



“TRADITIONAL WEAVING TECHNOLOGY AND WOMEN ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT OF THENGAL KACHARI TRIBE OF ASSAM”

¹SanjibKr. Dutta,² Dr. Ruprekha Bordoloi

¹Ph. D Research Scholar,²Professor

¹Department of Sociology

¹Mahapurusha Srimanta Sankaradeva Viswavidyalaya, Nagaon, India

Abstract :A huge number of indigenous people live in India. They have their own rich culture, traditions, values, and practices and are yet untouched by the modern world's lifestyle. North-east India is a cultural hub of diverse ethnic groups. Traditional weaving culture contributed much to the culture of the North-east India. The Thengal Kachari tribe of Assam makes a significant contribution to the weaving culture of Assam. Their weaving culture shows a artistic talent of the women folk. The weaving culture of the Thengal Kachari tribe preserves their rich cultural heritage and serves as a source of income for women. These all contributed to gender equity and social upliftment. This study explores how the traditional weaving practices enhance the economic opportunities and social status of the women of Thengal Kachari tribe. This research highlights the challenges faced by the women in weaving practices including impact of modernization and demands of global market. The findings of this study provide significant insights into how economic empowerment through weaving influences gender relations and enhances social status within the community.

IndexTerms - Thengal Kachari, Indigenous Culture, Weaving Culture, Economic Empowerment.

1.0 INTRODUCTION:

The Thengal Kachari tribe of Assam is one of the major ethnic aboriginal communities. This tribe belongs to the Bodo group of the Mangoloid family. They are presently found in Jorhat, Golaghat, Dibrugarh, North Lakhimpur, Dhemaji, and Karbi Anglong districts of Assam. According to Riseley, they derived their name 'Thengal' from an ancestor, who is said to have ascended to heaven leg foremost. (Sengupta, 2003). This plains tribe of is an offshoot of the larger Kachari group. The Kacharis are also known as the Bodo-Kacharis or Boro-Kacharis in the Brahmaputra Valley. Kameswar Brahma also wrote, "The Bodo people of the eastern part of Assam, who settled in the Cachar district, especially in North Cachar of Assam, call themselves Kacharis."However, as a result of modernization and socio-economic shifts, the intersection of financial situations, religious views, and cultural traditions within the Thengal Kachari group is always changing.The Thengal Kachari depends basically on the natural resources. Agriculture is their primary livelihood along with farming, weaving and fishing. The Thengal Kachari tribe has their rich weaving and handloom heritage. But this has not properly preserved and technologically developed. The Thengal women can weave all types weaving apparels. The tribe considers weaving as a dignitary work as well as cultural identity. Weaving plays a significant role in the economic development of the tribe.

The Thengal Kachari women are very expert in the skill of weaving. They rear muga, silk and prepare various clothing. The women have the culture of applying vermilion at their parting of hair as a symbol of marriage and this is a common practice among the other people of the greater Assamese society. The women wear riha along with mekhela (piece of cloth worn at the lower part of the body and scarf known as chador (Sengupta 2003). In respect of economic development of household as well as society, the Thengal weavers need skill up-gradation and adaptation of new technology advancement to boost to their traditional weaving industries.

1.1 Objectives :

1. To analyse the role of traditional weaving technology in the economic empowerment of Thengal Kachari tribe women.
2. To identify the challenges faced by the Thengal Kachari women in the weaving industry.
3. To examine the impact of economic empowerment through weaving on gender relations and social status within the Thengal Kachari community.

1.2 Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it helps to understand how the traditional weaving practices can help in the economic empowerment of tribal women. This research highlights the intersection of gender, culture, and economy by focusing on Thengal Kachari tribe of Assam by offering insights into sustainable development strategies that respect and preserve cultural heritage. The findings of this research can guide in policy making particularly in women's empowerment and economic development of rural indigenous community.

