



# ECONOMIC SIGNIFICANCE OF TRADITIONAL HANDLOOM WEAVING AMONG ADI TRIBE OF EAST SIANG DISTRICT OF ARUNACHAL PRADESH

<sup>1</sup>YANYA SIYOM and <sup>2</sup>OBINAM LIBANG

<sup>1</sup>Student, Dept. of Economics, Arunachal Pradesh University, Pasighat

<sup>2</sup>Assistant Professor (Guest), Department of Economics, Arunachal Pradesh University, Pasighat, Arunachal Pradesh

**Abstract:** This research investigates the handloom and handicraft practices of the Adi Tribe in East siang district of Arunachal Pradesh, which have long played a vital role in shaping the socio-economic, cultural, and environmental fabric of indigenous communities. These traditional practices, rooted in centuries of craftsmanship, are more than just livelihood activities they are deeply intertwined with identity, heritage, and sustainability. This study reviews a range of scholarly works that examine the diverse dimensions of handloom weaving, from its significance in empowering rural women to its role in preserving cultural traditions and addressing contemporary challenges. Through this study, it becomes evident that while the sector holds substantial potential for economic development and cultural preservation, it also faces significant constraints that demand thoughtful intervention, modernization, and policy support.

**Key Words:** *Traditional Handloom Weaving, Adi tribe, East-Siang District, Arunachal Pradesh*

## INTRODUCTION

The Adi people are one of the most populous groups of indigenous people in the state of Arunachal Pradesh. The present habitat of the Adi people is heavily influenced by the temperate and subtropical regions with the districts of Siang, East Siang, Upper Siang, Lower Dibang valley, Shi-Yomi, Namsai within Arunachal Pradesh. “Adi” is an umbrella term denoting ‘hill men’ and it consists of number of sub tribes who are residing mainly in Siang belt of Arunachal Pradesh. The Adi people are known for their distinctive weaving practices of handloom, which are passed down through generations. Historically, traditional handloom weaving was a household activity performed by women, and the materials used for the craft came from the natural environment. The process typically involves spinning yarn from locally sourced cotton or wool, which is then dyed using natural dyes derived from plants, minerals, and other organic materials. The final product ranges from simple fabrics for daily wear to elaborate, ceremonial garments worn during important tribal festivals. These textiles are also exchanged during traditional barer systems, which reinforces the community’s interconnectedness.

Economically, it provides a primary source of income to many Adi families. The textile products are often sold at local markets and, in recent years, have also been marketed outside the region, gaining recognition for their craftsmanship. It also helps to sustain traditional livelihood and creates employment opportunities for many women in the community. Through their skills in weaving, women gain an economic foothold, giving them financial independence and a strong voice in the community. However, as the demand for machine-made fabrics increases, the traditional handloom sector faces significant challenges. Many artisans struggle with limited access to modern marketing strategies, insufficient raw materials, and the high cost of production.

The textiles produced by the Adi tribe are often praised for their environmental sustainability. The growing appreciation for handcrafted, eco-friendly products opens up new economic avenues for the Adi tribe, particularly in domestic and international markets. In this context, understanding the economic significance of the traditional handloom practice among the Adi tribe is crucial not only for preserving their cultural heritage but also for supporting local economic growth and development. By promoting these crafts, in a way, respects traditional methods while incorporating modern business practices. The Adi people could potentially tap the products into new markets, improving both their economic stability and cultural pride.

## OBJECTIVES

The present study has the following objective:

- To examine the role of Handloom weaving in income generation.
- To assess market dynamics and economic opportunities.
- To identify economic challenges faced by Traditional handloom weavers.

## HYPOTHESIS

The following Hypothesis will be tested:

- Traditional practices significantly contribute to the income and livelihood of the Adi tribe in east siang
- Limited market access hinders the economic sustainability of handloom weaving among the Adi tribe.

## Review of literature

Das (2019) explores the critical role of handloom weaving in empowering rural women in the northeastern states of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. The study specially focuses on how handloom weaving serves as a vehicle for economic independence, social recognition and the preservation of cultural traditions for rural women in both Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. The study points overall, handloom weaving plays a key role in rural women's empowerment, but addressing these challenges is crucial for sustaining its benefits.

A. Singh and R. Singh (2007) offers an exploration of the weaving practices among the Adi tribe. The study also highlights the Adi Women's profound knowledge of selecting diverse plant materials for thread production and their expertise in creating natural dyes from local flora. The article also emphasizes the cultural significance of

the woven garments, such as the “Gale” and “Galub” which are integral to the Adi people’s identity and social structure.

