

WEAVING WOMEN CONDITION DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Author Name: Dulumoni Nath

Affiliation: Assistant Professor, Dakshin kamrup college, Mirza

Email: dulumoninath2@gmail.com

DOI No. – 08.2020-25662434

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to delimitate involvement of women in handloom industry in Assam, India and its impact on their socio economic life. During the pandemic Covid-19 period weaving women's condition is going to very bad. The weaving industry constitutes a timeless facet of the rich cultural heritage of Assam. Highest proportion of weavers in India can be seen in Assam and around 99 percent of them are women. We can see in almost every assamese family have at least one weaving women and some place we find weaving men also. Any specific area of Assam famous for handloom; for example: Sualkushi. That industry has been badly affected during Covid-19 situations. The analysis clearly shows that such as income and livelihood positively correlate with involvement of women in weaving.

Keywords: Handloom, involvement, women, condition, Covid-19.

INTRODUCTION

The hand loom sector plays a very important role in India's economy. It is a part of our culture and heritage and one of the largest economic activities after agriculture having the capacity of absorbing a greater number of manpower. India is the only one country in the world which produces all the five varieties of silk i.e. Mubery, Muga, Eri Tropical Tassar and Temperate Tassar. India enjoys monopoly over the world Muga, Silk production contributes by the Brahmaputra valley of Assam a state in the north east India. Assam ranked third in the top largest silk producing state of the country. Assam has been famous for its cottage industry especially for spinning and weaving wearing and reeling activities were popularized and became an indispensable part of every Assamese household. This research paper focus on the socio-economic condition of weaving women and the present day Covid-19 impacts on them.

The handloom industry embodies the rich tradition historical and cultural diversity that distinguishes India from the rest of the world. It occupies a pivotal place within the socio economic fabric of society. One of the advantages of the handloom industry it is more labor intensive requiring less capital. This sector is as old as the human civilization itself and is being sustained by transferring of skill from one generation to the next. The handloom weaving sector provides employment, either direct or indirect, to more than 43 lakh weavers and allied workers is the country which contains a large number of people from scheduled caste/tribe, backward and minority of adult handloom workers (aged 18 years above) at 77.94 percent compared to only 22 percent of adult men workers.

The socio economic conditions of the weavers are so depressed that they even cannot fulfill their basic human needs. Wage arrangement is very diverse in the handloom industry. Women are more laborers than men. So declassified the less skillful activities in sericulture education and skill training is very important to improve the situation of women weavers. In Sualkuchi about

49 percent of total women weaver is migrated from other state or districts. The socio economic conditions of these migrated female weavers have great impacts on the sector.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Objectives of the study are

- a) Assess the socio economic conditions of women weavers of Assam weaving industry.
- b) To compare the past and present status of weaving industry of Assam. Basically impacts of Covid-19 on weaving industry of Assam.

METHODOLOGY OF STUDY

The study mainly depends on secondary sources. The secondary sources have been used to supplement the primary sources. Secondary sources include different magazines, articles, newspapers etc. These sources also collected from Internet.

DISCUSSION

Assam as a state of India it is a labor intensive state and sericulture sector requires more labor, both together create perfect combination for the economic development of the state. Sericulture could be factors for uplifting the socio economic standard of the weavers section of society. Sericulture could play an important role in solving unemployment problem. Weavers are the backbone of the sericulture section and women play notable involvement in sericulture activity.

The handloom sector play very important role in the India's economy. It is part of our culture and heritage and one of the largest economic activities after agriculture having the capacity of absorbing a greater number of manpower. In 2009-10' this sector provides direct employment to over 65 lakhs person in India of which 60.40% are women. This sector contributes nearly 19% of the total cloth produced in the country and also adds substantially to export earnings.

