

Women and Entrepreneurship in North East India: Handloom as an Enterprise in Manipur

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Otojit Kshetrimayum



V.V. Giri National Labour Institute

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CONTENTS

| | | |
|------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| I. | Introduction | 1 |
| II. | Handloom Sector in India and North East India: An Overview | 4 |
| III. | Handloom Weaving in Manipur: From Socio-Cultural Perspective | 6 |
| IV. | Handloom Sector in Manipur: An Overview | 8 |
| V. | Establishing an Enterprise | 17 |
| VI. | Handloom Entrepreneurs: Case Studies | 26 |
| VII. | Conclusion | 35 |

List of Tables

| | | |
|------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| Table 1.1 | Number of Handloom Worker Households in Select States in order of Ranking | 9 |
| Table 1.2 | Number of Handloom Workers in Select States in order of Ranking | 9 |
| Table 1.3 | Number of Looms in Select States in order of Ranking | 9 |
| Table 1.4 | Number of Handloom Worker Households by Type of Ration Card Owned | 10 |
| Table 1.5 | Number of Handloom Worker Households by Type of Dwelling Unit | 11 |
| Table 1.6 | Number of Handloom Worker Households by Ownership of Dwelling | 11 |
| Table 1.7 | Number of Total Handloom Workers by Age Group | 11 |
| Table 1.8 | Total Workforce by Type of Handloom Workers | 12 |
| Table 1.9 | Number of Adult ¹ Handloom Workers by Gender (2009-10) | 12 |
| Table 1.10 | Number of Handloom Worker Households by Social Groups | 12 |
| Table 1.11 | Number of Adult Handloom Workers by Social Groups | 13 |
| Table 1.12 | Educational Attainment of Adult Handloom | 13 |
| Table 1.13 | Total and Average Number of Person Days Worked Per Year | 14 |
| Table 1.14 | Number of Adult Handloom Workers by Employment Status | 14 |
| Table 1.15 | Number of Adult Handloom Workers by Nature of Engagement | 15 |
| Table 1.16 | Average Earning of Handloom Households (Rs./Annum) | 15 |
| Table 1.17 | Contribution of Handloom to Total Household Income in Percentage | 15 |
| Table 1.18 | Number of Looms by Working Status | 16 |
| Table 1.19 | Number of Working Looms by Purpose of Usage | 16 |

| | | |
|------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| Table 1.20 | Number of Working Looms by Type of Yarn | 17 |
| Table 1.21 | Number of Households Reporting Major Source of Input-Hank Yarn | 17 |
| Table 1.22 | Number of Households Reporting Major Source of Input-Dyed Yarn | 17 |
| Table 1.23 | Socio-economic and biographic profile of the entrepreneurs | 18 |
| Table 1.24 | Year of establishment | 19 |
| Table 1.25 | Type of organisation | 19 |
| Table 1.26 | Type of building | 19 |
| Table 1.27 | Reasons for establishing the enterprise | 20 |
| Table 1.28 | Monthly income of the entrepreneurs | 20 |
| Table 1.29 | Amount of fund invested in the enterprise | 21 |
| Table 1.30 | Details of financial assistance | 21 |
| Table 1.31 | Nature of employment of the weavers | 22 |
| Table 1.32 | Type of loom used | 23 |
| Table 1.33 | Mode of wages | 23 |
| Table 1.34 | Mode of sale | 23 |
| Table 1.35 | Mode of marketing products | 24 |
| Table 1.36 | Mode of Sales promotion | 24 |
| Table 1.37 | Problems encountered | 25 |
| Table 1.38 | Empowering lives | 26 |

Foreword

Nearly 27.83 lakh handloom households are engaged in weaving and allied activities in India, out of which 87 per cent are located in rural areas and the remaining 13 per cent in urban areas implying that handloom sector is predominantly a rural based industry. A look at the handloom industry in India over the past years reveals that the changes in production technology are few but the changes in the market are substantial. While handlooms has been losing the low end market to the power looms, it has been gaining new ground in the high and mid-range markets with its creation of new niches. At the centre of these higher-end market transactions are entrepreneurs or the master weavers. The present paper examines the rise of women handloom entrepreneurship in Manipur, one of the states in North East India with the transformation of handloom from a traditional craft to industry and its impact on the women entrepreneurs.

A case study of the women handloom entrepreneurs or master weavers in Imphal East district, Manipur was carried out. The main objective is to study the entrepreneurial functioning of the handloom entrepreneurs and understand how they sell in the same markets where the cooperatives are unable to sell. The paper is divided into following sections: the first part provides an overview of handloom industry in India and the North Eastern states of India; the second and third sections highlight handloom weaving in Manipur from a socio-cultural perspective and an overview of handloom sector in Manipur respectively; the fourth section introduces the working of the entrepreneurs and describes how they have established their enterprises and how they operate, and the last section highlights case studies of three successful women handloom entrepreneurs. The study has observed that women entrepreneurship in the handloom industry in Manipur is associated with the changing social and political structures and the expansion of market on the supply side and the attributes of culture of weaving on the demand side. It is significant to examine that all the women entrepreneurs in this study felt that they are all economically empowered in the sense that they are making an attempt to start their own entrepreneurship for generating income not only for themselves but also for the people involved in their enterprises. This study will be useful for the researchers, practitioners and policy makers in the area of handloom sector.



Manish K. Gupta
Director General

Women and Entrepreneurship in North East India: Handloom as an Enterprise in Manipur

I. Introduction

The present paper examines the rise of women handloom entrepreneurship with the transformation of handloom from a traditional craft to industry and its impact on the women entrepreneurs. A look at the handloom industry in India over the past years reveals that the changes in production technology are few but the changes in the market are substantial. While handlooms has been losing the low end market to the power looms, it has been gaining new ground in the high and mid-range markets with its creation of new niches. At the centre of these higher-end market transactions are entrepreneurs, in this case, the master weavers. There are two facts about master weavers that make them an interesting subject of research, first they are able to sell in the same markets where the cooperatives are unable to sell without subsidies. Second fact, which the government has now begun to acknowledge, is that 27 per cent of all the weavers in the country work under master weavers as per Handloom Census of India, 2009-10. So how is it that more than one fourth of the weavers continue to work under master weavers even though, the local cooperatives are supposed to be more 'weaver friendly'?

The pertinent reason that many of the weavers continue to work for master weavers is improper functioning of the cooperatives and the inability to provide work on a continuous basis. Hence, although the wages of the cooperatives may be higher and fairer, what weavers seem to value more is continuity of work. Compared to cooperatives, entrepreneurs remain relevant for two main reasons. First, they ensure that the costs involved in the business transactions are low. This ensures that the final product is within the price range that attracts customers. Second, they keep themselves close to the markets by being proactive in their interactions with various stakeholders. They use their social contacts intelligently to seek both business and market information along with other resources that their firms require at different times. If one were to compare the workings of cooperatives and master weavers, one finds that the master weavers manage to sell more successfully because she knows how to keep transaction costs low. Some of the techniques that master weavers use include – delaying payments (to weavers and to raw material suppliers), joint utilization of resources, negotiating longer credit time, hiring temporary staff, etc. These are commonly known in entrepreneurship literature as bootstrapping. So the tactics that master weavers use are amongst those

commonly used by entrepreneurs across the world. Handloom production and marketing are labour intensive activities. Therefore, master weavers develop governance mechanisms to ensure the smooth operation of their business. The handloom production process of each master weaver varies from place to place.¹

Manipur is still an industrially backward state. There are not enough industries to keep pace with the growing problems of unemployment, poverty, deficiency in health care facilities etc. Added to this, there is the problem of comparative neglect of industrialisation in state planning. As a result, the growth of entrepreneurship among women in general is very low. There are hardly any major or medium industrial units in the state worth mentioning and the few that have already been established are now suffering from varying degrees of industrial sickness. Given the enterprising spirit of the women in particular, with proper policies and programmes and reasonably adequate infrastructural support, small-scale and household industries, either demand-based or resource-based can be successfully established in Manipur.²

Though the entry of Manipuri women in organised business is a fairly recent phenomenon, in reality they have been associated with economic activity since ages. They have all along participated in outdoor occupations. Though there is no popular industries in Manipur, women of this state have played an important part in the production process by working in home based industries such as handloom, pottery, handicrafts, etc.³ While such economic participation by the women were largely unacknowledged because it was carried on basically within the private environs of the home, it taught them the vital skill of entrepreneurship in home based industries, a factor which could stand them in good stead today.

The ingredients for the success of any business venture are availability of raw materials, better finished products, ready markets and most importantly skill of the entrepreneur to successfully sell the finished products. In Manipur, especially in the field of handloom and handicraft, raw materials and craftspeople used to be aplenty. This prolificacy in fact ensued from the customary practice, among almost all the ethnic communities residing in the state, of young girls to learn the fine arts of weaving from their mothers- a tradition which is fast falling out of practice.

¹ Bhagavatula, Suresh. *The Working of Entrepreneurs in a Competitive Low Technology Industry: The Case of Master Weavers in the Handloom Industry*. Bangalore: Indian Institute of Management.

² Horam, M. 2000. *The Rising Manipur*. New Delhi: Manas Publication. pp. 212-215.

³ Kaul, Vinita. 2000. *Women and the Wind of Change*. New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House. p. 180.

