

CHAPTER – VIII

SUMMARY, FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

8.1 Summary

It is the interlacement of the two sets of threads longitudinal and across, which is termed as weaving, the fundamental technique of which has been known to the mankind since the days immemorial as its culture has been a necessity for production of cloth at least for the purpose of covering the human bodies. The region of Assam was quite familiar to the primitive methods of weaving which has been cultured in each and every house among all sections of people of different castes and tribes specially the women folk. Even during the pre-independence period womenfolk of every Assamese family were accustomed to handloom weaving at their own cottage. They had woven mostly the latest dress materials like mekhela-chadar, blouse piece and other furnishing materials besides gamochas with floral designs, gents striped coloured shirting etc.

During the reigns of Ahom kings, it was the duty of each and every lady of an Assamese family to spin cotton yarn on charkha and to weave fabrics on handloom. The male members of the family had to collect and bring cotton fibers for charkha spinning from Abor hills, Mishimi hills and other contiguous areas of cotton plantations. Later during the British period, the said traditional spinning and weaving had been gradually discontinued at the advent to the mill-made yarn and fabrics from west to our markets. Moreover the ladies had to deviate their attention mostly to their education in schools-colleges which were opened in very good numbers. During the period of the second world war, finer cotton yarns and fabrics became dirt all over the world causing a great setback in mill-weaving as well as handloom weaving elsewhere. To migrate the scarcity of cotton fabrics in the world, a type of grey coarse cotton fabric had been produced in abundance in America and been sent to the needy markets elsewhere in name of standard cloth'. In India it was known as Markin cloth which were later produced from coarse cotton yarn spun from short stapled cotton fibres grown in India itself. During the

world war ending period, almost every Assamese family was found to weave the aforesaid Markin fabrics at their house-hold handlooms so as to meet their day to day needy clothes with little change in counts, width and colours.

The post independence period of India has witnessed heavy influx of mill made fabrics that too at very cheap rates to all markets elsewhere. Consequently our womenfolk became reluctant in continuing their handloom weaving as before. Still the womenfolk of Assamese family did not abundance the practice of traditional weaving which has been taken up later as rather hobby among the elite section of the society, for their exquisite designs, while the yarns are usually cotton yarn or different fibre-yarn and of various attractive colours as found in Indian markets. Thus the trades of handloom weaving in modern days has been found among the womenfolk as hobbies of their leisure hours. It is heartening to note that womenfolk have not forgotten yet their traditional practice of handloom weaving which got an immense scope of renaissance in the study region, provided with enthusiasm towards modernization by each and every womenfolk of the region with commercial outlook and perseverance. Modernization in Handloom weaving can be well maintained on household handlooms itself by the womenfolk of the family with some renovations on existing handlooms or by replacement of the same by the latest handloom devices.

The continuity and contemporary characters along with the importance of the indigeneous textile tradition in the Hajo circle of Kamrup district, Assam have been discussed under the relevant chapter of the project.

With a view to achieve these objectives the project has been divided into eight (8) chapters. The first one are devoted to the introduction of the problem which includes Textiles in human civilization, Indian heritage in handloom & weaving, Textiles in North-east, Textile heritage in Assam and scope and justification of research problem.

Chapter – II gives the review of related literature as the survey of literature plays an important role in establishing the backdrop for any research in social

sciences. It is felt that justification of the present study can be classified by reviewing the available literature on the subject. Therefore, an attempt has been made to review the available literature on the subject to find out gaps in research before finally selecting the present topic for study.

Chapter – III gives a description of methodology that the researcher has adopted for the study. The type of the research is qualitative and the methodology used for the study is multiprolonged and multidimensional. The study is based mainly on primary and secondary data for analyzing of problems related to the development of traditional handloom practices. The purposive sampling method has been selected for field survey. An interview format has been prepared and interviewed the selected respondent.

For collecting primary data on the basis of purposive sampling method five weaving villages has been selected for field survey in the entire Hajo Revenue circle.

Chapter - IV gives some introduction to the study region i.e. the Hajo circle of Kamrup district, Assam which may have related with weaving activities even from the days of Kautilya.