The reservoir of handloom skills is concentrated in the north eastern state of India, Who together account for 16.83 lakh (60.5%) handloom households out of the total 27.83 lakh units engaged in the country. Assam alone accounts for 12.41 lakh (44.6%) handloom households, whereas Manipur and Tripura have 1.79 lakh (6.4%) and 1.21 lakh (43%) such households, respectively. However, only 13.4% of the commercial looms of the country are in NEI and their contribution to the country's total production of handloom fabrics is merely 20%. In 2009-10 a total of 1403484 weavers are found engaged in this profession in Assam of whom 147042 are full time weavers while 1256442 are part time weavers.

Handloom weaving has an overwhelming presence in the socio Economic life of Assam since time immortal. Handloom industry is one of the oldest and largest industries. It is known equality for its pristine simplicity and unequalled charm. The techniques of weaving are handed down over generation, Allusions to that are available I Assamese literature and scriptures. Assam's handloom industry is basically silk oriented.

During Covid-19 Assam's handloom sector faces unprecedented uncertainties for these weavers is not just a health crisis any more, it is a livelihood hazard and a socio cultural calamity, since for many of them weaving is a form of livelihood, an art, and a part of their culture and identity.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF WEAVING

The spinning and weaving activities were popularized and became an indispensable profession of every Assamese household during the days of Ahom regime (1228-1826). The weaving of cloth was not considered as a degraded profession; rather it was practiced by the Brahmins and lower castes irrespective of their social status. Momai Tamuli Borbaruah, a minister of Ahom king Pratap Singha (1603-1641) made it an obligatory duty for every household to spin and weave.

During the Ahom reign in Assam were many looms under the supervision of Royal house called 'Rajagriha looms' for producing special type of silk fabrics for the use of the members of the Royal family. But the production of Rajagriha looms became sometime less but many expert female weavers drawn from various places of Assam. Such weavers received grant of rent free land and other favors in return for their services. During the reign of 'Dihingia Raja' alias Shuhungmung the mother of Bhawanipurigopal Ata', who was very expert in weaving. From the historical records it is learnt that some of the Ahom queens were also personally involved in patronizing silk industry in Assam. King Siva Singha's consort queens Phuleswari, Ambika and Sarbeswari were personally in charge of training the young girls on the art of weaving, as well as looking after the activities of the Royal looms in the palace.

During the reign of Jayadhwaj Singha Mohammedan experts in embroidery work were brought from Delhi and established in Assam, which encouraged Assamese people to learn the art of embroidery for the upliftment of indigenous crafts in Assam. King Rudra also brought new ideas, techniques and design of the art of weaving from other parts of contemporary India through his enjoys and encouraged the Assamese weavers to practice those ideas.

When MK Gandhi visited Assam in January 1946, he had said that Assamese weavers could weave dreams in their looms. He saw this as an activity that could pose a challenge to the foreign goods that had flooded Indian markets and had hoped that Assamese weavers would give the British manufactures goods fierce competition. Assamese folk songs too, are filled with references to the state's glorious history of weaving.

Sualkuchi a town lying 35 kilometers away from Guwahati in lower Assam is known as the Manchester of east for its contribution to the crafts its weavers are famous worldwide for their exquisite paat, muga and eri silk work.

PRODUCTION OF HANDLOOM INDUSTRY

Handlooms are environment friendly. A handloom is an independent and autonomous technology's. Handloom can play vital role in the state's economy. During 2009-10 among 70 sample weaving centers with 251 loom of Assam, it is found that the production of 'Mekhela' (lower part of traditional women apparel) and 'Chadar' (upper part of traditional women apparel) sheet together constitutes 76.64% of the total product produced by the sample centers in the reference year. The weavers are interested in clothing to the needs of the local Assamese customary that prefer traditional apparel to modern apparel. So they produced 'Saree' in limited quantity (3.34%), though it has wider market potentials the annual average production of a loom producing purely plain before is as high as 516m², where as it is only 142.88m² if the loom produces fabric with sophisticated designs.