There are also generations of entrepreneurs who have been selling the handloom and handicraft products in the domestic market along with other essential commodities. These are the women in the various *Ima Keithels* (women's market) spread across the state. Today, we see a new generation of women entrepreneurs emerging – women who are attempting to make their mark in the markets outside, women who are making the presence of the handloom and handicrafts from the state felt in the national and international markets. Moreover, cultural and political factors also play a significant role in the emergence of women handloom entrepreneurs in Manipur with the transformation of the society from kingship to democratic elected government and subsequently abolishing the feudalisation and restriction of handloom craft to specific lineage groups.

Women entrepreneurs are represented by those groups of women who have broken away from the beaten track and are exploring new vistas of economic participation.⁴ A woman entrepreneur, in general terms, can be defined as any individual woman or a group of women, who initiate, organize and operate a business enterprise. Government of India has defined women entrepreneurship as an enterprise owned and controlled by a women having a minimum financial interest of 51% of the capital and giving at least 51% of employment generated in the enterprise to women. In our tradition bound society, we may think that it is not possible for a woman to be an entrepreneur but the myth that a woman's place is in the home has been convincingly demolished by the modern age. Women in business are a recent phenomenon in India. By and large they had confined themselves to petty business and tiny cottage industries. Women entrepreneurs engaged in business due to push and pull factors which encourage women to have an independent occupation and stands on their own legs. A sense towards independent decision-making on their life and career is one of the motivational factors behind this urge. Saddled with household chores and domestic responsibilities women want to get independence. Under the influence of these factors the women entrepreneurs choose a profession as a challenge and as an urge to do something new. Such situation is described as pull factors. While in push factors women engaged in business activities due to family and economic compulsion and the responsibility is thrust upon them. Interestingly, Nongbri argued that pertinent problems in agriculture had motivated the Khasi women in Meghalaya to join entrepreneurship. She pointed out that although

⁴ Moitra, Biplab. 2001. 'Women and Entrepreneurship', *Yojana*. Vol. 45. p. 17.

entrepreneurship as an occupation gave women sufficient financial stability and also flexibility, they did not enjoy high status due to the gendered ideology.⁵

In this connection, a case study of the women handloom entrepreneurs or master weavers of Manipur was carried out. The study was conducted among the fifty handloom master weavers of Imphal East district. The main objective is to study the entrepreneurial functioning of the handloom entrepreneurs and understand how they sell in the same markets where the cooperatives are unable to sell. The paper is divided into following sections: the first part provides an overview of handloom industry in India and the North Eastern states of India; the second and third sections highlight handloom weaving in Manipur from a socio-cultural perspective and an overview of handloom sector in Manipur respectively; the fourth section introduces the working of the entrepreneurs and describes how they have established their enterprises and how they operate, and the last section highlights case studies of three successful women handloom entrepreneurs.

II. Handloom Sector in India and North East India: An Overview

According to the Handloom Census of India, 2009-10⁶ nearly 27.83 lakh handloom households are engaged in weaving and allied activities in India, out of which 87 per cent are located in rural areas and the remaining 13 per cent in urban areas implying that handloom sector is predominantly a rural based industry. The majority (82 per cent) of handloom working households are weaver households, which means that at least one member of every such household is engaged in weaving activities. Nearly 14 per cent are allied worker households, 3 per cent are idle loom households and about 1 per cent is other handloom households having no adult handloom workers.

In the North-East, 90 per cent of the handloom worker households are weaver households. The allied worker households are mostly found in the states outside the region, and form 29 per cent of the total handloom worker households in these states. A caste-wise breakup yields that about 10 per cent handloom working households belong to the Scheduled Castes (SCs), 22 per cent households belong to the Scheduled Tribes (STs), 41 per cent households are from Other Backward Castes (OBCs) and 27 per cent households belong to Others. There is major difference in the caste

⁵ Nongbri, Tiplut. 2008. *Gender, Matriliney and Entrepreneurship: The Khasis of North-East India*. New Delhi: Zubaan.

⁶ National Council of Applied Economic Research. 2010. *Handloom Census of India, 2009-10*. New Delhi: NCAER.

composition of handloom worker households in the North-East and other states. In the North-East, ST (36 per cent) and OBC (33 per cent) households have similar proportions of almost a third of the total households, followed by Others category households (24 per cent), while SC households (7 per cent) are far less in number. In states outside the North-East, more than half (53 per cent) of the handloom worker households belong to the OBCs category, followed by households from the Other category (31 per cent). SC households account for 14 per cent of the total, while ST households have a very small presence (2 per cent).

A religion-wise breakup shows that about 78 per cent of the handloom worker households are Hindus, 15 per cent households are Muslims, six per cent households are Christians, and the remaining one per cent households are Buddhists, Sikh or from other religions. There are differences in the religion-wise composition of handloom workers households in the North-East and other states. In the North-East, 82 per cent of the households are Hindus largely concentrated in the state of Assam, and 12 per cent households follow Christianity and other religions. The proportion of Muslim households is small (6 per cent). In states outside the North-East, the proportion of Hindu households (70 per cent) is comparatively less, and there is a major increase in the proportion of Muslim households (29 per cent). Households from other religions account for only 1 per cent of the total. Uttar Pradesh (85 per cent) and West Bengal (37 per cent) emerge as special cases with high proportions of Muslim households.

Nearly 53 per cent of the handloom worker households are into commercial production, and nearly 16 per cent households undertake a mix of domestic and commercial production. Thus, a total of 69 per cent of the handloom households undertake commercial production.

Nearly 28 per cent of the handloom worker households are into purely domestic production and mostly located in the North-Eastern states. The total weaver household units recorded a decline from the first (29.9 lakh weaver households), to the second (25.3 lakh weaver households) and the third (22.6 lakh weaver households) handloom Census, indicating that the sector has exhibited a declining trend for over the two decades. In contrast to the national trend, the North-Eastern states recorded an increase in the number of such households from the first (14.6 lakh weaver households) to the third (15.1 lakh weaver households) census.⁷

There are 43.31 lakh handloom workers in the country, out of which 36.33 workers stay in rural areas and 6.98 workers stay in urban areas. An age-

⁷ Handloom worker households refer to both the weavers households and allied handloom workers households.

wise distribution reveals that adult (aged 18 years and above) handloom workers account for 89 per cent of the workforce, while under-age workers (aged less than 18 years) account for 11 per cent of the workforce.

There are major differences in the gender composition of the adult handloom work force between the North-Eastern states and other parts of India. The North-Eastern states have a predominantly (99 per cent) female adult work force. In states outside the North-East, male handloom workers are present in significant numbers (44 per cent). States that have a high proportion of male handloom workers are Uttar Pradesh (50 per cent), Andhra Pradesh (49 per cent), Tamil Nadu (47 per cent) and Karnataka (46 per cent).

There are major differences in the employment structure of adult handloom workers in the North-East and other states. 96 per cent of all adult handloom workers in the North-East work in independent production systems, though a large proportion of them are domestic workers. In comparison, 76 per cent of all adult handloom workers are contract workers in other states: 66 per cent work under master weavers or private owners, and 10 per cent work under institutions.

A large majority of looms in the North-Eastern states engage in domestic production (62 per cent), and a relatively less (34 per cent) proportion is into mixed production. In states outside the North-East, 82 per cent of the looms are purely for commercial production and 14 per cent for mixed production.

Thus, we could observe that the nature and scope of handloom in the North Eastern states of India is quite distinct from the rest of the country. This definitely provides an interesting area for research.

III. Handloom Weaving in Manipur: From Socio-Cultural Perspective

Weaving industry in Manipur is not just an economic activity that can be accounted for only by economic explanation. It may be said that there is a concomitant relationship between its origin as an industry and the cultural demand of society. The industry is sustained, as there is need for costumes by different clans to mark their distinct identity and for various secular and religious occasions. So, it is a medium, which serves as a repository and transmitter of culture and civilization. The costumes serve as narratives of a different kind, which is neither oral nor literate but one, which inheres and tells the history, cultural identity, social structure, gender roles etc. of the society. This means that there is a deeper structure cloistered in the handloom works apart from its utilitarian function. Owing to these cultural connotations, weaving is an important site for sociological inquiry.

The dress and the mode of dressing forms a significant part of the Meitei⁸ tradition. The Meitei cultural tradition of the art of weaving is based on a mythical foundation. Weaving was so much culturally esteemed in the traditions of the Meitei that in the community ritual of *Lai Haraoba*⁹, the dance performed by the *Maibis* (priestess) symbolically conveyed the art of weaving to the young girls. Traditionally, it was a practice for the parents to give a set of weaving apparatus to their daughter as an indispensable part of the marriage gift on her wedding. It would also be worthwhile to note that when selecting a girl for daughter-in-law, the Meitei parents gave priority to the prospective bride's proficiency in the art of weaving. Until recently, it was compulsory for every female in the Meitei society to be trained in the art of weaving. Females who do not possess adequate knowledge and skill in weaving are viewed as lacking in the quality of womanhood, and for that matter, they do not have the source of wealth and prosperity. That is why knowledge and skill of weaving was compulsory for every Meitei female. Acquiring knowledge of the art of weaving was thus viewed as the greatest asset a girl of marriageable age needs to have. It is the women who provided their families with all the necessary household cloths and garments worn by the members by making the items themselves. It has been reported that every Meitei household had at least a set of weaving looms, either the loin loom (*Khwang Iyong*) or the throw-shuttle loom (*Pang Iyong*) type.