1.3 Geographical Background of the Study Area :

Assam, a state of North-East India located in the tropical latitudes (24.30 N and 280 N) and eastern longitudes (89.50 E and 96.10 E). The state covers an area of 78,438 km². Assam is surrounded by Bhutan and Arunachal Pradesh on the north; by Mizoram, Meghalaya and Tripura on the south; by Nagaland and Manipur on the east; and by West Bengal and Bangladesh on the west. Jorhat is purposively selected for the present study so as to understand and study the participation of women of the Thengal Kachari tribe in weaving for increase their existing livelihoods that can be made sustainable. Jorhat is a populous district of Assam situated at a strategic place The district is bounded by [Majuli](#) on north, [Nagaland](#) state on the south, [Sivasagar](#) on the east and [Golaghat](#) on the west. The researcher selected four villages based on the concentration of weaving culture. To obtain information and response for the present study, 100 respondents were selected randomly from the selected village.

1.4. Methodology:

Mix method approach has been employed for this study combining qualitative and quantitative research methods.

1.4.1 Fieldwork:

A field work has been conducted in the Thengal Kachari villages of Jorhat district of Assam focusing on prevalence of weaving technology.

1.4.2 Primary Data Collection:

Personal interview method has adopted with Thengal Kachari women weavers, leaders, and local entrepreneurs.

1.4.3 Secondary Data Collection:

For secondary data reviewed some existing literature, government reports, and previous studies on women's empowerment, weaving technology of Thengal Kachari tribe.

1.5 Literature Review:

1. Goswami (1999) discusses in her book Assam in the Nineteenth century: Industrialization & Colonial Penetration that every household had a loom, and women were primarily responsible for weaving to produce clothing for personal use.
2. Goswami (2005) highlighted in her book Indigenous Industries of Assam: Retrospect and Prospect (2005), that in Assam 85 percent of the population lives in rural areas and so rural industries can form the backbone of the economy. In rural areas promotion of the handloom industry is of vital importance. Most of the rural people are self employed by producing goods for their regular uses.

3. Daimary (2005) discusses in his book Economic Development of Assam: Problem and Prospects that handloom industries has plays a significant role in rural economy and the rural women can sustain their livelihood by these industries.
4. Sarmah (2016) discusses in his book Status of Women Engaged in the Handloom Industry in Assam that weaving is considered as the glorious traditions in Assam's economy. It enhances the significance of Assamese culture and traditions.
5. Eaton A.H.'s handicrafts of the south Highlands(1973) explored in-depth that local artisans and women passed down weaving skills through generations. He also discuss about the cultural significance of the weaving technology.
6. Binita Das's thesis, "The life and culture of the Thengal Kacharis of upper Assam," elaborates on the different aspects of the life and culture of the Thengal Kachari tribe, including their religious beliefs and practices. Weaving plays a vital role in the economic life of Thengal Kachari women. About 88% of households own looms.
7. Bornali Chetia provides a complete study on the social and cultural life of the Thengal Kachari of Assam in her thesis, "Asamar Thengal Kachari Janagosthir Samajik Aru Sanskritik Jibon Eti Samikshtmak Adhyayan".

1.6 Findings and Discussions:

Weaving is a process of producing cloth using threads and yarns. It is an essential practice of people of Assam. The weaving plays a significant role in socio-economic development of the Assam. Spining, knitting, crocheting, plaiting, braiding, and felting are important aspects of weaving. It contributes in improving the living standard of the weavers and thus creates important employment opportunities. The handloom industries ranked second after the agriculture highlighting its importance in economic activity. Handloom sector contributes nearly 15 per cent of the cloth production in the country also contributes to the exports earnings as 95 per cent of the World's hand-woven fabrics comes from India .It continues to be an important source of livelihood, especially for women , who form around 70% of the weavers or allied workers in the sector according to the Ministry of the Textile statements. (Choudhury. R.:2022)

The Thengal Kachari tribe of Assam continues to create handmade fabrics, preserving their rich cultural heritage through this traditional craft. Endle has mentioned that, "one of the chief industries, a very profitable one among the Kachari's, is that of the culture of the silkworm known as eri, and the manufacture of the eri cloth." (Endle, R.S.:1990)

It is seen that Machine made fabrics weaving items largely dominated on local markets. The Thengal Kachari people weave dresses for their day-to-day uses as well as business purpose.