Chapter – V relates to the history antiquity and folklore associated with traditional textiles and weaving. Assam has a long history of textile culture. There are descriptions of early Assam in many ancient religious and secular treaties of India. There are descriptions of Assamese textiles in Indian epics Ramayana and Mahabharata. Kautilya mentioned in Arthasastra the name of Chinapatta a variety of silk from china. Kautilya also mentioned other varieties of silk from early Assam namely Dukula and the best one from Subarnakundya, which has been identified with early Assam and was situated near Hajo. In Arthasastra there are mentions of other varieties of silk from Eastern part of India. But according to Arthasastra the silk from early Assam was the best of all. The chapter also describes about the folklore associated with weaving in the region.

Chapter – VI describe about the traditional Textiles and weaving practices of Assam and designs and motifs of various kinds weaved in the region from very early period. The designs in a general way is divided into five broad categories, viz, naturalistic, stylized, geometric, abstract and structural. The motifs are - floral and plant motifs, Animal motifs, structural motifs and Geometric motifs. All these motifs have been designed in a very stylized form in the region to cater the aesthetic needs of the customer.

It also describes some folklore and folk beliefs and the traditional textile technology including the process of folk dyes.

Chapter – VII is an analytical one which describes the present status of weaving. As no living culture is static some changes have taken place with the craft of weaving in the region. This is because of the fact that the innovative thinking of the weavers have compelled them to convert their traditional handloom industry to commercial one. In the same chapter the researcher has explain some problems associated with the handloom industry.

Chapter – VIII gives the summery of findings and conclusion of the project.

The textile takes a significant role in understanding the culture and history of mankind. Its relationship with man is as like as the body and soul. As an aspect of material culture, the textile warps not only the human body but also culture at the same time.

In Assam, the art of ‘weaving’ is an age old traditional activity. It prevalent among all castes and is exclusively feminine one. The textile is treated here as a domestic craft to meet the household requirement of every family. It is only a labour of love. The women use this craft as a vehicle for expression for her cultural imaginations and experiences. She reflects her imagination in the form of motifs of varied forms drawn from various sources. For example when an Assamese girl etches floral motifs on ‘Bihuyan’ as a gift to be given her beloved on the occasion of Bihu festival – she naturally puts her mind and heart into it.

They weave design with their deep feelings and emotion by using brilliant colour combination. Here each motifs becomes an alphabet of her mind. Such alphabets or symbols when put together become a letter of love and youth understands the sense.

Assam is a confluence place of different ethno-cultural groups; each has cultural background and distinct history of its own. The geographical diversity, ecology and socio-economic condition affect in the growth and development of each group. The ethnic groups have their respective speciality as well as peculiarity in weaving and in designing. The design and costumes always symbolize the cultural identity of each group in the society. The geo-cultural boundary between two ethnic groups is not in a water tight form and one never stood hostile to another. Rather, they co-exist peacefully and make a common culture that exhibit in the textile traditions of this region. In traditional context, the textile is marked by continuity and homogeneity at the same time. This very process of integration was enacted by the women. She acts like a scribe and records the ethno history in floral language on fabrics. So, the textile exists as a document for ethno history of preliterate people.

But now, the economic change brings qualitative and quantitative changes in the life and culture of the people. For this change, new elements of textiles have found in the way in Assamese culture. It was transformed identifiably more in urban area in comparison to rural settings.

In rural areas, the textiles has not lost its traditional elements; it constitutes more or less unchanged and distinct and remains uninfluenced of urban cultures.

The textiles of the study region are on road to transformation and synthesis. It breaks their traditional boundary – they come closer and exchange their elements. This is spontaneous and people do not show any negative attitudes. This is a silent process of assimilation. Another notable fact is that the traditional designs or motifs are transformed on the new types of costumes, where the traditional values and beliefs related to textiles are on wave in the face of modern

changes. But the innate linkage between traditional and modernity is not lost. It flickers but has not extinguished. Traditional designs continue to exist from being its oblivion.

It is not an easy task to keep aside anything unacceptable on this ground that the design is new. But, it reflects the reality of life and experiences of the people and culture of this area, it should be preserved.

