

UNRAVELING THE WOVEN TREASURE OF NORTHEAST OF INDIA: A SUSTAINABLE APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

To understand the craft traditions of north-eastern India, one must know the terrain, its people and their way of life. For in this area, as is in most other parts of India, crafts are not practiced as hobby, nor are they a commercial venture; they are very much an integral part of the life and customs of the people. The north-east of India is like a variegated patch-work quilt. A multiplicity of tribes and tribal groups each with its own distinct culture inhabit in this region. A common feature of the entire region is that weaving is practiced alike by all tribal groups. Weavers and craftsmen make use of number of techniques combined with vivacious designs to make the most interesting artistic artifacts. North Eastern Region is one area where it has huge potential for investments particularly in the field of textiles and handicrafts. Due to its inherent strength for skilled work force and locally available raw materials this sector is developing a lot in this region. Fresh attempts have been made to revive the textile art of northeast India as a cottage industry with the combined efforts of State and Central Government, NGO's, designers and entrepreneurs. The aim of this paper is to analyze different schemes designed to promote and preserve textile craft tradition of northeast region of India. In the world with lot of technological advancement, India is poised between past and future, tradition and technology and village haats are

being deposed by shopping malls, -e-marketing, eco-labeling and social-labeling. Nevertheless, craft still maintains its place, finding new opportunities and prospects and creating a mark in sustainable development of India. Keywords: Craftsmen, Govt. efforts, technology, Textile craft.

INTRODUCTION

Textiles and crafts of India have a rich heritage which is a desire of the whole world. Hand woven textile is one of the creative products, which carries lot of significance in many tribal societies; it is symbolic, represents status of wearer, and imparts power to the wearer or user. The way tribal people produce textiles indicate to a great deal about their belief, culture and relationship with the environment. Handloom weaving as a folk art having age old features forms an integral part of the culture and tradition of the diverse ethnic groups with diverse socio-cultural background in Assam, the north eastern state of India. Hand woven textiles these tribes profile extraordinary craft of each tribe, shares weaver's skill through woven stories. Skills and techniques of craft such as weaving and folklore were handed down orally over to the next generation. The tribal culture has two aspects; the material culture consist of their habits of clothing, eating, mode of farming, etc and the non-material culture consist of their values, status and roles, language, beliefs, symbols and goals. Hence, their culture is a complex phenomenon of all these aspects.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This paper is based upon the secondary data collected from various books, magazines, journals, articles and websites. The main focus of this paper is to analyse various textile craft revival schemes aiming to promote and preserve northeast traditional textile crafts in India.

INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSIONS

Northeast textiles unlike any other traditional textiles in our country play an important part in Indian history. Craftsmen and weavers of this particular part believe in their traditional values and work hard towards the sustains of their crafts. Due to ignorance and unawareness this particular part of the country has always been left out when it comes to craft revival. Different endeavours have been made to revive the textile art of this area by government and non-governmental organisation in order create sustainable market for these artisans in the country through various policies and awareness programme. Through review there were few elucidation and discussion of the collected data which has been done under the five different categories:-

- Textile crafts of northeast and there important centers:- This section deals with the wide spread of handloom sector in the entire northeast region along with the important centers of production.

- Government intervention:-Talks about the various initiative taken by the government along with the various strength and challenges faced by the handloom sector in NER

- Institute and NGOs involved in revival:-There are various institutes and nongovernmental organisations who are engaged in revival of these textiles and helping the craftsman to work on a larger platform

- Role of designers:-This section deals with various known designers who have worked with these NER textiles.

- Government efforts and revival schemes:- This part deals with the various schemes and policy which ministry has started for the resurgence of these tribal craft of NER.