WEAVING WOMEN CONDITION

Income is playing an important role in deciding the involvement of women in the handloom industry. The women weavers are not under any employer and they work in their own houses and earn wages from the sale. The increase in their income or earning solely depends on the market demand for products thus the more is the income earning from the sale as a result of increase in market demand, the more is the involvement of women in weaving activity. Before women are used to work under the cooperative society, they have turned to be independent weavers as it gives comparatively more earning.

In weaving each loom provides direct employment to one weaver. Hence, 251 looms of the 70 manufacturing units in the entire sample district provide direct employment to same member of weavers the tender aged boys and girls are generally as assistant on monthly salary basis. As per male: female participation rate in weaving in term of mandays Created by the weavers and assistants is convened, it is found that the female dominate the entire sample unit with 55.68% of mandays. In 'sualkuchi' of kamrup district of assam where the commercial weaving centers are highly concentrated. It is more or less equal (m=50.90%, f= 49.70) while in other area (noncommercial area) females are dominant (76.92%). This is because weaving is not popular among male in the commercial weaving area.

COVID-19'S IMPACT ON ASSAM'S WOMEN WEAVERS

After announcement of worldwide lockdown the biggest victims of the declining India's economy have been the informal sector workers. Around 90% of India's economy is informal, with around 26 crore informal workers spread across agriculture, animal husbandry, construction mining, hospitality and so on. The plight of migrants is not hidden from anybody. Weavers are incurring huge losses and are also under heavy debt. One of the major problems that the weavers have been facing in the unavailability of raw materials. Even those weavers who are associated with organization face a shortage of necessary raw materials like yarn. Raw materials supplier unable to supply to weaver working under them transportation is restricted and they face great difficulty in delivering yarn to the weavers. The sale of yarn is not listed as an essential commodity and hence, both its production and sale have stopped during the lockdown.

Anurita pathak Hazarika, program director of North East Network, an NGO that works in the North East, the NEN has been working in the North East for more than twenty years now. The weavers supported by NEN have now started wearing masks. These masks are made of cotton and are ecofriendly and sustainable. NEN are worried about the future. There is also the possibility of an increase in the price of yarn if and when the situation gets better. Organizations are also facing difficulty in collecting finished products from the weavers, but many of them also feel that even if they do manage to collect the goods, they would not be able to sell them. Markets are shut and the demand for handloom products have gone down.

This is not just economic crisis though, it is also socio cultural calamity, weaving is considered a part of Assam's cultural heritage. Wearing hand women cloths is part of many festivals like Bihu. Thus the economic crisis in the handloom sector can very well be seen as a cultural loss too. This is a fear that resonates with many weavers and the organization that support them. They weave both for self-consumption and for commercial purposes. At the same time many women

also use weaving as an activity to earn additional money that they can claim to have earned by themselves.

Therefore, there is no doubt that the centuries old Assamese handloom industry is under severe threat today but so are the weavers especially female weavers. Immediate government intervention is required to provide some form of relief to the weavers and non-state actors should be support by the state. Covid-19, for these weavers is not just a health crisis anymore it is a livelihood hazard and a socio cultural calamity, since for many of them, weaving is a form livelihood an art and a part of their culture and identity today all of it is at risk.

CONCLUSION

We all of few aware the national handloom day India every year celebrated on 7th august. This year (2020) 6th year national handloom day celebrated. This adversely affects the market of handloom products.

The central government of India had taken many new policies to solve the unemployment problem. Recently 'Atmanirvor Bharat' the economic policy of India released for every adult citizen of India. Also Assam takes a goal to local vocal to global. After Covid-19 India made a powerful self-dependent country of world. From aspects of agriculture, industry and so on. Citizen of India basically youth generation gets workplace in own country. And the policy Atmanirvor Bharat makes upliftment in Indian economy. Every necessary products, goods made in India and during Covid-19 India's people have been boycotted other country's important goods so our goods efforts make India as a self-dependent India. And every need will be fulfill in our nation.

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