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Marketing practices of tribal handloom weavers: A study on Bodo weavers from Udalguri district of Assam

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Abstract

Handloom sector, predominantly non-farm activity is a rural traditional occupation of large segment of weaver populations. In agrarian Assam, this sector provides livelihood to a large section of rural population. It is one of the largest economic activities, after agriculture, providing wider avenue of income and direct and indirect employment. Thus, the village handloom weaving provides scope for self employment for rural folk. Different Tribal communities like Boro, Khasi, Rengma, Angami, Nishi, Adi, Kuki, Rava, Garo, Lalung, Sonowal Kachari, Mising, Chutia, Tipras, Hajangs, etc. of north-east India are also playing an important role in this regard. As a basic requirement of life and to indicate their culture among the societies, like other communities; Bodo tribe is also using the different colourful cloths made in their respective household weavings. Besides catering clothing needs to the community, handloom sector of Bodo community play a vital role in present market scenarios of the entire Bodoland Territorial Area Districts (BTAD) as well as some Bodo dominated parts of the Assam state. The business cycle of Bodo weaving products are the great concern of the regions. In the present study, an effort has been made to trace the Bodo weavers' marketing practices, their socio-economic condition and problems faced by them in marketing of handloom products particularly in Udalguri District. The study is based on primary data, collected through field survey within the Udalguri district of Assam by direct questionnaire to the respondents. A few numbers of secondary data are also being used for the completion of the present work.

Keywords: Handloom weaver, Marketing practice, Tribal, Bodo tribe, Udalguri district

Introduction

In Assam's economy, Cottage industries particularly handloom sector provides a greater livelihood to the large section of rural population. Handloom sector, predominantly non-farm activity is a rural traditional occupation of a large segment of a weaver population. It is one of the largest economic activities, after agriculture, providing wider avenue of income and direct and indirect employment. Endi, Muga, Paat (Mulberry) are considered to be indigenous origin and found only in Assam and Meghalaya. Thus, this village handloom weaving provides scope for self-employment for rural folk.

Handloom weaving is an integral part of every indigenous rural culture and economy for them. Bodo have a reputation of earning livelihood by virtue of weaving for maintaining their families and indicating their culture and identity. Besides, different other Tribal communities like Khasi, Rengma, Angami, Nishi, Adi, Kuki, Rava, Garo, Lalung, Sonowal Kachari, Mising, Chutia, Tipras, Hajangs, etc. of north-east India are also playing important role in this regard. As a basic requirement of life and to indicate their culture and identity among the different societies, like other communities; Bodo tribe is also using the different colourful cloths made in their respective household weavings. Besides catering clothing needs to the community, handloom sector of Bodo community play a vital role in present market scenarios of the entire Bodoland Territorial Area Districts as well as some Bodo dominated parts of the Assam State. The business cycle of Bodo weaving products are the great concern of the regions. In the present study, an effort has been made to trace the Bodo weavers' marketing practices, their socio-economic condition and problems faced by them particularly in Udalguri District. The study is based on primary data, collected through field survey within the Udalguri district of Assam by direct questionnaire to the respondents. A few numbers of secondary data are also being used for the completion of the present work.

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The Bodos: A brief introduction

The Bodos or Boros constitute a major ethnic group of Assam. Racially they belong to Indo Mongolian stock. However, their language belongs to the Tibeto Burman branch of the Sino Tibetan family of language. They are the largest plains tribe in Assam, settled primarily in the Northern Bank of the Brahmaputra River and scattered in Southern parts of the same, adjoining States and found a few in Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh too. The 1971 census report indicates Bodos being the 8th largest scheduled-tribe (ST) group in India. The language of the community has been recognized as an associate official language in Assam in 1985 and recently included in 8th schedule of the constitution of India in 2003. The Boro society is primarily patriarchal in character and majority of them resides in village area. They follow mainly three religions namely-Bathou (The oldest Bodo religion), Brahma and Christianity. Some of them also follow Hinduism. History tells us that the Bodos had their own kingdom and Dimapur (Now in Nagaland) was the Capital of it. However, the kingdom went under British colonial administration through Doctrine of Lapse policy in 1832.

