the handloom industry is the largest economic activity in the informal sector after agriculture with approximately 3.8 million people engaged in the production from the natural fiber fabrics like cotton, silk, woolen and from man-made mixed fiber fabrics. Integrity a part of rural life and more than 10 million people depends on these looms either fully or partially for their livelihood (Phurailatpam). The study is an effort to find out the role of weaving in creating self-employment in Boko Development Block under Kamrup (Rural) District of Assam. It is found that, weaving activities plays an important role in creating self-employment and income generation. Further, it provides employment opportunities to earn weaver's livelihood and improving their skills, standard of living and contributing support to their families.

Keywords: Role, Weaving Activities, Self-employment, Boko Development Block, Assam.

Introduction: The weaving or handloom industry is the largest cottage industry in the country. The weaving sector plays an important role in the country's economy. Hand woven fabric is the product of Indian tradition, the inspiration of cultural ethos of the weavers. The textile industry occupies a unique place in our country. This sector contributes nearly 30 percent of the total cloth produced in the country and adds substantially to the export earnings. One of the earliest to come into existence in India, it accounts for 40 percent of

the total industrial production, contributes to nearly 30 percent of the total exports and is the second largest employment generator after agriculture. This sector is very important from the point of view of its size and employment potential. It provides direct and indirect employment to over 13 million weavers. It also gives employment to a lot of women and plays its role in women empowerment,(Wikipedia).

Indian weaving industry has traditionally been one of India's thriving sectors of mass employment. Abundant raw materials and an unlimited supply of cheap labor have contributed to its success. The Handloom weavers who make traditional items such as saris, dhotis, bed sheets and shawls etc., have been hit the hardest and contribute to the production. Out of the 38 million people employed in the weaving industry 12.4 million or close to 33 percent are concentrated in this declining part of the sector. The majority of them are low caste and extremely poor, working in small family units and more than 40 percent are women. It is one of the largest economic activities providing direct employment to over 65 lakh persons engaged in weaving and allied activities. For effective Government intervention through financial assistance and implementation of various developmental and welfare schemes, this sector has been able to withstand competition from the power loom and mill sector and the weavers are encouraged to introduce innovative products and designs (Vasugi Raaja, 2011).

There are basically three types of weaving tradition in India:

- 1) **The rural:** Representing the familiar, unchanging images of rural life. These are abundantly full of joy and life, with figures of plant, animals and humans.
- 2) **The classical:** Revolving around royalty and court life. Here the forms and symbols varied according to the patronage of the ruler. Symbols and myths were rendered graphically with elegance and style.
- 3) **Tribal:** These were usually bold geometric patterns and weavers in strong primary colors usually woven on simple bamboo looms (Sarkar C. , 2012).

Brief review of literature: A study on "Indian Power Loom Industry: Challenges and Perspectives " identified that, the decentralized Power Loom sector came into existence , mainly with the conversion of handloom into power driven looms and the mill sector loses the ground. The power loom sector is the second largest employer after agriculture. There are about 19 lakh power looms in the country which employees about 48 lakh people. Today the decentralized sector is facing numerous problems like obsolete technology, no implementation of business ethics, traditional method of marketing, lack of trained human resource, high cost of production with low quality etc. But the performance of the industry within last few years has proven that the industry is standing against the age of globalization. The industry has transforming itself into a modern industry (Thakor, D.V., Pawar, Y.T., Anjum, & Md.Saeed, 2009).

Gupte (2010), in his study titled, "A study of the competitiveness of the handloom Paithani Sari Business" concluded that, in the current sense of the aggressive marketing and high competition, the textile entrepreneur need to adopt some modern practices to keep the art, technique and pride alive. The handloom silk textile sector has its own peculiar and

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determinants of competitiveness. Once they are identified, the entrepreneurs can attempt for its development along with global challenges. The effects of Westernization, liberalization, Globalization and ever – changing world of fashion can be studied before the business adopts new strategies to compete the global challenges.