In contrast to other parts of India where weaving is primarily carried out by men, in Manipur weaving is entirely the work of women. Weaving formed an integral part of women's domestic duties. In fact, knowledge of weaving is primary qualification of a Meitei girl. The handloom industry is practically dominated by women not only from the idea of economic necessity but also from the sense of social custom. A Meitei girl is initiated into the art at a tender age, and throughout her life, she practices this art. Not only does she supply clothing to her family members but also makes it a source of family industry. It is said that the development of this industry by women is linked to the men's continuous engagement in wars. Women therefore not only had to supply men with the uniforms but also had to maintain their families by selling the product of this industry.¹⁰

⁸ Meities, Nagas and Kukis are three main ethnic communities in Manipur. Meiteis constitute the largest group among the three communities and are predominantly settled in the valley part of the State.

⁹ *Lai Haraoba* is the biggest ritualistic festival of the Meities for pleasing the local deities with various recitals of songs and dances.

¹⁰ Roy, Nilima. 1979. *Art of Manipur*. Delhi: Agam Kala Prakashan. p. 13.

The fact that various types of clothes were in use is revealed in the *Puyas* (ancient hand written manuscripts), though no date has been mentioned. Besides, the oral traditions of the Meiteis such as legends, folk tales etc. clearly suggest that the various items used in the weaving of clothes formed part of the dowry¹¹ of the princesses and daughters of royal families. For example, at the daughter's marriage, different weaving tools such as 'Khwang Iyong' (loin loom), 'Pang Iyong' (throw shuttle loom) etc. were some of the essential items of dowry. There is also a reserved room known as 'Ningol Ka' (daughter's room) in the *Yumjao* or traditional Meitei house. The unmarried girls of a particular locality would bring the different items used in weaving like *Tareng* (spinning wheel) to assemble in this room and performed the work of spinning till late at night and engaged themselves in a sort of competitions with each other to bring out the best design and product. This tradition of coming together in a single house to weave and work is known as *Sinnaiphram Kaba* (going to work). This was done on a rotation basis from one house to the other every other day. Since the Second World War this practice has dwindled.¹²

Majority of the weavers in the state are self-employed artisans who carry on the profession in their own homes with the assistance of their family members in pre-loom and post-loom process. During the pre-plan period all the cottage and village industry in Manipur, especially the handloom industry was independently run by the workers themselves with the help of family members. The craft which was started to meet the limited demand of families soon developed into a profession for certain groups of people and the ideas of commercialization and marketing of the products as an economic activity entered the field. The change in this traditional activity is that the art of weaving in its contemporary form has become a modern economic enterprise in Manipur.

IV. Handloom Sector in Manipur: An Overview

The socio-economic dimension of the handloom sector in Manipur is highlighted in this section by examining the Handloom Census of India, 2009-10 report published by National Council of Applied Economic Research and Development Commissioner (Handloom), Ministry of Textiles. Regarding number of handloom worker households, Manipur stands in the fourth position and constitutes 6.43 per cent of the total

¹¹ Dowry here refers to a kind of gift to the bride at the time of marriage. It generally consists of items needed to start a family. The choice of items is solely decided by the bride's parents. However, there are certain items which should be included as per the custom of the society.

¹² Ibid. p. 9.

handloom worker households in India. 84 per cent of the handloom worker households in Manipur are located in the rural areas and nearly 16 per cent are in the urban areas. Thus, the handloom sector in the state is predominantly a rural activity. In terms of handloom workers, Manipur occupies sixth position constituting about 4.7 percent of the total handloom workers in India. The state has got the third highest number of looms with nearly 8 per cent of the total number of looms in India. Thus, Manipur is a significant contributor to the handloom sector in India (see Tables 1.1, 1.2 & 1.3).

Table 1.1: Number of Handloom Worker Households in Select States in order of Ranking

| Sl. No. | State | Number of Handloom Worker Households | Percentage share to total household (27,83,271) |
|---------|-------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| 1. | Assam | 12, 40,817 | 44.58 |
| 2. | West Bengal | 4,06,761 | 14.61 |
| 3. | Tamil Nadu | 1,89,069 | 6.79 |
| 4. | Manipur | 1,7, 8,975 | 6.43 |

Source: Handloom Census of India, 2009-10, NCAER

Table 1.2: Number of Handloom Workers in Select States in order of Ranking

| Sl. No. | State | Number of Handloom Worker | Percentage share to total workers (43,31,876) |
|---------|----------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| 1. | Assam | 14,83,864 | 34.25 |
| 2. | West Bengal | 6,65,006 | 15.35 |
| 3. | Tamil Nadu | 3,18,512 | 7.35 |
| 4. | Andhra Pradesh | 3,06,465 | 7.07 |
| 5. | Uttar Pradesh | 2,17,015 | 5.00 |
| 6. | Manipur | 2,04,319 | 4.71 |

Source: Handloom Census of India, 2009-10, NCAER

Table 1.3: Number of Looms in Select States in order of Ranking

| Sl. No. | State | Number of Loom | Percentage share to total workers (23,77,331) |
|---------|-------------|----------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| 1. | Assam | 11,11,577 | 46.75 |
| 2. | West Bengal | 3,07,829 | 12.94 |
| 3. | Manipur | 1,90,634 | 8.01 |

Source: Handloom Census of India, 2009-10, NCAER

Economic Status

As seen from Table 1.4 furnished below, 5.3 per cent of the handloom worker households belong to the poorest of the poor category and 30.1 per cent belong to the BPL category. Only 11.6 per cent of the households hold APL cards. It is also likely that many households belonging to the 'No Ration card category' may be very poor. A sizeable number of the handloom households (53 per cent) do not hold any ration card. It is evident that as compared to the national average poverty level of 22 per cent as per Planning Commission's estimate for 2011-12, the incidence of poverty among the handloom worker households is much higher at more than 35.4 per cent.

Table 1.4: Number of Handloom Worker Households by Type of Ration Card Owned

| Location | AAV* | BPL* | APL* | No ration card | Total |
|------------|-------|--------|--------|----------------|---------|
| Rural | 7,682 | 45,199 | 17,507 | 80,724 | 151,112 |
| Urban | 1,810 | 8,641 | 3,285 | 14,127 | 27,863 |
| Total | 9,492 | 53,840 | 20,792 | 94,851 | 178,975 |
| Percentage | 5.30 | 30.08 | 11.61 | 52.99 | 100 |

*Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAV), Below Poverty Line (BPL); Above Poverty Line (APL)
Source: Handloom Census of India, 2009-10, NCAER

House ownership

Indicative of their poor economic condition, majority of handloom worker households (97.5 per cent), live in semi-pucca or kuchha dwellings. Both the kuchcha and semi-pucca houses, are mostly located in the rural areas. Only 2.5 per cent of the households have pucca houses. About 93 per cent of the handloom workers live in their own dwelling units. Only 4 per cent of the workers live in rented premises (see Tables 1.5 & 1.6).

Table 1.5: Number of Handloom Worker Households by Type of Dwelling Unit

| Location | Kuchha ¹³ | Semi pucca ¹⁴ | Pucca ¹⁵ | Total |
|------------|----------------------|--------------------------|---------------------|---------|
| Rural | 65,357 | 82,302 | 3,453 | 151,112 |
| Urban | 8,984 | 17,980 | 899 | 27,863 |
| Total | 74,341 | 100,282 | 4,352 | 178,975 |
| Percentage | 41.5 | 56 | 2.5 | 100 |

Source: Handloom Census of India, 2009-10, NCAER

Table 1.6: Number of Handloom Worker Households by Ownership of Dwelling

| Location | Owned | Rented | Others | Total |
|------------|---------|--------|--------|---------|
| Rural | 139,150 | 7,645 | 4,317 | 151,112 |
| Urban | 26,858 | 177 | 828 | 27,863 |
| Total | 166,008 | 7,822 | 5,145 | 178,975 |
| Percentage | 92.75 | 4.37 | 2.87 | 100 |

Source: Handloom Census of India, 2009-10, NCAER

Under-age Workers

Out of the total handloom workers of 2,18,753 in Manipur, nearly 7 per cent are below 18 years of age. The reasons for existence of large number of under-age handloom workers may be due to the large scale incidence of poverty among the handloom worker households, predominantly domestic nature of handloom production, and low-level of educational attainments among the handloom worker households.

Out of the total adult handloom workers, nearly 98 per cent are weavers and the remaining 2 per cent are allied workers. Nearly 84 per cent of the adult handloom workers belong to the rural areas and 16 per cent are located in the urban areas (see Tables 1.7 & 1.8).

¹³ Kuchha house is one whose walls and roof are made of non-pucca materials. Non-pucca materials include unburnt bricks, bamboo, mud, grass, leaves, reeds, thatch, etc.

¹⁴ A semi-pucca house is a structure that has have either the walls or the roof but not both, made of pucca materials.

¹⁵ A pucca house is a structure whose walls and roof are made of pucca materials such as cement, concrete, oven-burnt bricks, stone, iron, timber, tiles, slate, plywood, and artificial wood of synthetic material.