HANDICRAFTS IN THE REGION

The north-eastern states, often referred to as the seven sisters, comprise the hill states of Meghalaya, Nagaland, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh, Tripura, Mizoram and the Assam Valley. They form a diverse multi ethnic community of Indians and are home to more than 100 ethnic tribes who are skilled in craftsmanship and handloom traditions very distinct in their aesthetic sensibilities. These communities are spread across the different states, of which some are located in remote mountainous locations amongst the foothills of the Himalayas. Living with nature is integral to their lifestyle. The social structure is well defined with the village headman playing a distinct role in management of affairs of the village. The states have a long international border and there is a cross-cultural influence from neighbouring countries including Myanmar, China, Bangladesh and Bhutan. The entire region has an extraordinary diversity of tribal people-Arunachal Pradesh has 26 major tribes; Nagaland has 16 tribes and the state of Meghalaya, Assam, Manipur, Mizoram and Tripura has nearly 12 tribes each. Relatively cut away from the other regions of India, each state is industrially less developed but has a rich wealth of natural resources including forests, mines and biodiversity. The 23 _ CII initiative to improve the handloom and handicraft products of North East, CII Delhi (2001), status report prepared by Northeast Development and Finance Corporation (NEDFi) on the Handloom and

Handicraft sector in north-east India, presents the following interesting facts highlighting the importance of development of handicrafts for the economic growth of the region.

- Every 14th person in the north-eastern region is dependent on handloom and handicraft products for a livelihood.

- Nearly 80% of income for the artisan comes from the handloom and handicraft sector.

- More than 90% livelihood to nearly 60% of the artisan community comes from handloom and handicraft sector.

- Share of raw material in the value of a product is nearly 30% (ranging from 42% high to 5% low).

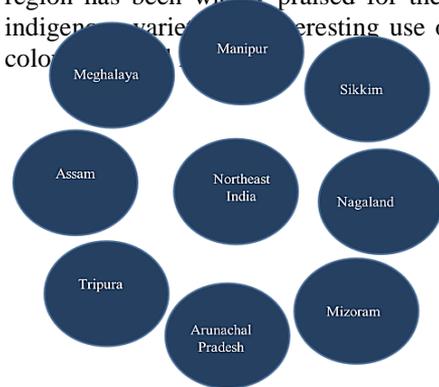
- The extent of value addition as percentage of prices earned by the artisan is around 32%. (Only one-third is the artisan earning, nearly two-thirds is the sum total of expenses and overheads distributed between middlemen, transport, marketing, display and promotion, etc.).

- The difference between average price earned by the artisan and that at which the product is being sold in the local market is more than 35%. The second most important economic activity in these hill states after agriculture is handloom and handicrafts. Secondary data highlight the distribution of the handicraft clusters comprising of 250-300 members each, in the North eastern states and Handicraft projects extended to artisans amongst the different north east states in India.(2)

IMPORTANT CENTRES

Weaving is a traditional occupation for a broad range of social groups in Northeast States like Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Mizoram, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Tripura and Sikkim. Each tribe of northeast states excels in the craft of weaving and their excellence gets a charming, exquisite expression through the many woven products produced by the members of a tribe. The Northeast

States has tremendous potential in promoting handloom sector as a trademark of the ethnicity because the region has been widely praised for their indigenous varieties. Interesting use of color



The kind of looms used in Northeast States are fly shuttle looms, throw shuttle looms and especially in the hilly regions, is the 'loin loom' which is quite different from the other loom types used in the other parts of India. There is no pedal for the shedding motion, and every weaving motion is done by hand. Although the loin-loom is a simple device, the products woven on it vary in texture, colour and design and the weavers use mostly cotton and acrylic yarn. The handloom fabric produced ranges from shawls, sarees, mekhalas, chaddars, gamochas, lungis, dhotis, gent's jackets, ladies wear, bed sheets, bed covers, furnishings, carpets and shoulder bags etc. Besides, the handloom sector has long been a traditional occupation for women and it is an accepted activity for women. The women weavers perform multiple roles of being handloom producers and trading of handloom products because among many tribes of the northeast, there's a common belief that weaving could make a man lose his vitality if practiced. Hence there is no social stigma of a woman working as a weaver because culture demands that

women know this occupation. Handloom industry plays a dominant role in the cultural and economic development of the rural masses in majority of the North Eastern States. Despite fulfilling the basic clothing needs at home, or for ceremonial occasion or as a decorative piece, the hand-woven textile plays a significant role in making social and cultural distinctiveness, rituals and surroundings. The region contributes half of the total workforce in handloom sector, because almost all tribes and communities in the hills and the plains of the region are actively engaged in this activity. This region has the highest concentration and a rich heritage of handlooms in the country.