Changes is common phenomenon. There must have change in traditional textiles. The new trend will escort more commercialization and opportunity for employment and investment. But in the same time, people ought to be aware of presenting the originality of culture along with evolution.

If textile craft is given a new shape with dignity, awareness and effort, it would bring the lost pride of Sualkuchi, alongwith the entire Hajo circle and of Assam.

8.2 Major Findings:

- It is amply evidenced that handloom weaving is not merely the production of textile items but an integral part of life and culture of the indigenous people.
- The tradition of textile production is an age-old practice which has been descending from generation to generation and the historical antecedents provide substance to the contemporary practices.
- Patronage of Ahom kings for the development of sericulture and handloom weaving is notable in the textile history of Assam. Because of their keen interest and encouragement, sericulture and weaving as household craft developed and flourished with specialization in muga and pat silk. The indigenous weavers in Assam have achieved good reputation for the unique quality of their hand woven textiles, both silk and cotton.

- After the advent of British rule in Assam (in 1926 AD) the tradition of handloom weaving lost its importance. Despite the stiff competition from mill made products and exposure of Assam to external market forces, handloom weaving survived as a household craft maintaining its rich tradition.
- The handloom products of Assam are well known for their glorious heritage of artistry and fine workmanship. The traditional skill of the people of Assam in silk and cotton weaving is of a high order. The skill achieved brought worldwide acclaim for them.
- No living culture is static. An element of culture, the craft of weaving has also been subjected to the universal laws of change.
- Handloom sector is facing a tough competition from various players in the market. The competition is intensive in both inter sector (from mill, powerlooms etc.) and intra sector (from foreign countries like China, Bangladesh etc.) this increasing competition is the biggest challenges for the handloom sector.
- The womenfolk still depend to a greater extent on the products of their household looms particularly for their day to day attire.
- Certain social and cultural factors and forces lie behind the continuance of distinctive textile traditions among the weavers in the region. Gamocha (Towel) as discussed in Chapter – VI is an indispensable part of Assamese life and culture. It is very intimately woven into the socio-cultural life of Assam. In the B'Ohag-Bihu festival in which the onset of Assamese New year is celebrated (in mid April), the gamocha called bihuwan is an invariable gift item to express respect for the elders and affection for the young ones.
- It is customary to offer a new cloth in the form of decorated gamocha like cloth either of same size or small version called gosain kapor (chapter – V)

to the God on the Assamese New year's day during Bohag Bihu or Rongali Bihu festival.

- The cheleng kapor and Anakata (chapter – 5) are two other traditional textile items vested with socio-cultural significance among the people in the region. Such clothes having distinctive characteristics are required on many socio-religious occasions. Anakata is a distinctive textile type in Assam which is required in different socio-ritual occasions. This cloth is invariably woven at home.
- The force of cultural norm in the preservation and continuity of weaving of traditional textile type can be seen in the case of riha-mekhela-chadar the three distinctive pieces which constitutes the Assamese women's dress. Even highly sophisticated and urbanized Assamese women would rarely were the saree on ceremonial and rituals occasion. It is an unwritten cultural code that in wedding, deaths and all other religious ceremonies and festivals the womenfolk in particular put on the culturally prescribed items of dress. Change does not effect the bridal attire of riha, mekhela and chadar which have been weaved commercially in the region.
- It is apprehended that weaving as a part of women-centric culture and economy of rural Assam, is likely to disappear with progressive modernization. In the urban areas, weaving has, by and large, disappeared from the domestic culture of the women. But it is confined essentially to its household in most of the villages particularly in Hajo circle of Kamrup, Assam.
- An interesting trend in the areas under study is that commercial handloom production is increasingly being taken up. These centres have tried to revive the lost traits of indigenous textiles, with particular reference to motifs and designs, and incorporated these in large-scale manufacture of fabrics meant for sale.