At present, the majority of Bodo people are found in BTAD (Bodoland Territorial Area District) area. BTAD popularly known as BTC (Bodoland Territorial Council) is a territorial privilege under Assam state of India established according to the Memorandum of Settlement on February 10, 2003 under the sixth schedule of the Constitution of India.

The Study Site

The present study site undertaken is the Udalguri district of Bodoland Territorial Area Districts (BTAD) of Assam. The district falls in eastern part of the BTAD area. This district is surrounded by Bhutan and Arunachal Pradesh in the north, Sonitpur district in the east, Darrang district in the south and Baksa district in the west.

Udalguri was a sub-divisional headquarters in Darrang district. But after signing of the Bodo Accord an Autonomous District called the Bodoland Territorial Autonomous District (BTAD) was created and Udalguri district became one of the four districts under the BTAD. The new district was created on 10th February, 2003 by carving two districts Darrang and Sanitpur of Assam. Total geographical area of the district is about 1,673.94 sq. km and the population density 381 persons per sq. km. The total population as per 2011 census is 832,769 and S.T. population is 32.58% to the total population. Distance of the District Headquarters from the state capital of Guwahati is about 140 km (Source: official website of udalguri district). The district is mainly inhabited by the Bodo community. However, other communities including Assamese, Nepali, Bengali, Rava, Muslims, etc. also play an important role in the district.

Conceptual Framework

Marketing practice

In the context of the present study, the term marketing refers to the process of buying and selling of handloom items produced by indigenous Bodo people. In its broader sense the term 'marketing practice' or 'marketing management' relies on adoption and co-ordination of the 4 P's that are product, price, promotion and place for achieving response (Philip Kotler). For achieving final goal of business, these factors should be fulfilled. Besides fulfilling all these factors

of marketing, however, the marketing practice of Bodo weavers also include a few numbers of these factors directly or indirectly. The product of Bodo handloom weaver includes mainly the traditional culture of indigenous loom product. Three varieties of silk products namely- Muga, Paat (Mulberry) and Endi (Eri) are used in making Langa Dokhona (Bodo female dress), Blouse, Gamocha (both are Bodo male wearing and white surni), Aronai, Mekhla Chaddar, Bed sheets, etc. Apart from these, some cloths made from polyester, wool, cotton, etc. are also available. The prices of such products are made independently by the weaver themselves or handloom co-operative societies. The prices of the products are mainly based on product type, its designs, comfortable and durability. For example, the price of paat or muga dress is higher than that of polyester dress. Promotion is the main tool for succeeding every business venture. It includes advertising, publicity, sales force, sales promotion, etc. However, the handloom ventures of Bodo are not dedicated with all those practices. For advertising and publicity of the product for business purpose only a few sponsored programmes, expo and exhibitions are taken into account. For dealing of the product, necessary places with regard to availability of buyers are also required. In the present study, only a few numbers of weekly markets in specific places, daily markets in respective town area are mentioned. However, the process of exporting products is very much limited in the region. To make it simple it is observed that marketing practice of Bodo handloom weavers deal with the selling their products in their local market with specific prices and with minimum profit margin.

Bodo handloom weavers

Bodo handloom weavers are the basically from remote village areas who make different products in their traditional loom. Basically, female are taking a major role in this regard. They are known as expert weaver among the societies. They can make different abstract designs and figures of animals, hills, birds, human forms, creepers, flowers, diamond motifs, celestial phenomena, etc. These designs used in weaving by Bodo weaver carry special meaning and cultural significance. As per National Handloom Census-2013, in Assam; out of total of 14,83,864 weavers, female constitute almost 14,68,453 weavers and male constitute only 15,411 weavers (Source: Third National Handloom Census-2013). Earlier Bodo women collected raw materials through their own household agri products; however, of late these are supplied from various market channels made in outside state.