GOVERNMENT INTERVENTION

The north-eastern states of India have their unique requirements in skill based training depending on the natural resources, industry and native trades. The governments of these states have embarked on skill development missions to meet the aspirations of youth through training, enhance employability and employment. Several training partners, academic institutions and vocational training center's are actively involved in a range of programs that enable livelihoods, increase productivity and income levels of people in the states. Most initiatives are a part of national schemes like PMKVY and DDU-GKY apart from regional schemes from the states. (4) As per 3rd Handlooms Census, carried out in 2009-10, more than 43 lakh people are engaged in weaving and allied activities which was 65.5 lakh as per 2nd handloom census conducted during 1995-96. Some of the important facts/figures are as follows.

1	Number of looms.	23.77 lakh
		20.66 lakh looms - rural areas 3.11 lakh looms - urban areas
2	Number of looms in NER.	15.5 lakh (65% of total looms)
3	Number of persons engaged in weaving and allied activities.	43.31 lakh 36.33 lakh workers - rural areas 6.98 lakh workers - urban areas.
4	Number of adult weavers and allied workers.	38.47 lakh
5	Man days worked per weaver per annum.	234 days

Year-Wise Production of Handloom Cloth & Export of Handloom Products:

Year	Handloom cloth production (million sq. Meters)	Handloom exports (Rs. In crore)
2007-08	6947	N.A
2008-09	6677	N.A.
2009-10	6806	1252
2010-11	6907	1575
2011-12	6901	2624
2012-13	6952	2812
2013-14	7104	2233
2014-15	7203	2246

Source: <http://handlooms.nic.in/writereaddata/2486.pdf>

The above table shows that though the number of handlooms and number of handloom weavers are declining, the handloom cloth production is more or less constant and sustained around 6900 million square meters, besides, handloom exports are increasing. The following are the important feature of current scenario of handloom sector.

- Value addition is taking place
- Quality of handloom products is improving
- More weavers are adopting full time profession
- Many SPVs/SHGs are exporting directly
- Many high end retailers are selling handloom products (5)

To adopt the block level approach in all handloom pockets of the Northeast, the guidelines of the Scheme, "National Handloom Development Programme (NHDP)" and "Comprehensive Handloom Cluster Development Scheme (CHCDS)" – Mega Handloom Cluster (in the pattern of NHDP) has been amended and State Govts. has been requested to develop such common facility center's (CFCs) in all important handloom blocks for which Govt. funding of upto Rs.2.00 cr. per block is available. Details of the Block level clusters (NER) sanctioned and amount released under revised

guidelines of NHDP and CHCDS (up to 30.12.2015) are as follows:

S.No	Name of the state	No. of block level cluster sanctioned	Amount released (Rs. in lakh)
	NER		
1.	Arunachal Pradesh	2	97.680
2.	Nagaland	3	199.905
3.	Manipur	4	241.812
4.	Meghalaya	3	180.632
5.	Mizoram	7	447.071
6.	Sikkim	1	39.310
	Total	20	1206

Source: Website: <http://www.handlooms.nic.in>

Strength of northeast Handloom Sector:

- Production of intricate woven fabric, its versatility & wide variety
- Diverse design base; quick to switchover to new designs
- Availability of high skilled labour
- Traditional mode of production with low technology, electricity not required
- Eco friendly technology/process
- Informal school for skill generation and transfer of technology
- Many weaves/process still beyond the scope of powerloom and will continue to be produced by handlooms

Challenges Faced:

- Number of handloom weavers is declining sharply.
- Low productivity in comparison to power loom and mill sector. Year Handloom cloth production (million sq. Meters)
- Limited scope of technological up gradation and improvement in weaving activity.
- Shifting of skilled labour to other sectors.
- Younger generation is not adopting weaving profession due to lower wages, tough working conditions.
- Serious constrains of credit availability.

INSTITUTIONS/NGO'S INVOLVED IN REVIVAL OF NORTHEAST TEXTILE CRAFT OF INDIA

1. National institute of design (NID):- In 2010 leading design institute in Ahmedabad has taken a project to study and document the textile tradition of northeast the efforts were crowned through a 2 week long exhibition "Threads of Change", which was the culmination of an intensive effort to document the textile traditions of North East India, by Ministry of Culture, IGNC & National Institute of Design. The first phase of documentation covered Assam, Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh and Meghalaya.

