Handloom Industry and Its Economic Impact- A study of Nagaon District with special focus on Gerjaipam Village.

Smt Chaitali Rani Dutta
Scholar, Department of Economics, K K Handique State Open University, Assam, India

ABSTRACT: The handloom sector plays a strategic role in the upliftment of rural economy of India. Even today, the rural people of India mostly women grossly depend on the handloom sector after Agriculture, which requires minimum capital and less technical skills and also gives them a dependable source on income. In Assam, the handloom sector has an overwhelming presence in its socio economic life. Assam is proud owner of more than 13 lakhs looms out of the total 28 lakhs looms of the country. The present study is mainly concerned with Nagaon District with special focus on Gerjaipam Village of Kachua Cluster. The Study is based on both primary and secondary data. Interview was conducted on 50 households randomly selected from 600 household of the area with uniformly designed questionnaire. From the field study it was found that the sector has an important role to play in improving the financial condition of the villagers. Though the weavers who own the looms had sound financial position but the economic condition of other daily wage weavers was not so good. The main reason for this was their illiteracy and lack of proper support from various Government schemes. But still the Gerjaipam village occupies a distinct place in the economy of Assam due to its huge production of Handloom products.

Keywords: Handloom sector, Technical Skill, Socio-Economic life, Cluster

I. Introduction:
The Small Scale Industry (SSI) sector in India presents a wide spectrum consisting of tiny, cottage and village industries and modern sunrise industries. This sector occupies a predominant position in the labour surplus economy of the country because of its advantage in terms of low cost, higher potential to generating employment, concentration in both rural and urban areas. The definition of SSI includes the traditional industries like Handloom, Handicraft and coir, Khadi and Village industries, Sericulture which are generally minimum technology based and located mostly in rural and semi urban areas, producing goods with the help of simple tools but with rich traditional and inherited skills. The other segment of this sector
comprises of modern SSIs and powerlooms which mostly use a little more sophisticated power operated tools. These are mostly concentrated in and around Urban areas.

Among all the components of SSIs, the present study focuses on the handloom sector which still plays a strategic role in the upliftment of rural economy of the country. Even today, the rural people of India mostly women, grossly depend on the handloom sector after Agriculture, which requires minimum capital and less technical skills, but earns for them a livelihood which is otherwise a distant dream for the illiterate folks of the country. As per the Handloom Census Report, 2009-10 conducted by the National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCEAR), In India, there are 43.31 lakh handloom workers in the country, out of which 36.33 lakh workers (84%) stay in rural areas and 6.98 lakh workers stay in urban areas. Most of the adult workers are female (77%) and the number of male workers (23%) is comparatively smaller. As opposed to female workers belonging to rural areas, a relatively higher proportion of male handloom workers are located in urban areas. Among all the states of India, the North Eastern states dominate the handloom sector. The NE states refer to the easternmost region of the country which is linguistically and culturally very distinct from the other states of the country. Over 53 per cent of the looms in the country and more than 50 per cent of the weavers belong to the North-Eastern States (Ministry of Textiles, 2010). The physical setting, climate, flora and fauna, population and settlements are responsible for the uniqueness of the textiles when compared with those woven textiles by the other states of the country.

Again among all the NE states, in Assam, the handloom sector has an overwhelming presence in its socio economic life: Handloom is the largest cottage industry of the state flourishing since time immemorial. It is providing quite a good employment in the state, particularly to the rural women. Mahatma Gandhi made no exaggeration when he remarked “Every woman in Assam is a born weaver. No Assamese girl can expect to become a wife if she does not weave. And she weaves fairy tales. Some of the old pattern were of matchless beauty”. Even former President, Sri APJ Kalam while visiting Sualkuchi, the Manchester of Assam had remarked that if Assam could produce another 20 Sualkuchi’s, then the scenario of Assam to the National and International arena would have been different. Weaving is inexorably linked with Assamese culture and heritage. According to tradition, the primary qualification of a girl in her wedding was her “Skill to Weave”. Because of this reason perhaps, Assam has the largest concentration of handloom and weavers in India. As per the Handloom Census Report 2009-10, Assam occupies the top position in respect of Statewise distribution of handloom workers with 124100 households sharing 21.7% of the total households in the state. Assam is proud owner of more than 13 lakh looms out of the total 28 lakhs looms of the
country. Inspite of its tremendous potential, the handloom industry has not flourished in commercial sphere to the desired extent. At present, about 2.05 lakh looms are being utilized for commercial weaving, 6.00 lakh looms run semi-commercially and rests are domestic looms which are run to meet domestic requirements. Besides, the handloom weaving provides direct and indirect employment to about 25 lakh people in the state.