A study on the functioning and Problems of Power Loom industry in Maharashtra with Special Reference to Malegaon Dist. Nasik, studied the functioning of power loom industry and their problems and suggested the following (a) Most of the weavers are unaware the power loom service centre. The centre should organize awareness campaign about the service provided by them. The Government should strengthen the power loom service centre in terms of capacity and infrastructure facilities. (b) In order to improve the level of managerial and administrative skills of the weavers, there is a need to expand the services of power loom service centre. They should also provide training to proprietors/weavers regarding entrepreneurship. Steps should be taken to provide basic entrepreneurial training to weavers. (c) Census of the power loom industry should be conducted after every five years in which basic statistics of their needs, raw materials, growth etc. should be conducted. It will be more effective for the programming and implementation of schemes (Anjum & Thakor, June, 2011).

Objective of the study:

- i. To study about the numbers of people engaged in weaving activities and to know various items produce by the weavers in the study area.
- ii. To study the role of weaving activities in providing self-employment and income generation to the weavers in the study area.

Methodology:

a) Types of Data: The study is based on both primary and secondary data.

b) Fixation of Sample: The weaving activities are found very sound in the Boko Development Block. Because, most of the houses are having weaving looms and some of them are doing weaving for their personal use only and others are doing for business as well as for personal use. As a result, there are around 19,239 people who are engaged in weaving activities, including both male and female in the block. Out of which 19,239¹ a sample of 100 respondents (both male and female) engaged in weaving activities in Boko Development Block have been conveniently selected for this study. But, efforts have been made to select a representative group of sample.

c) Method of Data Collection:

Primary data: primary data have been collected from the respondents who are engaged in weaving activities like owners and weavers of the areas under study. Observations on the weaving activities have also been made, further, a schedule has been design to

¹The population size of 19239 for this study have been ascertained by the researchers on consultation with the weavers, general people, block officials of that area and with understanding, taking into account the numbers village households and weaving units under Boko Development Block of Kamrup (Rural) District of Assam.

collect the required data. Telephone and personal interview were also conducted to collect require information.

Secondary data: secondary data have been collected from journal, books and websites/ internet etc.

- d) About the study area:** The present study is confined to weaving activities and how that helps in creating self-employment among the people of Boko Development Block under Kamrup (Rural) District of Assam. According to 2011 census report, the total population of the Block is 1, 11,880, having 23509 households and 100% is in rural area, with 56,415 males (50%) and 55465 female (50%) population. The total numbers of villages in the Block is 140, in which 2702 people are scheduled caste and 70688 are scheduled tribes. It has 74305 literate people, out of which 39970 (54%) are males and 34335 (46%) females. The Block has a total of 51997 workers out of which 62% are male and 38% are female.

Role of Weaving: Weaving sector plays an important role in the country's economic development and it is playing a very important role towards creating self-employment in the Boko Development Block of Kamrup (Rural) District of Assam. Weaving is a strong economic activity of the block, which providing employment opportunities to the engaged-people. It is one of the important sources of income-generation for them and they are earning their livelihood from weaving. Weavers of the Block are mostly doing their weaving business through *self-financing*; women workforce is more than men and they mainly used the traditional handloom. Weaving is considered as cottage industry in the villages of the Block and in this way, several village people of the block are attached to their traditions and have improved their economic condition. Women weavers have keen interest in weaving activity; and earning well as they contribute financial help in running their family. Every house contains the weaving loom and mostly applies traditional method of manufacturing cloth and so they are not able to produce products in bulk according to demand. The weaving industry occupies a place of importance in the Boko Development Block by virtue of its employment potential, production and exports its product outside the state. The owner of the units encourage the weavers to redesigned some 60 years old design by modernized method and also to be self-employed through weaving activities. The raw materials used in the weaving of the Block mainly include Muga silk, Paat silk, Eri silk, Polyester, Awa etc., they are comfortable, affordable and have almost the same look as the pure silk varieties. The units of the Block face the problems of duplicacy and some businessmen use to sell duplicate products in the market which is of low price, as a result it affects those units which are using original products for manufacturing the items.