2. Handloom training center: The Directorate of Handloom & Textiles under the ministry of textiles is running Handloom Training Centers in the various States in northeast India, particularly in rural areas to impart training for creating artisans and upgrading the skills on handloom weaving. A certificate is issued from the Directorate of Handloom & Textiles of the state to the trainees on successful completion of the assessment at the end.

3. Directorate of Sericulture and Weaving (Govt. of Meghalaya):The main objective of directorate is to train and demonstrate the appropriate technique involved in all stages of operation in silk production and to improve the fly shuttle looms. Training facility is also provided to handloom weavers under the scheme on Silk Weaving Technology Programme to private handloom weavers in clusters.

4. Directorate of Handicrafts and Handloom: The Directorate's primary objective is not only to preserve and showcase the traditional arts and crafts of Sikkim but to promote and disseminate information regarding the policy orientation of the government in setting the highest standard comparable to the best in the world for arts and crafts, skill development and environment friendly working culture. As a policy initiative there has been tremendous investment in

Skill Development Programmes whereby local trainees and artisans are trained in multiple crafts with the objective of developing and acquiring skills which will enable them not only to generate employment but in the long run to acquire self-sufficiency and self-reliance. The need of the hour is to harness the potential of this extremely vast resource of educated and extremely mobile youth force and channelize them into a productive socio-economic entity that is inherently strong and provides a solid base line for further growth. The challenges for ensuring integration of the various growth factors as also creating a competent civil system in Sikkim is formidable but nonetheless with the support of the government and implementation of the various initiatives in the right perspective these challenges can be overcome. (6)

5. The craft revival trust: The Craft Revival Trust (CRT), recognised in 1999 is a registered non-profit organization which works with craft and crafts persons. Main aim of the trust are as follows: study and document knowledge and skills of craft traditions and craft Communities that have been transferred from generation to generation
To safeguard the craft by creating a knowledge bank
To build a linkage of crafts and crafts persons
To promote respect for craft creativity, craft communities and the hand skills.
To create a rights based platform for promotion for the crafts persons.
To create programs those enables and create interest in the crafts by the next generation.

ROLE OF DESIGNERS IN PROMOTING THIS CRAFT:

1. Daniel Syiem: A well-known designer from Meghalaya having his own label Daniel Syiem Ethnic Fashion House (DSEFH) aims at preserving the

endangered hand-weaving traditions of North East India's native tribes. To revive these ancient textiles, DSEFH innovates at the yarn stage to create beautiful patterns, designs and vegetable dyes, while simultaneously generating employment for local artisans. Their production ethics include natural processes, careful use of resources, recycling and minimal wastage.

2. Karma Sonam: Another designer from Sikkim who runs a label kuzu. Kuzu creates sustainable clothing and home textiles by working in harmony with nature, and in collaboration with various artisans from the marginal communities of the Himalayan range.

3. Jenjum Gadi: Designer from Nagaland who returned to ramp after a decade, in collaboration with Sonnie Kath from the Dimapur-based Exotic Echo Society. With the goal of creating sustainable employment for the rural poor, Kath began the organisation in 2008, primarily working with Loin loom weavers (who are usually women), to create home furnishings, accessories, shawls and beaded jewellery.

4. Richana Khumanthem: For this astonishing designer her brand endeavours to bring the textiles of Northeast India, and Manipur in particular, to the attention of the national and international fashion industry. She believes that this can be achieved only by bridging the gap between the local artisans and the consumers, and so indigenous handlooms and handicrafts are the backbone of her luxury brand.

5. Aratrik Dev Varman: Based in Ahmedabad, Tilla is a fashion and interior design studio inspired by his own hometown Tripura. Tilla's values stem from the handmade and self-reliant nature of village crafts and their ability to adapt in infinite, creative ways. Varman uses hand woven Indian textiles like khadi, jamdani and kanjeevaram to create

clothing that is wearable, elegant and fuss-free.