Objectives of the study

The objectives of the present study are outlined below:

- a. To examine the marketing practices of Bodo handloom weavers of Udalguri district.
- b. To highlight the problems on handloom business of Bodo and suggest remedial measures for the same.

Methodological framework

The present study is carried out in the Bodo inhabited district of Udalguri in the state of Assam, India. The necessary data concerning the present work are collected both from the primary as well as secondary sources of data.

Sources of primary data

The primary data is collected through questionnaire method and direct personal interview with the Bodo women weavers and sellers in Udalguri districts.

Sources of secondary data

The researcher collects secondary data from books, journals, magazine, periodicals, etc.

Sample frame

In order to examine the marketing practices of Bodo weavers, the researcher have selected total random sample of 40 from the entire district. A total number of 4 Developmental Blocks have been chosen as randomly. From each Developmental Block, 10 respondents have been selected by using lottery method. The results are expected to reflect the current status of handloom marketing practice.

Limitations of the study

- a. The present study is based on only a single Bodo community ignoring the other tribal community.
- b. The analyses and observations may not be applicable to the outside districts or states.

Results and discussions

The findings of the present study are depicted as per respective tables. However, analysis is made only from the view point of marketing practices of the respondents but the socio-economic profile, pre and post production process of them are not taken into analysis. All the data sources depicted under respective tables are from independent survey.

Table 1: Gender wise distribution of the respondents

Name of development Blocks	Total no. of respondents	Male	Female
Udalguri	10	1(10)	9(90)
Bhergaon	10	2(20)	8(80)
Rowta	10	2(20)	8(80)
Mazbat	10	1(10)	9(90)
Total	40	6(15)	34(85)

Note: the figures in the brackets indicate the percentage of total respondents.

Source: Field Survey.

The above table shows that in every development blocks female respondents play an important role in weaving sector. It is seen that in entire district, 85% of the total respondents are female and only 15% of male are engaged

in handloom sector. So it can be said that female counterparts are more interested than that of male counterparts.

Table 2: Items of handloom product

Name of development Blocks	Total no. of respondents	Items				
		Dokhona, Gamosha and Aronaai	Wool cloths Endi cloth	Mekla Chadar	Bed sheet	Others items
Udalguri	10	10(100)	8(80)	1(10)	4(40)	10(100)
Bhergaon	10	10(100)	7(70)	2(20)	5(50)	10(100)
Rowta	10	10(100)	7(70)	0	4(40)	10(100)
Mazbat	10	10(100)	5(50)	1(10)	3(30)	10(100)
Total	40	40(100)	27(67.5)	4(10)	16(40)	40(100)

Note: the figures in the brackets indicate the percentage of total respondents.

Source: Field Survey.

The various items dealt with by the weavers (sellers) include mainly cultural dresses of the community like- Dokhona (both Langa and Agrong), Gamsha (both male wearing and white surni/phalli), Aronai, Endi & wool cloths except a few numbers of bed sheets and Mekla Chadar (Assamese female dress). The table 2 indicates that all respondents dealt with

Dokhona, Gamosha and Aronaai. Out of total, 67.5 respondents are dealing with Wool cloths and Endi cloth. As Mekla chadar is sold by other retailers, so this is very much rare in the case of Bodo weavers (sellers). Besides, all the respondents are selling other cloths which are available in their respective weaving.

Table 3: Level of monthly sales of different handloom products.

Name of development Blocks	Dokhona, Gamosha and Aronaai	Wool cloths Endi cloth	Mekla Chadar	Bed sheet
Udalguri	Highest	Average	Rare	Rare
Bhergaon	Highest	Average	Rare	Rare
Rowta	Highest	Average	Not arise	Rare
Mazbat	Highest	Average	Rare	Rare

Source: Field Survey.