As per the Statistical Handbook of Assam, 2012, the Handloom and Textile Department of Assam runs 102 Handloom Training Centres where in 1390 weavers were trained in 2011-2012, 98 numbers of Weavers Extension Service Unit in which total production in 2011-2012 was 93714.04 meters and 20 Handloom Production Centres in which the total production in the same year was 15487.35 meters. Besides this, there are 4 Handloom Training Institute and 1 Power Loom Centre under Training Programme, One Handloom Research and Designing Centre and one production procurement centre under production programme to assist the weavers with skill upgradation backward and forward linkage in taking handloom as a self employment venture. The Assam Government Marketing Corporation is the state level organization to look after the weavers of the state. The three –structured Co-operative sector consists of more than 3634 Primary level, 22 District Level and 2 apex Co-operative societies covered about 33% weaver population of the state. At present, the Directorate of Handloom and Textiles covered 13078 villages of the state under its 209 Handloom Demonstration circles with 1174675 weavers for its Handloom activities. The production of Handloom Fabrics was 215 million meters during the year 2011-2012 as against 217 million meters produced during 2010-2011. During 2009-2010, the production of Handloom fabric was 174.11 million metres. In 2011-2012, the Handloom sector provided part time engagement to 1019667 no of weavers and full time engagement to 155008 no of weavers. For publicity of the developmental programmes and creating awareness about the handloom products of the state a total of 60 numbers of District level fairs have been organised in 2011-2012 as against 55 numbers in 2010-2011, 23 numbers of Special Handloom Expos organized in 2011-2012 as against 17 in 2010-2011 and 6 Numbers of International Handloom expo in both 2010-2011 and 2011-2012.

The state Government proposed to give special attention on up gradation of technology and skills to ensure higher value addition and higher Income generation of those engaged in this sector. Thus emphasis has been given on Research and Development in CAD/CAM and other modern technologies for improving the quality of production. It is proposed to establish a CAD/CAM centre at the Handloom Research and Designing Centre for development of design in High Tech Method. It is also proposed to establish a Design Museum at the HRDC to preserve the traditional, Ethnic and cultural Designs of different Castes, communities and that of different kingdoms of the NE Region. Creation of awareness among the weavers about the
latest trend in handloom technologies and creation of provision of marketing facilities is also given high priority for development of Handloom Sector in the state.

For strengthening the Handloom Sector, Various developmental schemes have been undertaken by the State Government to increase the production, productivity and Self Employment. The Government of Assam has proposed to establish one Handloom trade Centre at Dibrugarh to give more exposure to the Handloom fabrics produced in the state as well as to create Commercial motivation amongst the weavers. Besides this, the state government has proposed to set up 6 dying houses, 27 yarn banks in each district headquarter, One Design studio, and one garment factory(Jorhat). The state Government has also undertaken implementable programmes like Trade related Entrepreneurship Development of Urban weavers, Chief Employment Generation Programme, Economic upliftment Package, Chief Minister’ special scheme etc. the state government also proposed to implement a new financial package to Handloom sector involving issue of Weaver’s Card, Yarn Passbook through NABARD. However the co-operative coverage of 45% of the state’s weaver population is very poor which has been proposed to be raised to 50% during the 12th Five Year Plan period7.

III. Objectives of the Study: The aim of this paper is to –
1. study the attitude of P,G level students towards CBCS in higher Education.
2. suggest some effective measures to overcome the limitations of CBCS in higher Education.

VI. Methodology :
The present study is mainly concerned with Nagaon District, the most populous district of Assam and well known for its Handloom products after Sualkuchi with special focus on Kachua Cluster. The study used both primary and secondary data. Primary data of 50 households and a total of 200 weavers (respondents) engaged with the sector directly were collected from the Gerjaipam Village of Kachua Cluster through uniformly designed interview questionnaire. However, respondents in the village were identified through random sampling method. Secondary data were collected from various reports like Statistical Handbook of Assam 2012, Assam Economic Survey 2012-2013, information received from the Department of Handloom and Textiles, Nagaon.