- When compared with traditional household level of production, the output from the commercial centres is certainly very large. The culturally distinctive fabrics are reaching a wide spectrum of buyers.
- Eri silk are used at a nominal extent. Textile items like *riha-mekhela-chadar* as a set, separate *mekhela-chadar saree*, *eri shawl*, *gamocha* etc. are the major production in the region.
- Over the years, Sualkuchi has emerged as the most important silk textile producing centre of Assam. With the development of cluster the same techniques of products has been spread all over the Hajo circle, where every home is organized as an industrial unit with two or a number of looms being operated with the help of paid weavers or by the family members. It would not be wrong to say that *pat* and *muga* silk produced in the area reached every home and hearth in Assam.
- The silk ware traders from the cluster reach even the remotest villages. In addition particularly every town, big or small, possesses stores which stock Sualkuchi silk. This sort of centralized production of what is known as ‘Assam silk’ has contributed towards spread of common elements of texture, colour, motifs and designs throughout the length and breadth of Assam which has been produced at a very large number in the region.
- Tradition plays an important part in the textile production of the region. Yet it would be wrong to assume that the indigenous textiles represent total persistence and continuity of old tradition. Nor does it reflect an acculturative change where the old has been given up altogether in favour of new elements. Instead there is a synthesis of the old and the new.

8.3 Suggestions for the development of Traditional Handloom Industry

For the survival of the Traditional handloom industry during the era of commercialization following suggestions has been contributed by the researcher:

- From the study it has been found that handloom weaving is a rich heritage of Assam. Therefore the conservation of this heritage is the responsibility of the people.
- Product quality doesn't along serve the customer's purpose. The businessman should understand who his customer is, where the customer wants the product or service, in what form at what price etc. To sustain in the competitive business environment, every industry has to understand these aspects and practice in reality.
- To improve the current situation of Handloom sector and to make it more competitive in current scenario, it is necessary to design appropriate marketing strategies. To get a success in today's competitive market place, handloom sector needs to be more customers centered. In order to reach customers across the world. It is suggested to start online sale of Assam handloom products through e-commerce strategies.
- The sector has great market opportunities if it is ready to take them. Products made by using organic cotton yarn and natural dyes are in high demand in the developed nations that are health conscious. For these kinds of products research and development, training and knowledge sharing are crucial things.
- Pricing strategy must be formulated on the basis of the market demand, that is the cost of the production, value added to the product and brand image of the product.
- To bring superior quality in handloom products innovative and faster weaving process and techniques should be introduced to increase efficiency of weavers as well as loom to make handloom more competitive and profitable.
- Identifying high growth areas, new product categories and potential marketing avenues on continuous basis will direct the handloom sector

towards profitable business model. Entrepreneur needs to find opportunities to export customized products according to the external market needs.

- To minimize the productivity and quality, the weavers should be given incentives for their skills and efforts. Incentives motivate any worker to give his best.
- Training for entrepreneurship development and practical knowledge must be imparted to the weavers in the region.

8.4 Conclusion

Tradition plays an important part in the textile production of Assam. Yet it would be wrong to assume that the indigenous textiles represent continuity of old tradition. Nor does it reflect an acculturative change where the old has been given up altogether in favour of new elements. Instead there is a synthesis of the old and the new. The old has been combined with the new to create an emergent tradition in the field of indigenous textiles among different weavers of the study region. This emergent trend is expected to find helpful in cropping with the changed contemporary conditions.

In recent years, a gradual disappearance of handloom weaving as a household craft has been marked among the urbanized section of various communities of Assam. But in the region under study, the craft of weaving continues as an integral part of Assamese culture. Moreover it provides an important boost to the rural economy. The natural tendency of the girls to bear and pursue weaving from tender age indicates the high value vested in weaving in the culture of Assam. The practice of producing one's future post marital requirements of clothes is still in existence as an element of culture. This has helped in keeping the textile tradition alive in the Assamese community.

Discussion on all the relevant factor of textile traditions of Assam as well as the Hajo circle lead one to finally infer that handloom weaving is likely to

survive and prosper because of the force of tradition as well as newer meaning and substance acquired by it in the recent days. Based on the rich tradition in textile production, availability of natural resources, talent of the indigenous weavers, unique features of the traditional textiles etc. it could be concluded with confidence that handloom weaving of the region has tremendous potential to flourish further.