There are different varieties of handloom products weave in the Block. The various types of handloom products have been described as follows:

- ❖ **Mekhela-Chador:** Mekhela and Chador both are two main pieces of cloth that draped around the body. It is mostly worn by Assemese women. It is made from different silk like, Muga, Paat etc.

- ❖ **Saree:** It is an ancient type of traditional dress, saree is draped dress created from a single piece of fabric 5 to 9 yards long, which is cover the entire body of a women. It is mainly made from Muga and Paat silk.
- ❖ **Dokhana:** Dokhana is the main traditional dress of Bodo women or girls, to cover the whole body. It is a long piece of cloth which is long enough to cover their body and it falls to their ankles, it is also wearing in house, school, dancing etc. Dokhana is made by Paast silk, Polyester, Masraise etc..
- ❖ **Aronai:** Aronai is a small scarf, a Bodo traditional dress used in honouring of respected persons and also in all Bodo dance. It is simply hanged on neck.
- ❖ **Shawl:** Shawl is the cloth taken over the body during winter season. It is specially made from Muga silk.

Paat Sari



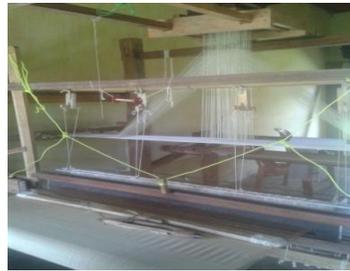
Aronai Muga Sari



Dokhana



Spinning Machine



Weaving Cloth on Loom



Jotor

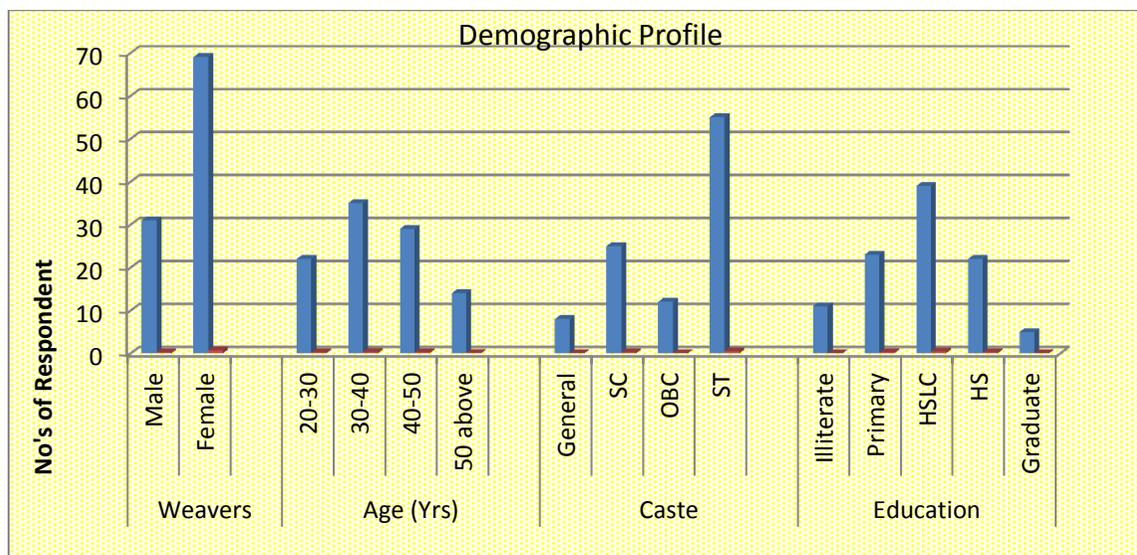
Handloom or Weaving have a great potential as for gainful employment, both fulltime and part-time, to increasingly larger section of the economically poor weavers. The significance of the handloom activity in the Block is a home based activity providing self-employment to skilled workers. The Handloom or Weaving is also the historical importance; it represents a tradition of skills which is an integral part of the study area (Employment in the Handloom Industry).