In the entire Udalguri district, the sale of Dokhona, Gamsha and Aronai occupy highest rank in case of Bodo weavers or sellers. It is observed that during the months from October to April the volume of sales on these items are increased rapidly. It may be because of marriage ceremony,

celebration of Bihu, Christmas, conference, etc. among the society. It can be noted that maximum number of coming generations (both village and town area) are not familiar for weaving or making those things. So, they approach market for having these dresses.

Table 4: Market place to sale handloom items

Name of development Blocks	Total no. of respondents	Weekly market	Daily basis in town	Both weekly and daily markets	others
Udalguri	10	8(80)	1(10)	1(10)	-
Bhergaon	10	8(80)	-	2(20)	-
Rowta	10	8(80)	-	2(20)	-
Mazbat	10	9(90)	1(10)	-	-
Total	40	33(82.5)	2(5)	5(12.5)	-

Note: The figures in the brackets indicate the percentage of total respondents

Source: Field Survey.

The above table indicates about the marketing place of the respondents. It can be seen that in all development Blocks, the maximum number (82.5%) of weavers are selling their products in weekly markets. Although weekly markets are conducted in a single day in a week but there are various weekly markets under one development block covering 3 to

4 times markets in a week. The sellers who sell continuously all the day in respective town area include only 5% of total respondents. There is other type of sellers who partially sells their product into the weekly market as well as daily town area which are approximately 12.5% of the total respondent.

Table 5: Average monthly income

Name of development Blocks	Total no. of respondents	Average monthly income			
		Rs.2000 to Rs.4000	Rs.4001 to Rs.6000	Rs.6001 to Rs.8000	Rs. 8000 & above
Udalguri	10	3(30)	4(40)	2(20)	1(10)
Bhergaon	10	2(20)	5(50)	2(20)	1(10)
Rowta	10	5(50)	4(40)	1(10)	-
Mazbat	10	6(60)	3(30)	1(10)	-
Total	40	16(40)	16(40)	6(15)	2(5)

Note: the figures in the brackets indicate the percentage of total respondents

Source: Field Survey.

The incomes of the respondents are fluctuated from time to time. It is based on the volume of the sales. If there is more sales, then higher will be the profit. As mentioned above under table- 3 that during the months from October to April the volume of sales are increased rapidly, on the same period their income will be the higher as compared to other periods. Anyway, the above table 5 indicates that 40% of

entire district earn average monthly income of Rs. 2,000 upto Rs. 4,000 and from Rs. 4001 to Rs. 6000 respectively. Only 15% of the total respondent fall the average monthly income of Rs. 6001 to Rs. 8000 and only 5% can earn average monthly income above Rs. 8000. For running their family, however, they have other occupations which include agricultural activities, some govt. facilities, etc.

Table 6: Exporting of handloom products

Name of development Blocks	Total no. of respondents	Within the district	Outside the district	Outside the state
Udalguri	10	2(20)	2(20)	1(10)
Bhergaon	10	1(10)	1(10)	-
Rowta	10	1(10)	1(10)	-
Mazbat	10	1(10)	1(10)	-
Total	40	5(12.5)	5(12.5)	1(2.5)

Note: the figures in the brackets indicate the percentage of total respondents

Source: Field Survey.

From the above table it is shown that the exporting of handloom products, that 12.5% of the total respondents supplies their products within the district as well as outside the district. It can be observed that they should be encouraged to supply more products outside the state as well

as the country resulting great efficiency of sales volume. For this purpose, loom materials and other factors should be available.

Table 7: Taking loan from Bank/NGOs

Name of development Blocks	Total no. of respondents	Loan from Bank	Loan from NGOs	others
Udalguri	10	1(10)	-	-
Bhergaon	10	1(10)	-	-
Rowta	10	1(10)	-	-
Mazbat	10	1(10)	-	-
Total	40	5(10)	-	-

Note: the figures in the brackets indicate the percentage of total respondents

Source: Field Survey.

