

# HANDLOOM INDUSTRY OF INDIA

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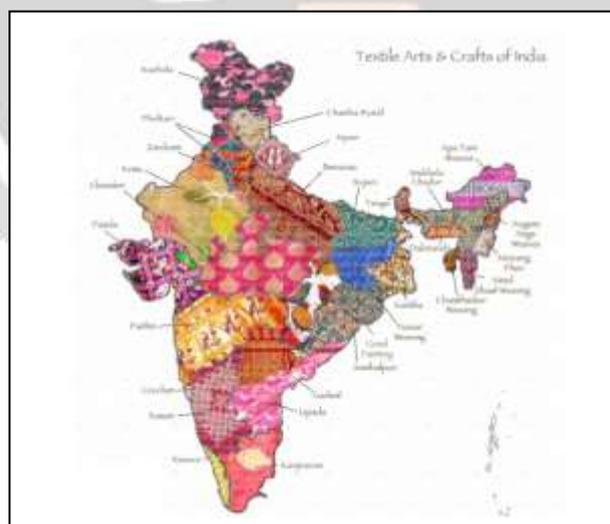
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## ABSTRACT

*The Indian handloom industry is one of the oldest and largest cottage industries in India with a standing ancient tradition dating back thousands of years for their excellent craftsmanship, representing the vibrant Indian culture. Indian artisans dating back to the Egyptian Babylonian times had such fine mastery over their fabrics. They were appreciated globally for their hand spinning, weaving and printing techniques that were handed down from generations. The handloom sector plays a very important role in the country's economy with over 4.3 million people directly involved in the production, the handloom industry is the second largest employment provider for the population of 2 lakh people after agriculture. Handloom products are known for their unique design and finesse, handloom is un-parallel in its flexibility and versatility permitting experimentation and encouraging innovations. The strength of the handloom lies in the introducing the innovating designs, which cannot be replicated mechanized power loom sector. Thus handloom forms a part of the heritage of India exemplifies the richness and diversity of our country and the artistry of the weavers.*

**KEYWORDS:** Handloom, Fabric, Assam, Weaving.

The handloom industry is expanding both nationally and internationally because of the demand for hand crafted artefacts and unique traditional designs, but the socio economic conditions of this community is deteriorating. The problems faced by the weavers are competing the global markets, low level of income, poor market price of the finished commodity and inability to reach the buyers. Handloom weavers need and deserve a centre where their skills and rich heritage can be utilized where further training will enable them to pursue new opportunities for their future.



It has a very diverse agro climatic and geographic condition, and each region is known for unique product of its own. It is not so easy to train people in this industry but the technology is easily understood even by common men. Even today handloom industry occupies an important place in the Indian economy It is an integral part of the decentralized part of the country, Indian handloom products are well known all over the world this industry is scattered all over the country the states where handlooms are operated on commercial basis as include Andhra Pradesh Bihar, Assam, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, Orissa, Tamilnadu, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh it provides direct and indirect employment to over 13 million weavers. One of the largest family based traditional industries in India is handloom. In India handloom sectors are scattered and decentralized. Handloom sectors are a source of livelihood for lakhs of weavers and artisans in India.

## INDIAN HANDLOOM INDUSTRY: AN OVERVIEW

- Handloom is a traditional weaving craft practised by generations of artisans to create attractive textile designs.
- According to the Reservation of Articles for Production Act, 1985, the term handloom is defined as “any loom other than power loom”.
- As mentioned before, The handloom industry is one of the oldest and the largest cottage industry in India, representing and preserving the vibrant Indian culture.
- Historically handloom Industry could be found in every state of India and each region had a unique take on their handloom product.
- Due to their unique rich variety, Indian Handloom Industry had a constant high demand in the Indian market as well as all over the world for their craftsmanship and intricacy of the designs.
- Indian artists are now distinguished worldwide for their hand spinning, weaving and printing elegance.
- The strength of the handloom industry lies in the fact that it involves hardly any usage of capital and power, is eco-friendly and suitable for innovations and transformation concerning market requirements.

Indian handloom designs takes its inspiration from nature and the products of various regions reflect the colors of the flora and fauna of that area and makes the uniqueness of handloom products. Indian handloom products are as different and varied as our cultures and languages. Handloom sector plays an important role in the Indian economy in the context of employment generation and the economic development of India. Handloom units are also very important for welfare resources.

**The export of handloom products from India was valued at US\$ 343.69 million in FY19. In FY20 (till November 2019), the exports stood at US\$ 226.05 million.**

Source:

Directorate General of Commercial Intelligence and Statistics (DGCIS)

### WHAT IS HANDLOOM?

Handloom refers to wooden frames of different types which are used by skilled artisans to weave fabrics usually from natural fibers like Cotton, Silk, Wool, Jute etc. It is a cottage industry where the entire family is involved in the production of cloth. Right from spinning the yarn, colouring, to weaving on the loom if done by them. Fabric produced from these looms is also referred to as Handloom. The tools required for this entire process are made from wood, sometimes bamboo and they do not require any electricity to run them. The entire process of fabric production was totally manual in earlier times. Thus this is the most eco-friendly way of producing clothes.

### REVIVAL OF HANDLOOM

Mahatma Gandhi started the Swadeshi Movement and reintroduced hand spinning in the name of Khadi which essentially means hand spun and hand woven. Every Indian was urged to spin the yarn using Charkhas and wear Khadi. This led to the closure of the Mills in Manchester and huge turning point in the Indian independence movement. People burnt imported clothes and chose to wear Khadi.