Table 1.7: Number of Total Handloom Workers by Age Group

| Location | Total workforce (All ages) | < 18 years | 18 years & above |
|----------|-------------------------------|---------------|---------------------|
| Rural | 184,088 | 11,780 | 172,308 |
| Urban | 34,665 | 2,654 | 32,011 |
| Total | 218,753 | 14,434 (6.59) | 204,319(93.40) |

Source: Handloom Census of India, 2009-10, NCAER

Table 1.8: Total Workforce by Type of Handloom Workers

| Location | No. of adult weavers | No. of adult allied workers | Total adult workers |
|------------|-------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------|
| Rural | 169,878 | 2,430 | 172,308 (84.3) |
| Urban | 30,729 | 1,282 | 32,011 (15.7) |
| Total | 200,607 | 3,712 | 204,319 |
| Percentage | 98.2 | 1.8 | 100 |

Source: Handloom Census of India, 2009-10, NCAER

Gender

Handloom weaving in Manipur is exclusively the work of the womenfolk. This has been validated from the table below that nearly 99 per cent of the total adult handloom workers are women with only a miniscule number comprising men, majority of who are allied workers (see Table 1.9).

Table 1.9: Number of Adult¹⁶ Handloom Workers by Gender (2009-10)

| Location | Male | Female | Total |
|------------|-------|---------|---------|
| Rural | 1,261 | 171,047 | 172,308 |
| Urban | 316 | 31,695 | 32,011 |
| Total | 1,577 | 202,742 | 204,319 |
| Percentage | 0.77 | 99.22 | 100 |

Source: Handloom Census of India, 2009-10, NCAER

Social Groups

As represented in both Table 1.10 and Table 1.11, majority of the handloom worker households and handloom workers (53 per cent) belong to socially disadvantaged groups such as OBCs (26.8), STs (21.5) and SCs (4.5). This social group status is also closely linked to the incidence of poverty among handloom workers.

¹⁶ Adult workers comprise workers who are aged 18 years and above.

Table 1.10: Number of Handloom Worker Households by Social Groups

| Location | Scheduled caste (SCs) | Scheduled tribes (STs) | Other backward castes (OBCs) | Others | Total |
|------------|-----------------------|------------------------|------------------------------|--------|---------|
| Rural | 5,825 | 38,505 | 39,819 | 66,963 | 151,112 |
| Urban | 2,415 | 424 | 8,104 | 16,920 | 27,863 |
| Total | 8,240 | 38,929 | 47,923 | 83,883 | 178,975 |
| Percentage | 4.60 | 21.75 | 26.77 | 46.86 | 100 |

Source: Handloom Census of India, 2009-10, NCAER

Table 1.11: Number of Adult Handloom Workers by Social Groups

| Location | Scheduled castes (SCs) | Scheduled tribes (STs) | Other backward castes (OBCs) | Others | Total |
|------------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------------|--------|---------|
| Rural | 6,421 | 43,545 | 45,451 | 76,891 | 172,308 |
| Urban | 2,701 | 466 | 9,295 | 19,549 | 32,011 |
| Total | 9,122 | 44,011 | 54,746 | 96,440 | 204,319 |
| Percentage | 4.46 | 21.54 | 26.79 | 47.20 | 100 |

Source: Handloom Census of India, 2009-10, NCAER

Education

The educational status of the workers also indicates their capacity to break the vicious cycle of poverty. As shown in Table 1.12, about 17 per cent of the total adult handloom workers have never attended school. A vast majority of them, i.e. 86 per cent have educational level of high school and below.

Table 1.12: Educational Attainment of Adult Handloom

| Location | Never Attended school | Below primary | Primary | Middle | High school/secondary | Higher secondary | Graduate & above | Others | Total |
|------------|-----------------------|---------------|---------|--------|-----------------------|------------------|------------------|--------|---------|
| Rural | 29,389 | 11,926 | 24,693 | 54,425 | 29,482 | 14,293 | 6,342 | 1,758 | 172,308 |
| Urban | 1,524 | 4,793 | 3,103 | 9,654 | 6,507 | 3,833 | 2,329 | 268 | 32,011 |
| Total | 34,182 | 13,450 | 27,796 | 64,079 | 35,989 | 18,126 | 8,671 | 2,026 | 204,319 |
| Percentage | 16.7 | 6.6 | 13.6 | 31.4 | 17.7 | 8.8 | 4.2 | 1.0 | 100 |

Source: Handloom Census of India, 2009-10, NCAER

Employment

On an average, the handloom workers are employed for 211 days a year. While weavers get 211 days of work, the allied workers get work for 189 days only. Slight difference exists in the number of days worked in rural and urban areas. While the weavers in rural areas work for 210 days, those in urban areas work for 220 days. The allied workers in rural areas work for 190 days and those in urban areas work for 188 days.

It is observed that nearly 97 per cent of the total adult handloom workers are independent workers followed by workers working under master weavers, private owners, State Handloom Development Corporation (SHDC), cooperative society and Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC). Nearly 84 per cent of the total adult handloom workers are working full time while 16 per cent are into part time engagement. These details are highlighted in Tables 1.13, 1.14 and 1.15.

Table 1.13: Total and Average Number of Person Days Worked Per Year

| Location | Total days worked (Weaver+ Allied ¹⁷) | Average days per household | Average days per worker | Average days per weaver | Average days per allied worker |
|----------|---------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Rural | 36,094,646 | 239 | 209 | 210 | 190 |
| Urban | 7,011,327 | 252 | 219 | 220 | 188 |
| Total | 43,105,973 | 241 | 211 | 211 | 189 |

Source: Handloom Census of India, 2009-10, NCAER

Table 1.14: Number of Adult Handloom Workers by Employment Status

| Location | Independent ¹⁸ | Under master weavers ¹⁹ | Under SHDC* | Under KVIC* | Under cooperative society | Under private owners | Total |
|------------|---------------------------|------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|---------------------------|----------------------|---------|
| Rural | 166,639 | 3,834 | 57 | 29 | 50 | 1,699 | 172,308 |
| Urban | 31,256 | 204 | 3 | 5 | 7 | 536 | 32,011 |
| Total | 197,895 | 4,038 | 60 | 34 | 57 | 2,235 | 204,319 |
| Percentage | 96.85 | 1.97 | 0.02 | 0.01 | 0.02 | 1.09 | 100 |

* State Handloom Development Corporation (SHDC), Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC)
Source: Handloom Census of India, 2009-10, NCAER

¹⁷ An allied worker is one who has undertaken pre-loom (dying of yarn, warping/winding, weft winding, sizing, testing, etc.) and/or post-loom activities (dying of fabric/calendering/printing of fabric, made ups, etc.), even for one day in the last one year (preceding the survey date), either within the premises of the house or outside the household premises.

¹⁸ An independent worker describes a production system in which the worker purchases raw materials from the market, makes cloth or allied activity product/service (warp product, weft product, sizing, calendering, made ups, etc.) and sells the woven finished products or services in the market independently, all on his own.

¹⁹ A master weaver refers as a generic term to people who get the yarn sized, supply beams to smaller owner, get the fabric woven and get the cloth processed. This system of master weaver has evolved over years. In the past, master weavers used to advance yarn to weavers working in their own houses. In recent years, many master weavers have set up common sheds for weaving, where hired weavers come and undertake production activities.

Table 1.15: Number of Adult Handloom Workers by Nature of Engagement

| Location | Full time ²⁰ | Part time ²¹ | Total |
|------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|---------|
| Rural | 145,647 | 26,661 | 172,308 |
| Urban | 26,870 | 5,141 | 32,011 |
| Total | 172,517 | 31,802 | 204,319 |
| Percentage | 84.43 | 15.56 | 100 |

Source: Handloom Census of India, 2009-10, NCAER

Income

The average annual earning of the handloom households is Rs. 56,261 in Manipur and Rs. 36,498 at the all India level (see Table 1.16). Thus, the state has higher average annual household income than the national level. However, it is found that the share of handloom income to total handloom household income in the state is only 9.53 per cent across all handloom households while it is 30.2 per cent at the all India level (see Table 1.17). This sharp discrepancy can be attributed to the fact that most of the households in Manipur do handloom weaving generally for commercial production at a very subsistence level and primarily for domestic purpose. The average annual income from handloom activity across all households in the state is Rs. 5,361 which again is much lower than the Rs. 11,015 per annum at the national level.

Table 1.16: Average Earning of Handloom Households (Rs./Annum)

| Location | Weaver households | Allied households | All households |
|----------|-------------------|-------------------|----------------|
| Rural | 55,672 | 53,927 | 55,675 |
| Urban | 59,078 | 70,559 | 59,442 |
| Total | 56,188 | 64,486 | 56,261 |

Source: Handloom Census of India, 2009-10, NCAER

Table 1.17: Contribution of Handloom to Total Household Income in Percentage

| Location | Per cent share of income from handloom |
|----------|----------------------------------------|
| Rural | 9.42 |
| Urban | 10.08 |
| Total | 9.53 |

Source: Handloom Census of India, 2009-10, NCAER

²⁰ Persons who operate looms or work on allied work on a full-time basis, that is, those who engage exclusively on handloom activity are treated as full-time workers.

²¹ Part-time handloom workers are persons engaged in occupations other than weaving or allied handloom work and who operate looms or undertake handloom allied activity only during their leisure hours or when the regular weavers/allied workers are out on lunch, tea, etc.

Loom & Yarn

As represented in Tables 1.18, 1.19, 1.20, 1.21 and 1.22, there are 1,90, 634 looms in the state of Manipur, out of which about 98 per cent are in working order while the remaining 2 per cent are in idle status. Only 12 per cent of the working looms are into commercial production and about 87 per cent of the looms are into both domestic and commercial production.

Almost 97 per cent of the looms use mill spun yarn implying that the state exclusively depends on other states for its yarn requirement by the looms as the state does not have any yarn industry.

Out of the total households procuring both the hank and dyed yarn for their looms, about 96 per cent receive it from the open market followed by supply from other sources, master weavers, State Handloom Development Corporation (SHDC) and cooperative society. It shows that the handloom households are very much susceptible to market volatility and risks.