V. Result and Discussion:
The Handloom and Textile Department of Nagaon covers almost 455 villages of its three Sub Divisions viz., Nagaon, Hojai and Kaliabar. The handloom sector in the district is mostly dominated by the females , with 11 numbers of males and 22 Nos of females on
average engaged in the district. There are 49000 looms operating in the district at present which belong to country loom, fly shuttle frame loom and Fly Shuttle Pit Loom. But all the looms are not active, some of them are also presently not in operation. As per the information received\(^9\) the number of active and inactive looms is as under:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Looms</th>
<th>Active</th>
<th>Inactive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Country</td>
<td>12300</td>
<td>13200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fly shuttle Frame Loom</td>
<td>6700</td>
<td>7400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fly Shuttle Pit Loom</td>
<td>6400</td>
<td>3000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Nagaon district boasts of producing a large quantity of handloom products. The actual and targeted levels of production in the last 3 financial years are as follows:

(Production in Million Square Meter)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Financial Year</th>
<th>Targeted Production</th>
<th>Actual production</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2011-12</td>
<td>9.00</td>
<td>8.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012-13</td>
<td>20.00</td>
<td>18.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013-14(^*)</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>20.01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^*\)indicates production till December 2013

However, among the 455 villages, weaving is done for domestic purpose in most of the villages. In true sense, commercial weaving is done in only 8 villages. This occupation has helped in removing the rural poverty of the region giving financial remuneration of Rs 120/- per days per weaver on average. For helping the weavers financially, the loan has been given to 485 weavers through Weavers Credit Card Scheme. These loans range from Rs 25000- Rs 2,00,000 with/without any collateral. The clothes that are produced in this district are sold mostly in the local markets of the weaver, Market outside the district, Expos organized at the State Level and also some in Weavers Extension Unit. There are 3 Weavers Extension unit in Nagaon and Kaliabar Sub Division and 1 in Hojai Sub Division. But no arrangement is there
for taking the output to the international market. Besides no SHGs, NGOs and Marketing organizations are involved in the district for marketing the produce to the outside market. Though National Handloom Expos and Special Handloom Expos have been organized at the state level by the Directorate of Handloom and Textile, Assam and the weavers from all the parts of Assam has participated in them including Nagaon, but no such Expos has been organized at the District level which could have otherwise benefitted the local weavers to a great extent. For promoting the handloom production and to attract unemployed youths towards this sector, training programmes at the district levels have been organized. A total of 660 persons have been trained in the last three years under Chief Minister’s Special Employment Generation scheme, Economic upliftment of Weaver, Cluster Approach Scheme under IHDS etc. Other schemes which are in operation in the district are i) Economic Upliftment of Weaver ii) Production of Handloom Fabrics, iii) Scheme for production of Gamucha, iv) Cluster Approach Project under Integrated Handloom development Programme v) Health Insurance Scheme vi) Mahatma Gandhi Boonkar Bima Yojana vii) Yarn Pass Book scheme viii) Weavers Credit Card Scheme ix) Production of Gamocha under State Specific Scheme etc.

Having received the above cited information from the Department of Handloom and Textiles, Nagaon, a decision was taken to make a field study of one of the villages weaving commercially to have stock of the ground realities. For this Gerjaipam Village was selected which is located about 42 kms away from the Nagaon Town.

Gerjaipam village belongs to the Kachua Cluster of Nagaon district. The rural artisan cluster which is define as, ‘geographically concentrated household units producing handicraft/handloom products, often belong to a traditional community, producing the long-established products for generations and the skill of centuries old’². The Kachua Cluster consists of the following villages:- Gerjaipam, Kachua No 1, Kachua No 2, Rangalubasti, Kandapara, Satlunga, Biringati, Ali tangani, Jurirpar, Ramanipathar, Hatikhuti, Rajali and Fakali. However, Handloom weaving is done mostly in Gerjaipam, Kachua No 1& 2, Rangalubasti, Kandapara and Ali tangani. Among all of them, in Gerjaipam the handloom weaving is done on extensive scale. Out of the total 6000 weavers of this cluster almost 3000 belong to Gerjaipam Village. Near about 600 households are involved with this profession purely on commercial basis. These are their traditional business, passed on to next generations by their ancestors.