The result and discussion relating to the objectives of the study of the respondents shown in the table as follows:

Table-1: Demographic Profile of Weavers of Boko Development Block

Sl. No.	Categories	No. of respondents	% of respondents	
1	Weavers	Male	31	31%
		Female	69	69%
		Total	100	100
2	Age	20-30	22	22%
		30-40	35	35%
		40-50	29	29%
		50 above	14	14%
		Total	100	100
3	Caste	General	8	8%
		SC	25	25%
		OBC	12	12%
		ST	55	55%
		Total	100	100
4	Education	Illiterate	11	11%
		Primary	23	23%
		HSLC	39	39%
		HS	22	22%
		Graduate	5	5%
		Total	100	100

Source: Field Survey (2017)



Source: Table-1.

Income of Weavers: During the study effort has been made to know about the income generation of the weavers from weaving activities in the block, and mixed responses were found. The weavers earning an average income of Rs. 7,660 per month (taking, n =100), and their income Ranges from Rs. 5000 to Rs. 10000 per month. The full-time weavers are not fully satisfied from such amount monthly incomes and expecting more in terms of their labour and investment, but the part-time weavers are satisfied from their incomes. Because, they have other major source of income and they are engaged in weaving activity as their tradition or as side income business as well as for their own cloth requirements.

Findings:

Some important findings of the study are given below:

1. During study it is found that, both male and female are engaged in weaving activity, but the number of female weavers is more than the male of different age group and that comprises both educated and uneducated people.
2. It is observed that there is various small size weaving units in the Block which are using traditional equipment, whereas big size weaving units are using latest equipment.
3. Most of the weaving units are using traditional handloom and a few are using the Pit loom. They used to produce various traditional as well as modern cloth items and have able to receive some foreign order (i.e. from Canada for shawl, scarf, sari, muffler, stole etc.), especially those products woven by Muga and Paat (Jute) Silk.
4. Though different communities' people are engaged in the weaving activities, but ST (Schedule Tribe) peoples are found more than others communities.
5. Through survey it is found that most of the units are used the latest yarn and it is very costly (Muga, Eri, Pat etc.), whereas cheap quality's threads are also used by some units like polyester, awa etc. in the Block.
6. The units of the Block made various dresses through handloom and weavers used Jacker Machine, Card Design, etc. for giving special design in the cloth.
7. The main problem faced by weavers with the changes of time with weaving activities is 'duplicate products' in cheap rate, as such original products (which generally come in high price) their demand and supply are coming down.
8. As regard income of the weavers, weavers get wages on regular basis, or on contract basis, as the case may be, for dependent weavers and their income is based on their work as well as on the design of cloth. And the independent weavers earn as their own according to their performance and quality of work and they are earning more income.
9. Some owner of weaving units provides basic training facilities to their weavers and supports them to be self-employed in various weaving activities.

Suggestions:

1. Original weaving products are badly suffering from duplicate products almost of same looks and it creates threat to the original weavers, this need to be address.

2. Weavers usually work for long hour and the amount of wages paid to them is not satisfactory and have not been changed/increased from a long time and this issue need to be addressed.
3. As the manufacturing process used by the weaver is mostly traditional and it need to be modified with modern techniques for innovative design, products and to win competition in the market.
4. The handloom used by weavers should be replaced by power-loom for standardization, design, quality and economy of the products.
5. From the study it is also found that, proper training facility is very important. Hence, the need for implementing some training and weavers welfare programmes was seriously felt for better performance and for improving weavers' skill.

Conclusion: The handloom sector of Textile Industry is the largest Cottage Industry in our country. Handloom or weaving sector has a great potential, as it provides gainful employment, both fulltime and part time to the economically poor people and that have also found in Boko Development Block. The weaving units of Boko Development Block are playing important role in providing employment opportunities to numbers of unemployed people. As such, every household are having a loom and family members are engaged in weaving activity. Weaving in the Block help many families to earn for livelihood through self-employment, have improved their standard of living and contribute to the well-being of their families. Weavers need to be trained with specialized skills of weaving for the growth of the weaving activities. If some scheme or special programme avails to them, then weavers of the Block can wholeheartedly devoted towards weaving and that will be beneficial both for the weavers and for the State.

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