Table 1.18: Number of Looms by Working Status

| Location | Working ²² | Idle ²³ | Total |
|------------|-----------------------|--------------------|---------|
| Rural | 158,783 | 3,204 | 161,987 |
| Urban | 27,920 | 727 | 28,647 |
| Total | 186,703 | 3,931 | 190,634 |
| Percentage | 97.93 | 2.06 | 100 |

Source: Handloom Census of India, 2009-10, NCAER

Table 1.19: Number of Working Looms by Purpose of Usage

| Location | Commercial ²⁴ | Domestic ²⁵ | Both domestic and commercial | Total |
|------------|--------------------------|------------------------|------------------------------|---------|
| Rural | 19,708 | 980 | 138,095 | 158,783 |
| Urban | 3,132 | 35 | 24,753 | 27,920 |
| Total | 22,840 | 1,015 | 162,848 | 186,703 |
| Percentage | 12.23 | 0.54 | 87.22 | 100 |

Source: Handloom Census of India, 2009-10, NCAER

²² A working loom is defined as a complete loom that has been operated at least for one day during the last one year or is at present working.

²³ A complete but idle loom is defined as the loom that has not been used for even a single day during the last one year.

²⁴ Handloom work - including weaving and allied work - that is undertaken as an occupation, and the product or service is primarily made for market consumption may be regarded as commercial handloom activity.

²⁵ Handloom work that is undertaken primarily for noncommercial purposes such as making fabrics for domestic consumption may be regarded as domestic handloom activity.

Table 1.20: Number of Working Looms by Type of Yarn

| Location | Mill spun yarn | Hand spun yarn | Total |
|------------|----------------|----------------|---------|
| Rural | 153,888 | 4,895 | 158,783 |
| Urban | 27,328 | 592 | 27,920 |
| Total | 181,216 | 5,487 | 186,703 |
| Percentage | 97.06 | 2.93 | 100 |

Source: Handloom Census of India, 2009-10, NCAER

Table 1.21: Number of Households Reporting Major Source of Input-Hank Yarn

| Location | Open market | Master weaver | Cooperative society | SHDC* | Others | Total |
|------------|-------------|---------------|---------------------|-------|--------|---------|
| Rural | 118,629 | 2,685 | 29 | 33 | 1,690 | 123,066 |
| Urban | 21,252 | 132 | 4 | 12 | 617 | 22,017 |
| Total | 139,881 | 2,817 | 33 | 45 | 2,307 | 145,083 |
| Percentage | 96.41 | 1.50 | 0.02 | 0.03 | 1.59 | 100 |

*State Handloom Development Corporation (SHDC)
Source: Handloom Census of India, 2009-10, NCAER

Table 1.22: Number of Households Reporting Major Source of Input-Dyed Yarn

| Location | Open market | Master weaver | Cooperative society | SHDC* | Others | Total |
|------------|-------------|---------------|---------------------|-------|--------|---------|
| Rural | 132,283 | 2,868 | 42 | 28 | 2,822 | 138,043 |
| Urban | 23,819 | 138 | 11 | 3 | 545 | 24,516 |
| Total | 156,102 | 3,006 | 53 | 31 | 3,367 | 162,559 |
| Percentage | 96.02 | 1.84 | 0.03 | 0.02 | 2.07 | 100 |

Source: Handloom Census of India, 2009-10, NCAER

V. Establishing an Enterprise

There are two ways for establishing an enterprise. The first route is to inherit a part of the family enterprise. Handloom is primarily a family or kin-oriented business. The second route is that taken by weavers who after working for intermediaries – cooperative, NGO or a master weaver – for a while set up their own firms with financial support from family or elsewhere.

The most challenging part of starting one's own enterprise is to raise the required capital and to recruit weavers as most of them would be under the

aegis of another master weaver. An important factor in creating an enabling environment for new start-ups is the macro environment surrounding the village or cluster. During boom time, there are a number of opportunities for weavers to break their bonds with master weavers to establish their own firms because many individuals (especially raw material suppliers) would be willing to lend money but in normal times when there is lesser optimism of the industry, it may be more difficult.

Regarding the age of the selected women entrepreneurs, a maximum of 42 per cent belonged to the age group of 31 to 40 years. Surprisingly, 10 per cent of the entrepreneurs are between the ages of 18-20 years. The youngest entrepreneur is 18 years while the oldest is 76 years. It is evident from the table that 40 per cent of the respondents were educated upto graduate level. Only 10 per cent had no formal education. This indicates the direct correlation between education and entrepreneurship in this case.

Analysing the type of family of the respondents, it was interesting to observe that 66 per cent had joint family system. 40 per cent of the families belonged to large family size with more than seven members in each family. The marital status of the selected entrepreneurs shows that 42 per cent of them were married. Apart from this, 26 per cent of the enterprises were run by widows and divorcees (see Table 1.23). It is observed that about 60 per cent of the enterprises were established during 1986 to 1995. The oldest enterprise to be established was in the year 1975. The most recent enterprise has been in the business since 2004 (see Table 1.24).

Table 1.23: Socio-economic and biographic profile of the entrepreneurs

| Details | No. of Entrepreneurs | Percentage |
|------------------------------|----------------------|------------|
| 1. Age of entrepreneurs | | |
| Below 20 years | 5 | 10 |
| 20-30 years | 12 | 24 |
| 31-40 years | 21 | 42 |
| 41-50 years | 7 | 14 |
| Above 50 years | 5 | 10 |
| 2. Educational qualification | | |
| No formal education | 5 | 10 |
| Secondary | 9 | 18 |
| Higher secondary | 13 | 26 |
| Graduate | 20 | 40 |
| Post graduate | 3 | 6 |
| 3. Type of family | | |
| Nuclear | 17 | 34 |
| Joint | 33 | 66 |

| | | |
|-------------------|----|----|
| 4. Family size | | |
| 1-3 members | 13 | 26 |
| 4-6 members | 17 | 34 |
| More than 7 | 10 | 40 |
| 5. Marital status | | |
| Unmarried | 16 | 32 |
| Married | 21 | 42 |
| Widow | 8 | 16 |
| Divorcee | 5 | 10 |

Source: Field work

Table 1.24: Year of establishment

| Year | No. of enterprise | Percentage share |
|-----------|-------------------|------------------|
| 1975-80 | 3 | 6 |
| 1981-85 | 7 | 14 |
| 1986-90 | 14 | 28 |
| 1991-95 | 15 | 30 |
| 1996-2000 | 7 | 14 |
| 2000-2004 | 4 | 8 |

Source: Field work

Regarding the nature of organisation, single ownership accounts for 60 percent whereas 40 percent of the enterprises were running as partnerships (see Table 1.25). The study shows that 62 percent and 14 percent of the enterprises had established the units in their own building and rented building respectively. However, it is interesting to observe that 24 percent of the enterprising units did not own or rent buildings. Instead they operated their businesses from their own homes (see Table 1.26).

Table 1.25: Type of organisation

| Organisation | No. of enterprise | Percentage |
|--------------|-------------------|------------|
| Single owner | 30 | 60 |
| Partnership | 20 | 40 |

Source: Field work

Table 1.26: Type of building

| Building | No. of enterprise | Percentage |
|-------------|-------------------|------------|
| Own | 31 | 62 |
| Rented | 7 | 14 |
| No building | 12 | 24 |

Source: Field work

Start up process of the enterprises

Among those surveyed, there are more fresh start-ups (66%) than splinter firms i.e., an extension of the already established enterprise. This implies that given certain conditions, independent weavers do have possibilities of coming out of the 'clutches' of master weavers to establish their own ventures. It is the demand of a particular product that creates an enabling environment for weavers along with the characteristics of their social networks that seem to influence who is able to set up their own ventures. It was seen that the urge to supplement the family income and unemployment had motivated 66 percent of the entrepreneurs to start up their handloom enterprises. On the other hand, the reasons stated by 34 percent of the entrepreneurs for establishing the enterprises were passion for the work and to take up their traditional occupation (see Table 1.27).

Table 1.27: Reasons for establishing the enterprise

| Reasons | No. of enterprise | Percentage |
|--------------------------|-------------------|------------|
| To augment family income | 15 | 30 |
| Unemployment | 18 | 36 |
| Passion for the work | 10 | 20 |
| Traditional occupation | 7 | 14 |

Source: Field work

Monthly income of the entrepreneurs

The data shows that more than 50 percent of the entrepreneurs could earn a monthly income of Rs. 7,500 and above. This shows that the entrepreneurs were earning a relatively good source of income from their enterprises (see Table 1.28).

Table 1.28: Monthly income of the entrepreneurs

| Income in Rs. | No. of entrepreneurs | Percentage |
|---------------|----------------------|------------|
| Below 2000 | - | - |
| 2000-4500 | 4 | 8 |
| 4500-7500 | 20 | 40 |
| Above 7500 | 26 | 52 |

Source: Field work

Investment and financial assistance

It is observed that 80 percent of the entrepreneurs invested Rs. 10,000 to 50,000 initially for the establishment of the enterprise. There were only

8 percent and 6 percent who had initially invested below Rs. 10,000 and above Rs. 50,000 respectively. It is interesting to note that the initial source of fund for 60 percent of the entrepreneurs came from self while the remaining 30 and 10 percent from family and loan from banks respectively (see Table 1.29).