Majority of the weavers interviewed were of the age between 17-73 years who were mostly Bengali Hindus belonging to Debnath, Das and Biswas Community and some also belonging to Muslim community. They live in Kaccha, semi Pacca and some also in Pacca houses with spacious loom shed. Weaving is the only source of Income as no agricultural
activities are undertaken in this area. Loom is the integral part of their household furniture. Out of the 600 households, 12-13 households are involved with yarn supply. The village produces various types of clothes like Gamochas, Chador-Mekhela, Karbi Pini, Karbi Bag, Karbi Muffler, Karbi Jacket, Bodo Dakhana etc. Most of the weavers are males (almost 71%) and women are engaged only in some selective works. Women are mostly associated with the weaving of Gamochas. The young weavers learn the skill of weaving mostly by observing their elders initially and got involved into various simple weaving processes. Their education level was between primary and secondary school.

During the survey, it was found that in all the villages there were only Pit Looms in operation which are fixed to the ground. Though Fly shuttle Looms were distributed by the Government but as per the assertion of the respondents they were not comfortable with the Fly Shuttle Looms. Besides their own Pit Looms could produce more output than the Fly Shuttle Looms which also require less space than the latter. It is worth mentioning that all the weavers did not possess their own loom – many of them (almost 74.8%) work as wage labourers under Master weaver who owns the loom solely. When asked about the reason of the same, the reply came as mainly their lack of ability to purchase the loom and secondly, the lack of sufficient space to place the loom. The looms are made of wood and any kind of repairing works are done in the shops located in the local market place. Sometimes persons from Nabadweep are also hired for repairing works done. The clothes are produced with cotton yarn, Thailand yarn and also of polyester yarn. These are purchased from the local traders as mentioned above. The yarns are bought without bleach and they are dyed by the weavers themselves. The following figures shows the pit looms used, the drum that is used to segregate the yarns and the dying of yarns:

Fig 1 & 2:- The Drum that is used to segregate the yarn into different colours.
Fig 3 & 4: Weavers busy with their looms

Fig 5: The dying of threads in one of the houses of master weavers.

It was informed that the weavers have to purchase the yarns from the local traders at a higher price due to their inability to purchase them directly from the market. To buy yarns directly from the local market, orders have to be placed in bulk and the weavers did not have sufficient money for that. However, the yarns are purchased as and when required only which are available in sufficient quantity with the local traders. It was found that all the households are self-sufficient i.e. they do the whole business on their own— from the purchase of yarn to selling of the produce to various markets. The clothes of this area is sold to almost all the parts of state— Dibrugarh, Lakhimpur, Karbi Anglong, Jorhat, Nagaon, Barpeta, Nalbari, Guwahati to
name a few besides in the ARTFED of the Govt of Assam. The whole business gives them a lot of income as appeared from their answers and the load of their works. The number of weavers under a master weaver ranges from 1-40. Some of the households again do not have any weaver under them, all the members of the family are engaged with the business.

The weavers (around 200) under the Master Weavers were also interviewed to cross check the answers given by the Master Weavers. All the weavers are full time workers, they work for 6 days in a week and almost 8 hours on average per day. Each of the weavers are able to weave 3-8 gamochas in a day and one gamocha fetches them Rs 12-30 depending on its quality and size. Besides one weaver can weave 3 sets of Mekhela Chadar per day which gives them Rs 70- Rs 90 remuneration per piece separately, one piece of Seleng Chador also fetches them Rs 25 per piece and a set with blouse piece earns for them Rs 180/- . They also weave Karbi Pini which fetches them Rs 100-Rs 150 per day, Karbi Muffler earning them Rs 100 to Rs 150 for 4 piece and Karbi Jacket giving them Rs 100-135 per piece per day. However the figures mentioned above give only exclusive items of work i.e. a weaver can weave only one item of the above mentioned amount per day. Again the work depends mainly on the demands of the market.