Table 7 shows that the number of respondent are rare in case of financial loan taken from banks and NGOs. However, a few numbers of respondents have received financial incentives from Government. Only 10% of the total

respondent have received loan from banks. It can be argued that they should be encouraged regarding the availability of finance which results in the expansion of their products and business.

Table 8: Supply of produced items

Name of development Blocks	Total no. of respondents	Own weaving products	Purchased from others	Both own products and purchased from others
Udalguri	10	2(20)	-	8(80)
Bhergaon	10	2(20)	2(20)	6(60)
Rowta	10	4(40)		6(60)
Mazbat	10	4(40)	1(10)	5(50)
Total	40	12(30)	3(7.5)	25(62.5)

Note: the figures in the brackets indicate the percentage of total respondents

Source: Field Survey.

Table 8 indicates that the 30% of the total respondents weave the products in their own loom and sale them to the market. 62.5% fall under the group who sell the products both from their own production and purchase from other weavers at the time of shortage. Only 7.5% of the total respondents deal as a middleman. However, such middleman also can weave but they have temporarily ignored.

Problems faced on marketing

The weavers get problems from production upto the sale of the products. Certain problems such as supply of raw materials, obsolete traditional loom, health problems (eye problems, back pain, others), financial incentives, etc. are occurred during the production process. In the case of selling the product lack of availability of consumers is the vital factor. This problem arise because of the other subsidiary problems which include lack of advertising, lack of awareness among consumers regarding product features, successive competition, limited cultural products, lack of proper exhibition, Expo cum sale programs, etc. Other factors include lack of own marketing organization, less public involvement, lack of e-commerce facility, dilemma of govt. involvement, etc. So, required remedial measures should be provided in overcoming such drawbacks.

Suggestions and recommendations

For developing and longevity of the handloom weaving markets along with the harmony of weaver communities, following suggestions and recommendations can be provided:-

- The handloom products are mainly confined to the local markets due to the fact that most of these are cultural specific items suitable for local use only particularly for Bodo tribe. So, care should be given in producing and selling of items related to other cultural affairs which can maximise their sales, market segment and can increase profit margin.
- There should be proper awareness among consumers regarding the product feathers through advertising media, sales promotion and other means.
- Since the weaver have no any marketing organisation of their own, they are often forced to sell their products in a buyers markets with a very low profit margin. But they can not withhold sales since ready cash is needed to buy the raw materials. So, proper marketing organisations should be implemented based on supply of products, price fixation, stock of products, etc.

- The availability of organised programs, exhibition and expo cum sale on weaving products can increase the selling activities of the products.
- In this globalised world E-Commerce play a vital role in every aspects of marketing. Marketing through on line mode should be implemented in the region.
- Training to enhance the skills of weaver in manufacturing and marketing aspects in changing business environment should be conducted.
- Skill and design development exercises should also be conducted for the weavers which will help them to understand and develop new product range as well as improve their design sensibility.
- There should be adequate medical facility for weaver section for minimisation of their health problems during loom period.
- Innovative and faster technical weaving process and methods to increase efficiency of weaver as well as loom will make handloom more competitive and profitable.
- Proper government schemes should be implemented to the weaver section to appreciate them in producing more products.
- In competitive market condition, not only illiterate should participate but also literate section should also be involved.
- Though the increasing of migration to urban areas or town areas, handloom practice should not be ignored.
- Exporting of handloom products to other districts as well as states should be given priority.

Conclusions

Although handloom weaving provides as a basic tool for livelihood of the Indigenous Bodo people, but their business practice on these items is not adequate one. They are facing many problems in marketing their products which may include lack of proper market channels, lack of accessibility market information, lack of better promotion and advertising, lack of awareness among consumers about the product features, lack of adequate raw material supply, increasing competition, etc. There is a need to explore, verify, modify and scientifically validate these practices for their wider used and application. The coming youth generations have to be appreciated in playing the role for their cultural business and identity of the society.

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