Table 1.29: Amount of fund invested in the enterprise

| Initially invested in Rs. | No. of enterprise | Percentage |
|---------------------------|-------------------|------------|
| Below 10000 | 8 | 16 |
| 10000-20000 | 18 | 36 |
| 20000-30000 | 11 | 22 |
| 30000-40000 | 6 | 12 |
| 40000-50000 | 4 | 8 |
| Above 50000 | 3 | 6 |

Source: Field work

The study has shown that 70 percent of the enterprises have received financial assistance from cooperative bank, Department of Industry and Commerce, Prime Minister Rozgar Yojana, Nationalised bank, Post-office, or Private finance agencies. However, 30 percent of them did not receive financial assistance from any sources (see Table 1.30).

Table 1.30: Details of financial assistance

| Name of the agency | No. of enterprise | Percentage |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------|------------|
| No financial assistance | 15 | 30 |
| Cooperative bank | 6 | 12 |
| Post-office | 5 | 10 |
| Nationalised bank | 7 | 14 |
| Private finance agencies | 3 | 6 |
| Swarnajyanti Gram Swarojgar Yojana | 7 | 14 |
| Department of Industry and Commerce | 7 | 14 |

Source: Field work

Spheres of Operation

Any entrepreneur has to engage in two separate spheres of operation – Production and Marketing. Finance and design of new products play an important role in both. The clients of the entrepreneurs are the owners

of textile stores in various urban and semi-urban areas and it is through them that the products reach their retail customers. The main raw material in the handloom industry is yarn that is imported mainly from outside the state. Dyed yarn in different colours is given to the weaver who prepares the warp and the weft which are then woven to form the required fabric.

All the enterprises employed some weavers on permanent basis. Moreover, 74 percent of them were employing both contract and permanent weavers (see Table 1.31). The permanent weavers see to those weavers who were working in the work-shed provided by the entrepreneurs, while the contract weavers see to those who were working from their homes.

Table 1.31: Nature of employment of the weavers

| Employment | No. of enterprise | Percentage |
|-----------------------------|-------------------|------------|
| Contract | - | - |
| Permanent | 50 | 100 |
| Both contract and permanent | 37 | 74 |

Source: Field work

*The total percentage exceeds 100 due to multiple responses.

Handloom production can be viewed as a two-pronged operation comprising management of raw material and procuring finished products. The weaver, when she receives the yarn initiates the weaving process with pre-loom activities like sizing the warp, preparing the weft, etc. The variations in the organisation of pre-loom activities differ according to the place of production. In certain areas, these pre-loom activities are carried out by women and children of the house and from the neighbourhood and there is no explicit payment. In other areas, specialists do the pre-loom activities and are paid directly by the master weavers.²⁶

It is interesting to note that all the enterprises were still heavily dependent on the production through traditional looms. Regarding the nature of loom being used by the weavers, all the enterprises were using fly shuttle looms, while 54 and 38 percent of them were also using throw shuttle loom and loin loom respectively (see Table 1.32). The only innovative method of production that they have introduced is the use of double seated throw shuttle loom.

²⁶ Bhagavatula, Suresh. 2009. *Weaving Social Networks: Performance of Small Rural Firms in India as an Outcome of Entrepreneurs' Social and Human Capital*. Amsterdam: Vrije Universiteit.

Table 1.32: Type of loom used

| Loom | No. of enterprise | Percentage |
|--------------------|--------------------------|-------------------|
| Loin-loom | 19 | 38 |
| Throw-shuttle loom | 27 | 54 |
| Fly-shuttle loom | 50 | 100 |

Source: Field work

*The total percent exceeds 100 due to multiple responses.

Regarding the payment of wages, 64 percent of the enterprises paid their weavers on a monthly basis. However, 26 percent of them paid on the basis of piece-rate (see Table 1.33). Weavers who do not have any loans from the master weavers and contract weavers are able to be in a better negotiating state in the payment schedule. The advantage of engaging in contract weavers is that vital working capital is not stuck in the form of loans to weavers. Having extra capital enables entrepreneurs to develop a bigger stock and also a wider product range.

Table: 1.33: Mode of wages

| Wage payment | No. of enterprise | Percentage |
|---------------------|--------------------------|-------------------|
| Weekly | - | - |
| Monthly | 32 | 64 |
| Piece-rate | 18 | 26 |

Source: Field work

Marketing

The study shows that 74 per cent of the enterprises sold their products by cash, 64 per cent by credit and 26 per cent by installment (see Table 1.34). It is also observed that 38 percent of the enterprises sold their products through their own showrooms. The enterprises also used retail stores, agents, exhibition-cum-sales and door to door vendor for selling their products (See Table 1.35).

Table 1.34: Mode of sale

| Sales | No. of enterprise | Percentage |
|--------------|--------------------------|-------------------|
| Cash | 37 | 74 |
| Credit | 21 | 64 |
| Installment | 24 | 26 |

Source: Field work

*The total percentage exceeds 100 due to multiple responses.

Table 1.35: Mode of marketing products

| Mode of marketing | No. of enterprise | Percentage |
|----------------------|-------------------|------------|
| Own showroom | 19 | 38 |
| Retail shop | 11 | 22 |
| Through agents | 15 | 30 |
| Exhibition-cum-sales | 4 | 8 |
| Door vendor | 12 | 24 |

Source: Field work

*The total percentage exceeds 100 due to multiple responses.

Generally, the clients are retail store owners in various parts of the state. If they purchase regularly they are considered to be core clients; there are others who are irregular or occasional clients. The interactions between new clients and master weavers usually start small and the transactions are conducted in cash. After a few such instances some clients may switch to purchasing products on credit. An average entrepreneur has about 10 to 15 wholesale clients of whom 3 to 5 are likely to be core clients.

Sales promotion techniques were adopted through advertisements (newspapers and cable TV), agents, door to door campaigns and pamphlets. 16 percent of the enterprises had used all these modes of sale promotion (see Table 1.36).

Table 1.36: Mode of Sales promotion

| Mode of sales promotion | No. of enterprise | Percentage |
|-------------------------|-------------------|------------|
| Advertisement | 12 | 24 |
| Agents | 14 | 28 |
| Door to door campaign | 12 | 24 |
| Pamphlets | 13 | 26 |
| All the above | 8 | 16 |

Source: Field work

*The total percentage exceeds 100 due to multiple responses.

Problems encountered

The problems encountered by handloom entrepreneurs are related to shortage and high price of yarn, lack of investment, unorganised marketing system and stagnation of finished products. The enterprises have problems regarding non-availability, high cost and poor quality of yarn. The main reasons for these problems are due to frequent economic blockades/strikes in Manipur in general and Imphal in particular, the dependence on yarns

imported from outside the state and also the control of the yarn trading by the businessmen from other parts of the country. The issues like lack of adequate funds, expensive cost of machinery and demand for higher wages of the labourers have been encountered by most of the enterprises. Inadequate sales promotion, less demand and inferior quality are the major marketing problems. Moreover, poor quality, high cost and old stock has led to stagnation of the products.

When the entrepreneurs were enquired for their plans in near future, all of them expressed that they are aspiring to expand their units and increase the level of production by introducing latest machineries and trained personals. They have plans to improve their sales promotion techniques and marketing process. They also wish to introduce new varieties of garments according to the requirements of the consumers (see Table 1.37).

Table 1.37: Problems encountered

| Problems | No. of entrepreneurs | Percentage |
|------------------------------------------|----------------------|------------|
| 1. Raw material | | |
| Non-availability | 12 | 24 |
| High cost | 10 | 20 |
| Poor quality | 7 | 14 |
| 2. Money | | |
| Lack of adequate funds | 20 | 40 |
| Expensive cost of machinery | 15 | 30 |
| Demand for higher wages of the labourers | 15 | 30 |
| 3. Marketing | | |
| Inadequate sales promotion | 21 | 42 |
| Less demand | 20 | 40 |
| Inferior quality | 9 | 18 |
| 4. Stagnation of goods | | |
| Poor quality | 13 | 26 |
| High cost | 13 | 26 |
| Old stock | 16 | 32 |

Source: Field work

Empowering lives

It is significant to observe that all the respondents felt that they are all economically empowered in the sense that they are making an attempt

to start their own entrepreneurship for generating income not only for themselves but also for the people involved in their enterprises. Besides this, some of them i.e., 18 percent expressed that they are both economically and politically empowered. They are leaders and active members of the *Meira Paibi* (torch bearers, an informal women's group for social order), while some are Pradhan, and Panchayat members etc. There are others i.e., 24 percent who felt that they are also socially empowered. They opined that their family members and others started respecting and encouraging their enterprise. Their views on various issues began to be heard and considered. There is another group consisting of 16 percent of the respondents who felt that they are economically, socially and politically empowered. They have got freedom and confidence and now not hesitant to visit places outside the state for business purposes like participation in fairs (see Table 1.38).

Table 1.38: Empowering lives

| Types of empowerment | No. of entrepreneurs | Percentage |
|-----------------------------------------|----------------------|------------|
| Economic empowerment | 21 | 42 |
| Economic & Political empowerment | 9 | 18 |
| Economic & Social empowerment | 12 | 24 |
| Economic Political & Social empowerment | 8 | 16 |

Source: Field work

VI. Handloom Entrepreneurs: Case Studies

This section has covered case studies of three handloom entrepreneurs. An attempt has been made to analyse the narratives given by the entrepreneurs and relate them with the sociological approaches to entrepreneurship.