6. Sonam Dubal: His label Sanskar dominated by the use of recycled vintage fabrics and indigenous silks, Sanskar is an ethical fashion label.

7. Krishana Mehta: Indian designer who showed her latest design way back in 2013 taking inspiration from Manipur in northeast of India and result was a beautiful range of vibrant collection.



Daniel Srim



Karma Sonam



Jenjium Gadi



Richana Khumanthem



Aratrik Dev Varman



Sonam Dubal



Krishana Mehta

GOVERNMENT EFFORTS AND REVIVAL SCHEMES

Like other States in India, Northeast too has the face of central structures of Khadi Board, Khadi Commission and Development Commissioner (Ministry of Textile, Government of India), National Bamboo Mission (Ministry of Agriculture, Government of India), North Eastern Council (Ministry of Development of NE Region, Government of India). Apart from these, there are other programs from State government departments and other state and national level agencies, including government undertakings.

1. North Eastern Handicrafts and Handloom Development Corporation Incorporated in 1977, North Eastern Handicrafts and Handloom Development Corporation (NEHHDC), as the name suggests is an organisation that attempts to develop and promote the indigenous crafts of the region by connecting craftsmen to prospective

markets and consumers and generating economic, cultural and social opportunities for creators while adding cultural value for consumers. The corporation is under the administrative control of the Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER), Government of India.

2. Tribal Cooperative Marketing Development Federation of India Limited (TRIFED): The Tribal Cooperative Marketing Development Federation of India Limited (TRIFED) which is a cooperative society registered under the Multi-State Cooperative Societies Act and is under the administrative control of the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, has been implementing the scheme namely "Institutional Support for Development and Marketing of Tribal Products/Produce" to protect and conserve tribal art and craft in the country. (7)

The details of the activities under the scheme of "Institutional Support for Development and Marketing of Tribal Products/Produce" are as under:

1. Retail Marketing Development Activity
2. Sourcing of tribal products
3. Organizing Tribal artisan Mela (TAM)
4. Exhibitions
5. Handicraft Skill Development Activity

According to report by national handicraft development programme in 2016 the office of Development Commissioner (Handicraft) is implementing the following seven schemes for promotion and development of handicraft sector:

- (i) Baba Saheb Hastshilp Vikas Yojana
- (ii) Design and Technology Up-gradation
- (iii) Marketing Support and Services
- (iv) Research and development

- (v) Human and Resource Development
- (vi) Handicrafts Artisans Comprehensive Welfare Scheme
- (vii) Infrastructure and Technology Development Scheme(8)

The role of the State Governments is envisaged in the following areas:

- (i) Publicity to create awareness about the NER Textile Promotion Scheme.
- (ii) Organizing meetings of the stake holders to get necessary inputs for implementation of the scheme.
- (iii) Formulation of project proposals based on an assessment of the gaps and requirement of Government assistance and submission of project proposals to the Ministry of Textiles.
- (iv) Assisting in the monitoring of projects.
- (v) Providing all the requisite clearances wherever needed for setting of textile clusters, parks and other processing/manufacturing activities.
- (vi) Assisting in the procurement of land and development of infrastructure etc. for setting of textile clusters, parks and other processing/manufacturing activities.
- (vii) Providing flexible and conducive labour environment.(9)

CONCLUSION

Northeast region has been neglected for so long that the people of northeast are finding their way to make a stand in the Indian sustainable fashion industry. Northeast region and its textile craft is taking a place in the nation's map of handloom and handicraft and could find its way to a niche market if proper planning, policies and schemes are made for its sustenance and revival. Central and state Govt. is taking initiative to preserve the woven treasure of northeast but the efforts are not enough. All the tribes in NER are using manual looms with low technology which affects the production. "If appropriate action is not taken, then there is a fear of replacing the

handloom products by imported materials. The responsibility is also with designers to focus on the handloom products instead of western garments to bring back a proud tradition". (10) Designers are taking initiative to introduced woven textile tradition of NER on a national and international forum with the support of Govt. Skill development programme and various schemes of government will defiantly help in creating large employment opportunity in this region especially for the women entrepreneur and will for sure improve their socio economic status. The day is not far when this region will become major handloom producer in the nation.

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