The handloom industry has made its owners quite self sufficient. Their output are quite well in demand. Besides, since the whole of the works are done solely by themselves hence, no agent system exists and no money is drained. Kachua and specially Gerjaipam is the biggest producer of Handloom products especially Gamochas in Assam at present. They get handsome amount annually from this sector. When asked about the selling prices of their produce we were informed as follows:-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Clothes</th>
<th>Selling Price( Rs/piece)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gamocha</td>
<td>Rs 20- Rs 200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mekhela Chador</td>
<td>Rs 150-Rs 500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mekhela Chador (Set)</td>
<td>Rs 320- Rs1000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karbi Pini</td>
<td>Rs 200-350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karbi Muffler</td>
<td>Rs 90-110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karbi Jacket</td>
<td>Rs 350-Rs 570</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Though the state Government has implemented various schemes for financial help of the weavers as already mentioned, but the weavers of this area have been deprived of any financial benefit. None of the weavers have given a positive reply on receiving loans. As regards training, in 2012-13, 60 new weavers were trained on new designs. However, it was seen that the weavers were themselves not interested in receiving training. Their common reply was that if they were to go for training, then their daily wages would be forfeited and there is no compensation from the Government side regarding this. Yarns were also distributed by the Government, but in very small quantity. Among other schemes of Government, as per official sources, 300 weavers were covered by the Mahatma Gandhi Boonkar Yojana in 2012 and these have also been confirmed by the Weavers though they were unaware of the name of the scheme. About 2000 households have been covered by the Health Insurance Scheme-ICICI Lombard which gives them Rs 15000/- free treatment per year. But due to some reasons, the facilities could not have been availed by the beneficiaries. After mentioning the above, it is to add that the economic condition of those who own the looms is quite so undisturbed though the weavers who work on daily wage basis are still struggling with their fate. Some Government aid in the form of supplying looms, Yarns and other forms of finance would be of immense help at this point.

Problems as observed and faced by the Weavers:-

i) The most important problem of this sector is the lack of value addition. The output produced by the weavers are not of that quality which are required by the present-day customers. There is always an undesired gap between what the weavers produce and what the customers of this age desire. But to utter dismay, the weavers are satisfied with their income and there is no urge to learn about the new designs that are coming up and new innovative technology.

ii) Threat from outside products have also been a cause of concern for this sector. Some of the weavers complained that their demand has fallen due to arrival of cheap foreign products. Though the quality of outside products were inferior to theirs but due to lack of any specific indication and lower prices, the customers are being easily duped by the traders.

iii) Lack of sufficient help from the government side. Though a lot of schemes are there for the weavers but their practical applicability is very limited. Till today none of the weavers have received any loan from the Handloom Co-operative Society through the Weavers Credit Card. Again while providing the training there is no provision of paying Stipend to the weavers which could otherwise have compensated for their lost wages.
iv) Lack of advertisements of the products. The weavers themselves approach the wholesalers/traders for selling their products which kill a huge portion of their time. In this situation, an agency for exclusively marketing the products is urgently required. This could also give a wide exposure to the products of this Sector.

v) Lack of use of power looms. Use of power loom has the advantage of producing quality products at larger quantity at an affordable rate. But due to shortage of power supply these loom could not be used by the weavers as informed.

Suggestions:

i) The most urgent way to save this prospective industry is to introduce Geographical Indication mark for this sector in the lines of Muga Silk. This has also been felt by other writers also.

i) Quick and adequate steps be taken by the Government to provide loans to these weavers. It has been learnt that loans for 224 household have been released to the concerned banks by the Department which has a special subsidy of Rs 4500 for loans upto Rs 25000/- by the NABARD, the loan amount may be raised to Rs 2,00,000/- with different amount of subsidy depending on the slab.

ii) Stipend should be given to the weavers at the time of training. This would encourage the weavers to come up by sparing some time from their looms and lean new motifs and also enrich their knowledge of modern upcoming designs.

iii) Product diversification should also be brought in the minds of their weavers. Besides the quality of the products need to be improved by using yarn of sufficient good quality. Government should come forward by making good quality yarn available at affordable price.
iv) The retailers, traders, NGOs and government should take part in promoting and advertising handloom products. If marketing responsibility is given to a third party, then the weavers can devote more time in producing clothes which will be qualitatively and quantitavely much superior.

Conclusion:

The handloom sector of the Gerjaipam village gives a unique picture of the flourish ness of the dying handloom sector the country. Each of the villagers are very intimately related with the loom of their houses. It has also made Nagaon a well known place of handloom products. But inspite of all these, some unwillingness have evolved in the mind of some of the weavers to let their descendents to continue in this profession. This is quite disheartening and the reason behind this should be interpreted and all round efforts must be made to revive this important and unique industry. Still we can be proud of our Handloom industry which has the full potential of representing the state from the ramp of the Fashion industry of the country and even to the Intentional Platform. The only thing that is needed is to change the outlook of our weavers and also of the people of the country.

References:


[7] Economic Survey of Assam 2012,