Assam has a rich unorganised weaving sector. It prevails in every house of the Assamese community. Knowing of traditional weaving culture is considered as a rich and respected. Thengal Kachari has a rich tradition of weaving. The woman of this community despite being engaged in paddy field work or other household work they likely to spend some time on her impend every day. The women make garments, substantially for everyday use, on handlooms. They also weave some special products for special occasions. They weave some sets of mekhela chador, a traditional women's vesture for their daughter's marriage. They feel proud to wear handloom products, such as Mekhela Chador, at special occasions similar as marriages and carnivals. Their handmade product has great demand in Assam and also in outside the state. But still this weaving has not yet become the main source of livelihood for some reasons. By using some simple technology the Thengal weaver conform the required demands of their society and made a prospects of handloom weaving looking bright.

1.7 Brief explanations:

Loom: Thengal Kachari women are very expert in weaving. Almost every household has a traditional loom in their home.

Table : 1 The following table shows the materials used in weaving :

SI. No	Implements	Uses in weaving
1	Ugha	A bamboo craft which allows for precise and efficient weaving, especially in intricate hand woven fabrics.
2	Chereki	A bamboo craft used before the actual weaving begins. The weaver placed the skein of yarn on the swift, and it rotated as the yarn is pulled off and wound onto the desired implement.
3	Maku	It is commonly made of wood. It is used to carry the weft yarn across the

		warp threads on a loom.
4	Tulutha	It is a wooden form of product used to pack the weft yarn firmly after it has been passed through the warp threads.
5	Chali Mari	A bamboo pole on which the loom is hung.
6	Nachoni	A small bamboo item hung in chalimari of the loom to hold thread.
7	Nachoni Jori	A kind of rope used to hang spindles of thread.
8	Jotor	A traditional spinning machine made of wood and has a large wheel at the front about 2-3 feet in diameter and a handle to rotate it. At the back there are two supports with a rotating drum where the yarn bobbins (Mohura) are placed.
9	Mohura	Mohura (Boobin) is a tool used to spin thread in a weaving loom.

Table 2: Age Distribution of Weavers

Serial No.	Age Group (Years)	Respondents	Percentage (%)
1	18-40	60	60%
2	40-60	30	30%
3	Above 60	10	10%
4	Total	100	100%

Description:

The table 2 represents the age distribution of weavers based on three age groups. Age group 18-40 forms the majority of the weavers, with 60 respondents accounting for 60% of the total. It has indicates that younger individuals are highly active in weaving. Age group 40-60 is the second largest group with 30 respondents, making up to 30% of the total. This group is more experienced and continues to contribute significantly to weaving. The individuals of above 60 years consists of 10 respondents , which is 10% of the total which is lower than other groups which represents that the decline of participation due to age related physical issues.

Table: 3 Marital Status of weavers

Serial No.	Divisions	Respondents	Percentage
1	Married Weavers	55	55%
2	Unmarried Weavers	45	45%
3	Total	100	100%

Table 3 shows that 55% of the total respondents are married and 45% are unmarried. The table shows a fairly balanced distribution, with married weavers slightly outnumbering unmarried ones.

Table: 4 Purpose of Weaving

Serial No.	Purpose of Weaving	Percentage
1	Business and Personal Use	35%
2	Business Only	25%
3	Personal Needs Only	40%
4	Total	100%

Table 4 shows the purposes of weaving among respondents. It shows that 40% of weavers that is largest segment engage in weaving solely for personal needs. 35% uses weaving for both business and personal purposes. 25% engaged in weaving for business purposes. It shows that a combined of 60% respondents are involving in weaving for economic purposes.

1.8 Suggestions:

The Thengal Kachari tribe has a rich weaving cultural heritage. It requires a significant attention and support to sustain and promote their craft in modern society. To empower the weavers several steps can be taken.

- **Government Intervention:** Establish production hubs and marketing networks to promote weaving culture of the tribe.
- **Training:** Can provide training on modern weaving technology.
- **Modern Technology:** To attract the younger generations can introduce advanced tools of weaving.
- **Financial Support:** Provide low-interest loans, subsidies, and grants to overcome financial constraints and boost production.

1.9. Conclusion:

The women of Thengal Kachari tribe are exceptionally talented in weaving, handicrafts, and handloom activities. Their traditional weaving culture significantly contributes to meet daily needs and family support. Thengal Kachari women are not only economically independent but also create employment opportunities for another. By these weaving practices they conserve and promote their cultural heritage. This study can not be generalized. So more research in this aspect is needed to verify the findings.

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