## INTRODUCTION TO THE ART AND CITY

This village is situated 35 km away from Guwahati, Assam on the banks of the Grand River Brahmaputra. The village is known for its silk weaving traditions and established in the 17th century by Momai Tamuli barbarua, a great administrator of the Ahom kingdom during the reign of the king Swarg deo Pratap Singh. (1603-1641). The village took shape as a silk weaving village when the Ahom's occupied it during the mid-17th century by defeating the Mughals. Patronized by the Pala and Ahom kings the craft established itself and during that period it was a luxury afforded by the royalty and the noble families of Assam. The weaving industry of Sualkuchi remained confined to the Tanti community till the 1930's later on people from other communities also took up weaving. Even some fisherman and Brahmin communities took to weaving as their main source of income as handloom was emerging as the most profitable source of income.

## CONCEPT OF HANDLOOM INDUSTRY

- The concept of handloom industry includes the process of operation by hand, of a wooden structure which is called the loom.
- The operations of this industry are primarily household-based, wherein various members of the family put in joint efforts for production.
- These activities are spread across thousands of towns and villages of the country and involve the transfer of skills from one generation to the next

## WEAVING INDUSTRY

The weaving industry has been an integral part of Indian history since ancient times, the art has been diverse throughout the nation. The art is traditionally passed onto the succeeding generation and kept alive. The art has been exploited in many regions of India, the industrialization has taken away the zest of the art. Globalization has affected the art to evolve and resort to modern means but there are some art forms of weaving that have taken a step back from the original status of respect. The art of weaving originating in Assam is one such endangered form of silk weaving which has been exploited and defamed. The competition which comes with the industrialization has brought people to scam the buyers but wrongly selling goods under the name of their art i.e.: Assamese silk sarees.

## WEAVING PROCESS

Yarn is a long continuous length of interlocked fibers. Staple length of silk fiber determines the thickness of yarn spun and this is referred to as "Silk yarn". Standard measure for a length of silk yarn is "Hank". A hank measures 840 yards. Hank yarn is typically used in handloom Production as opposed to cone yarn which is used in mill production. Hand spinning is process of converting fiber into the Yarn. The process of converting silk fiber to yarn is complex and the strength and fineness of yarn is dependent on the staple length of the fiber and the skill of the spinner. The equipment used by villagers is mostly seen due to the varied costs of a proper conventional hand loom equipment. The villagers have grown accustomed to the entire mechanism and have formed and devised their own equipment for their necessity of spinning yarn. As seen in the images above the use of all kinds of wooden wheels or broken parts of a carriage are used to make a spinning equipment, even a bicycle pedal is used for the same purpose.

The process of weaving is the interlacing of two sets of yarn - the warp and the weft. The equipment that facilitates this interlacement is the loom. A "handloom" is a loom that is used to weave fabrics without the use of electricity. The manipulation of the foot pedals to lift the warp has to be in sync with the throwing of the shuttle which carries the weft yarn. A perfect weave demands coordination between mind and body. The weaver achieves a harmony of motion and rhythm to create a unique and an incredible fabric

## TYPES OF DYEING

Dyeing used by the weavers, namely natural dyeing and chemical dyeing. Natural dyeing: Dyes extracted from natural materials such as the bark of trees, flowers, leaves and minerals are known as natural dyes. Vegetable dyes are a subcategory of natural dyes, referring to colors that come from plant matter only. Chemical Dyeing: There are different types in chemical dyes like - direct dyes, chemical dyes, Sulphur dyes, naphtha dyes, vat dyes and reactive dyes that are used today were developed during the period 1878-1956. Yarn dyeing is a predominant practice in North India unlike in the South India where fabric is dyed for developing prints in craft sector. The local experts are the ones who carry out the entire process of dyeing from mixing proportions of the additive to color mixes everything is handled by these experts for a single reason of material wastage, the yarn that is being dyed is always put in hanks (1 hank is 840 yards) thus if the dyeing is done by some novice dye maker, there is a huge loss margin on the artisans and weavers side.

## CONCLUSION

Handloom is a beautiful fabric and special as no two fabrics can be alike. Of course the output depends on the skill set of the weaver. But even if we make two weavers with similar skills weave the same fabric it will be different in one way or the other. Each fabric is a reflection of the weaver's moods – when a weaver is angry the fabric would be little tight while it would be loose when he is sad. Thus each piece is unique in itself. In India there are different styles of weaving in different parts of the country, and sometimes in the same region there could be as wide a range as 20- 30 varied styles. From simple plain fabrics, Tribal motifs, geometric designs, tie and dye, to exhaustive art on muslin. Our weavers have been master craftspeople. No other country can boast of such exclusive wide range of rich textile art, even today. Just like paintings and photographs, each woven sari is a masterpiece. Saying that handloom must perish for its time consuming and laborious compared to powerloom, is like saying painting, photography, clay modelling will go obsolete because of 3d printers and graphic designs.

The silk clothes that used to be one royal commodity in the ancient times has become a luxury item which many can afford today, while back then it was used by royalty only. The actual weavers had this art form as a sole income generating skill. The richness and ethnicity of this art lured many other sects of society to opt for making and selling these silk clothes too, but sending and selling them in different cities. Which in turn made it famous and known around the nation. The setback is that the weavers receive less appreciation and aren't generating enough wages to survive in this expensive economy. The weavers have started dropping out and opting out from this profession. There are incidents of people selling unmarked goods as Assamese traditional silk sarees and scamming people in the name of business, thus bringing more of reduced popularity to the actual weavers. This art of weaving and its diminished value in the global market lead me to the curiosity of the problem underneath it. The core problem lacks infrastructure in this field and the sale of the goods. The lack of infrastructure hinders the sale from a remote location in the hilly regions of the eastern regions of India. Thus this thesis will target a lot many issues in a one shot solution by enlivening the weaving culture in Assam.

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