Case I: Chungkham Rani Devi²⁷

Chungkham Rani lives at Wangkhei Lourebam Leikai. The youngest of eleven siblings- seven sisters and four brothers - Rani was born to Chungkham Tolen, a farmer and carpenter by trade and Thabal, a weaver, on 1st March, 1932.

Being born in an area which has given its name to the famous '*Wangkhei Phi*', the inborn skill and artistic inclination was no doubt cultivated at a very early age. "My mother used to make *Wangkhei Phi* on the loom, and I used to watch her and play

²⁷ With inputs from http://www.e-pao.net/epSubPageExtractor.asp?src=features.Profile_of_Manipuri_Personalities.Thingnam_Anjulika.Chungkham_Rani_Devi_Rani-Phee

beside her as she weaved. Slowly, I began to try my hands at the loom under the able instructions of my mother. She soon brought a small *eyong* (loom) for me and taught me everything she knew”, Rani recalls. “I was only about 11 years or so at that time”, she adds.

At around 14 years of age, Rani married Wangkheimayum Iboyaima, a contractor. The marriage was however short-lived as her husband lost the fight against the dreaded disease cancer. After 14 years of marriage and at the tender age of 27 years, Rani became a widow. She was also without a child.

Dismissing all advice of re-marriage, Rani returned to her maternal house and started creating skilful designs into the clothes she produced on her loom. Very soon she spent all her days and nights pouring her love and dedication into the *phi* on her loom.

“I saw all those beautiful flowers, birds and different designs on cloth manufactured outside the state and I was so inspired. I thought how beautiful our own phi would be if I could weave designs like those into them” she said.

At that time only the traditional designs like *Taj Mahal*, *Thangjing Makhai*, *Kabok Chaibi*, *Waikhu Matha* etc. were being woven in the Wangkhei Phi. “One of the first designs I wove was a pair of swans, a lotus flower, and two lotus leaves”, she said, recalling the painstaking ritual of experimentation, errors and toil she had put in before tasting success.

She was helped in her work by a nephew, an artist who painted the design on the threads kept ready for weaving, so that Rani could easily weave the design. “Before that, we used to consult graphic paintings on paper while weaving. This did give a semblance of the design, but the finished product left much to be desired”, she said.

Rani then began experimenting with silk yarns, dyes and designs- sometimes consulting her better educated brothers, nephews and nieces, and at other times consulting professionals. She made sure that the best yarn, dye and designs are used for her phi.

“When I initially started using silk threads, I made only five phis as the first set, as I was unsure whether they would sell.

But they were very much liked and soon the demand grew so much that I alone could not handle it", she recalls. This new brand of silk phi was to be called '*Engineer Phi*', the cloth of the engineers, so exclusive and priceless they were. Soon, women started treating *Engineer-phi* as one of the priceless heirlooms much like the Kanchipuram sarees of south India. The *Engineer-phi*, later came to be known as *Rani-Phi*.

And on these new range of phi, Rani also revived old and traditional designs like the *Namthang Khuthat*, *Luhong Phijin*, *Ningkhram Mayek*, *Thambal Chepki*, *Kanap Phibal*, *Salai Mayek*, *Yensin Mayek Phantup*, *Lanngam phi*, *Thakan Mayek*, *Khamen Chappa*, *Samjin Mayek* and *Leina*. Some of the modern designs she has used are inspired by the natural beauty around her - such as: *Wahong*, *Thambal*, *Kannga*, *Chingthrao*, *Siroi Lily*, *Yerum Lei*, *Ador Gulap*, *Takhellei*, *Leihao*, *Juba Kusum*, *Sambalei Mapal*, *Angeor*, *Mairen*, *Sajik Chaba Saji*, *Nongyin* etc.

She has received certificates of honour for her outstanding contribution and achievement from both the State as well as national Governments. Some of the awards she has received include Certificate of Honour (1975), State Award for Master Craftsman (1979-80), National Certificate of Merit (1990) and Certificate of Honour by the All Manipur Women Voluntary Association (1991), besides first prizes in design competition at the 22nd All India Handloom Week (1976) and design competition for Artistic Textiles (1990). Besides, she has participated in major national and international trade fairs such as the Surajkund Mela at Haryana, Crafts Bazar at Bombay and India International Trade Fair at Pragati Maidan, New Delhi.

Rani had been working towards passing down her art to the new generation through the 'Learning cum Earning Weaving Scheme' in the Rani Handloom Industry, which she had initiated. Under the scheme she supplies weaving materials to the learners who then work under her instructions and guidance. More than 400 girls have completed training under the scheme and at present, there are about 200 girls who are undergoing the training.

The Rani Handloom Industry was established in the year 1975 but this was neither registered nor affiliated to any Government agencies. This industry was established and sustained because

of various factors like traditional occupation, passion for the work and high demand by the public. Regarding the amount invested at the initial year of establishment of the enterprise, it was noted that she invested Rs. 60,000/- and subsequently Rs. 1,75,000/- from the money she generated herself. About the mode of ownership as well as the type of enterprise, the industry was running as a single owner from her own building but it did not get any financial assistance from any Governmental departments or other financial agencies.

Regarding the types of looms, the industry was using only Throw-shuttle looms. The data also shows that 200 female weavers are employed on temporary basis and 100 females are working as permanent weavers. For the mode of payment of wage, this industry followed the method of piece rate; Rs. 130 per Kg. of yarn for washing the raw-unweave yarns, and one-third of the total expenditure of yarn for weaving per item is given to the weaver as wages.

Both traditional and non-traditional designs and patterns are produced. The traditional designs include *Kanap Phiban*, *Lamthang Khut-hat*, *Samjeen Mayek*, *Thambal-cheplei*, *Ningkham Mayek*, *Luhong Phijin* etc., while designs imitated from the Mysore and Malda patterns, any floral, geometric, etc. constitute the non-traditional. It takes eight days to weave each piece of mosquito net, pyjama-kurta, and churidar. The time taken to weave each piece of chunni, dhoti, half saree, and full saree are five, six, seven and eight days respectively.

Regarding the details of marketing and sales promotion technique for producing more products, the industry adopted both cash and credit method for sales in its own show room or either in exhibition-cum sales or through agents by advertising in the cable TV networks and newspapers, etc. The industry also adopted the method of getting ready the product well in advance through the engagement of more master craftswomen. Irregular supply of raw-material is the most pressing problem for this handloom sector. Rising prices of yarn has led to high cost of the products. The unit also frequently experience the problems of health and illness of the master craftswomen.

With such illustrious years of successful entrepreneurship and contribution for the development and popularity of Manipur handloom products across the national and international level, Rani died at the age of 80 on 15th May, 2012.

Followed here is an analysis of the case study of Chungkham Rani relating to the factors that led her to start a handloom enterprise and the kind of activities she performs as an entrepreneur. In this case, it is observed that the attributes of culture has produced entrepreneurial behaviour. She was born in Wangkhei, a place famous for its handloom product known as Wangkhei Phi. She learnt the craft from her mother, who was a weaver from the very early age. She lost her husband after 14 years of their marriage and returned to her maternal house. She began to spend most of her time on weaving creating skilful and innovative designs. She had full support from her family members.

She also experimented with clothes made from silk yarn in different dyes and designs. The silk phi which was called Engineer Phi before came to be known after her name as Rani Phi. She not only revived the old and traditional designs but also introduced various new designs. She initiated the 'Learning Cum Weaving Scheme' by establishing her own enterprise, Rani Handloom Industry under which she supplies weaving materials to the learners who then work under her instructions and guidance. For production, there are two categories of weavers: one who are working at the workshed of her residence and the other who are working from their own residences.

Case II: Langpoklakpam Subadani Devi²⁸

Langpoklakpam Subadani Devi residing at Wangkhei Tokpam Leikai in Imphal East District was born at Huikap Mayai Leikai as the second among five siblings – two brothers and three sisters – to Laitonjam Nawa and Sanahanbi. Her father Nawa was a carpenter by profession while mother Sanahanbi was involved in small business before shifting to vegetable selling in her later days.

Subadani did her primary schooling at Andro High School till Class IV, and then shifted to Angtha High School where she studied till Class VIII. She left school after that. At eighteen years of age, she got married to Langpoklakpam Ibopishak, a government employee. "I was called a spinster at that time, as then girls used to be married off at a very early age," she recalls with a smile. Subadani and Ibopishak have four children – one daughter and three sons.

²⁸ With inputs from http://www.e-pao.net/epSubPageExtractor.asp?src=features.Profile_of_Manipuri_Personalities.Thingnam_Anjulika.L_Subadani_Devi_Entrepreneur

As was the tradition, Sanahanbi too used to weave clothes and it was from her mother that Subadani learnt the fine arts of weaving the traditional clothes such as *khudei* and *phanek*.

After her marriage she continued to weave making mostly *khudei* and *phanek*, and later on the diaphanous upper cloth that is the ultimate ornament of Meitei women – the *Wangkhei phi*. But this was a part-time profession for her – something which she did when she had some time left over from her more active work of looking after her children and home.

In the early 1980s, Subadani started investing more time and energy into her handloom works. She even brought in many young girls and women weavers and formed a co-operative society in her locality.

At first she had a steady entourage of young girls and women weavers working on the looms installed in her house. However the initiative did not work out as expected. Many of the young girls got married and left the work. The young married women too found the responsibilities of caring for their children and family too time and energy consuming, and thus found it more feasible not to undertake any work away from their homes.

Thereafter, Subadani started on a new venture wherein the women weavers could weave and also fulfill their familial responsibilities simultaneously. She started providing raw materials, money and other essential inputs to the women, and the women in turn worked on the looms in their own houses. The designs were however provided by Subadani.

The new arrangement worked successfully and today Subadani has a steady supply of end products waiting to be sold, and an equally steady stream of exclusive customers who come to her house to buy the items of their choice.

Apart from that, she also participates in exhibitions and trade fairs all over the country to showcase and sell her products. “Now I am planning to exhibit my products in Mumbai, talks are on, let’s see,” she said sanguinely.

She also used to send her products to Delhi for sale but has discontinued now. “There is a market for our handloom products outside the state, but I am unable to send as it

requires a bigger capital. I am only working with a small rotating capital," she adds.

Commenting on the pricing of the handloom products, she commented, "The raw materials that is the yarns, especially the *muga* silk yarns, are brought from outside the state which makes it more expensive. Added to this is the fact that these clothes are hand-woven and hence time consuming. Therefore the end product will obviously be costly."

Subadani was given the national award in 1993 for her innovative *lamthang khut-hat* design on *Wangkhei phi*. She also won the Manipur State Merit Award in 1992.

Like Rani discussed above, the entrepreneur here had also learnt the weaving skills from her mother at a very early age. She continued to weave even after her marriage and formed a cooperative society with the young girls and women weavers of the locality. However, the society could not work as expected. This led her to start a new venture wherein the women weavers could weave and also fulfill their familial responsibilities simultaneously. She started providing raw materials, money and other essential inputs to the women, and the women in turn worked on the looms in their own houses. The designs were however provided by her.

Case III: Laishram Pema Devi

"It has been almost ten years that I have been doing this business of collecting and selling of handloom products as a means to support my family. I have four children and my husband does not have a regular source of income. I started weaving from a very early age, seeing my mother working on the loom and also learning from her. I used to weave and supply my items to Chungkham Rani popularly known as Wangkhei Rani. Now people are very intelligent and smart. Any body can just go to the Bazar, buy the yarn and do the dyeing. But those days we did not know how to get the yarn or how to dye etc. We could get it only from her. She used to give us 55 gram of yarn for the weft of one Phi. After one Phi is finished, we have to go to her place and get the yarn. So we could not think of selling even one Phi without her knowledge.

It was she who taught me this business. She goes outside Manipur quite often to take part in trade fair. Once she wanted

a lot of cotton chunni for a fair. In my locality a lot of people are into the profession of weaving. She told me to collect some of these chunnis from the weavers and that I will also be paid for my service. So she gave me Rs. 1000 to collect ten pieces. In addition to it, I used Rs. 1000 more from my pocket and collected twenty pieces. She gave me Rs. 10 for each chunni as my service charge. So I could get Rs. 200 as profit. Then the next day she gave me another Rs. 2000 for the collection. I added another Rs. 2000 from my pocket and then slowly I became a full time entrepreneur in this profession. Now it's so busy I don't even have time to stay at home.

The weavers who are supplying the products to me stay close to my locality. Most of them are young. But there are weavers of my age group and a few old women too. The old people can weave simple ones with less design. The types of clothes that are woven in my locality are Rani Muka, bed-sheet, Chunni and mosquito-net with intricate design. The amount I pay to each weaver varies depending on the designs of the items. For a heavy work in Rani Phi I pay around Rs. 2000 and I sell it for Rs. 3000 approximately. For a simple design I pay around Rs.1000. For Rani Muka, we do not have a fixed amount unlike chunni. The price purely depends on the design. But it is a very challenging and risky business. Sometimes the weavers act like the boss. They will come to me asking for money without giving any item. If I do not give them, they will take money from another entrepreneur in the business and transfer the supply to her. This way all my investment can get duped also.

Initially I used to weave but now I have stopped doing that. After I have started this business of collecting and selling the products, I don't have time for weaving. Infact I have detached myself from the loom. I basically collect the finished products from a set of weavers who are my contact and then sell the items to the handloom shops. The shops are Ningol Handloom, Binodini Handloom and Imphal Handloom. These are the emporiums where I give almost all my items. They take supply from other people also. They take all the items that I supply since we have been in business for the past so many years. If they are not satisfied with an item they tell me the reason and ask to improve them the next time. But they do take it. A few of my items are also sold to some customers

who stay in and around this locality. But they are not regular customers.

It is me along with the people in the handloom shops who decide what to do and which design to use. If the weavers say that they do not have money for buying yarn I provide them the yarn after washing and dyeing. An estimate is also done about how much gram of yarn is necessary for a particular cloth. Accordingly the quantity of yarn is given to them. When they give me the cloth, I deduct around Rs. 100 per cloth. I put together the entire amount and use it for buying the raw material they need again. There are around 55-60 weavers who are working with me. There are some weavers who can afford to buy the raw materials. In that case either I go and collect the finished items or they come and give it to me. Sometimes if they take long to bring to my place then I go and see if they have not sold it to somebody without my knowledge. Sometimes weavers are very cunning. But before they start weaving they do consult me about which variety they should weave.

The profit is not much. After all the deductions are done I can get around Rs. 200 as profit for one Rani Phi. For cotton Chunni, I get only Rs. 10 each. But this is a type of cloth which consumes very less amount of time to weave. So I can collect twenty-five to thirty pieces in two or three days. But for Rani Phi, a very hardworking weaver can weave only two pieces in a month.

The profit of the shopkeepers is high. They sell the items at a very high rate. For us, we give them as soon as our items are ready. For them, they can sell an item sooner or later depending on the availability of customer. Sometimes an item lays in stock for two years. So they double the amount from which they got from us and sell it. If you buy from us, it is much cheaper. I will tell you the secret. An item which we sell at Rs. 2000 to shopkeepers is sold at Rs. 4500 by them. The amount that we need to weave one piece of Rani Phi is Rs. 300 approximately. The other charge is for the intricate design used in it.

Sometimes I wash the yarn. For the silk yarn, we buy the raw yarn and then boil it in hot water and wash it with detergent powder. But if the weavers know how to do it, I give it to them.

The same is true even for dyeing the yarn. But one needs to be very careful in dyeing because if the quantity of the acid is higher, the thread gets spoilt and if it is less, we cannot get the exact colour that we want. Initially, we also did not know the process of dyeing well. There is one lady called Binodini in Wangkhei. She taught us the dyeing process. We get the acid and chemical from the Bazaar.”

Pema had started weaving from an early age and learnt the art from her mother. Initially, she used to work for an entrepreneur but later started her own enterprise. She basically collects the finished products from a set of weavers who are her contact and then sell the items to the handloom emporiums. It is she along with the people in the handloom emporiums who decide which design to use. She provides yarn to the weavers. There are around 55-60 weavers who are working with her.

Analysing the three case studies, we could generate interesting information related with the tradition of weaving and entrepreneurship. All the three entrepreneurs have learnt the craft from their mothers and started weaving from their early stage of life. They have different reasons to initiate their enterprises. The pull factor for the first case (Chunngkham Rani) was her passion for the craft and the familial condition associated with the demise of her husband and returning to her maternal place leading to devote herself to weaving various innovative designs. The push factor for the second case (Langpoklakpam Subadini) was her failed attempt to run a cooperative society that led her to establish her own enterprise. In the third case (Laishram Pema), her long time experience of working under an entrepreneur (Chunngkham Rani) made it easy for her to start her own enterprise.

VII. Conclusion

To sum up, women entrepreneurship in the handloom industry in Manipur is associated with the changing social and political structures and the expansion of market on the supply side and the attributes of culture of weaving on the demand side. The study indicates that younger women are more zealous about entrepreneurship. It is evident from the study that 40 percent of the respondents were educated upto graduate level.

It was interesting to observe that nearly one-fourth of the enterprises were run by widows and divorcees. More than half of the entrepreneurs belonged to high income group with a monthly income of above Rs. 7,500. It was observed that the urge to supplement the family income and unemployment had motivated 66 percent of the entrepreneurs engaged in

handloom enterprises. On the other hand, the reasons stated by one-third of the entrepreneurs for establishing the enterprises were passion for the work and to take up their traditional occupation.

It is significant to observe that all the women entrepreneurs in this study felt that they are all economically empowered in the sense that they are making an attempt to start their own entrepreneurship for generating income not only for themselves but also for the people involved in their enterprises. Besides this, some of them i.e., 18 percent expressed that they are both economically and politically empowered. They are leaders and active members of the *Meira Paibi* (torch bearers, an informal women's group for social order), while some are Pradhans, and Panchayat members (elected members of the local government) etc. There are others i.e., 24 percent who felt that they are also socially empowered. They opined that their family members and others started respecting and encouraging their enterprise. Their views on various issues began to be heard and considered. There is another group consisting of 16 percent of the respondents who felt that they are economically, socially and politically empowered. They have got freedom and confidence and now not hesitant to visit places outside the state for business purposes like participation in fairs. The study therefore has shown that the emergence of women entrepreneurship in the handloom industry has definitely brought about some positive changes in the social, economic and political status of the women, though many problems are yet to be addressed.

In the light of the "Make in India" initiative of the Government of India launched on 25 September 2014, it is imperative to give greater impetus to the handloom sector with new business models that will not only rejuvenate and improve the rural economy but also empower the rural lives, especially the womenfolk.

Note: The data and analysis related to the status and trends of handloom sector in India, including North East India and Manipur is based on Handloom Census of India, 2009-10 published by National Council of Applied Economic Research.

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