Karmakar (2022) aims to analyse the various constraints encountered by the entrepreneurs in the Handloom and Handicraft sector of Papum Pare District of Arunachal Pradesh that restricts their growth and development. This research study adopts perspective of various entrepreneurs in utilizing the type of constraints they face at financial, marketing, technological, infrastructural grounds keeping in mind others factors.

Banerjee et al (2018) provided an in depth examination of how traditional handloom weaving is not only an economic activity but also a crucial part of the Adi tribe’s cultural identity. The study bridges the gap between the art of weaving and its socio-cultural significance, presenting a multi-dimensional view of how craft is intertwined with community dynamics. The study touches upon the need for government and non- governmental organizations to intervene in preserving and promoting handloom weaving. The decline in interest among younger generations and the numerous challenges faces by weavers underscore the urgent need for sustainable support systems that integrate culture preservation with economic opportunities.

Devi (2019) offers a comprehensive exploration of the paper explores the problems and scope of handloom sector in north- eastern region of India for economic upliftment of the people. The author also presents practical recommendations, such as modernizing weaving techniques while preserving traditional craftsmanship, improving government support, and enhancing market access, especially in global markets where sustainable and handmade products are increasingly valued.

Hegde and Ramaiah (2024) provides a detailed examination of the challenges faced by the traditional handloom industry and proposes strategies for its revival. The article also emphasizes the importance of government support, sustainable practices, and better market linkages to empower weavers and ensure the industry’s survival.

Pangging (2019) explores into the rich history and unique techniques of handloom weaving, shedding light on the intricate designs and patterns that reflect the tribe’s beliefs, social structures and traditions.

Tok (2022) delves into the traditional attire of Adi tribe, focusing particularly on gale, a wrap-around garment worn by women. According to this paper, the female dress of Adi tribe is divided into two parts. One is upper garment worn above the waist called “Ulta Galuk” and another is the lower garment called “Gale”. It form a significant part of the women’s attire, reflecting the tribe’s deep connection to nature and their history. The study also highlight that the Adi women are highly skilled in weaving these garments, utilizing local sourced materials like cotton, and their weaving techniques are an essential part of the tribes cultural identity. The intricate patterns and vibrant colors in Gale hold spiritual and symbolic meanings, often representing stories, beliefs, and the community’s history. Tok’s work serves as both an exploration of adi people’s cultural heritage and a plea for preserving their traditional weaving practices, which are central to their identity.

Mahanta (2017) explores the importance of traditional weaving in Arunachal Pradesh , specially focusing on how this craft helps preserve the cultural identity and heritage of the state’s indigenous communities. Mahanta

emphasize the significance of hand-woven textiles not just as economic assets but as symbols of cultural expression and continuity, reflecting in customs, rituals and social values of the people. The article stresses that with proper support, traditional weaving can continue to preserve the cultural heritages and provide economic opportunities.

Sharma and Patel (2020) studied a comprehensive analysis of the contemporary challenges and opportunities in reviving traditional handloom industries across India . The study explores the role of handloom weaving in sustaining cultural heritage and its economic potential in the modern world. The author suggest that revitalizing handloom weaving requires a blend of modern market strategies, skill development, government support, and create of strong branches for handloom products.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study aims to examine the traditional handloom practices of Adi tribe of Pasighat, East Siang district of Arunachal Pradesh. A sample of 20 weavers will be selected using a purposive sampling method to ensure representation. The present study will mainly be empirical in nature and is based on both primary and secondary data. The primary data was collected through surveys and structured interviews. The secondary data was conducted by an extensive review of existing literature on tradition handloom practice of Adi tribe, including economic and social aspects.

The semi-structured interviews with handloom weavers, traders, and community leaders was conducted to gather qualitative insights about the economic importance of handloom weaving. A structured questionnaire with both open and close-ended questions will help to quantify data on income generation, market reach, and economic reliance on handloom products. Field visits to weaving clusters and markets can provide direct observation on production processes, challenges faced by weavers, and the challenges faced by weavers, and the economic flow of products.

## MAJOR FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

### ECONOMIC IMPACTS

**Table 1.1**

**Distribution of Handloom Product Sales Channels Among Respondents**

Sl.no	Handloom product	No. of respondent	Percentages
1	Online platform	2	10%
2	Direct sell to tourist	1	5%
3	Through cooperative or groups	17	85%

*Source: Field survey, 2025*

Table 1.1 shows how handloom products are sold. It outlines three primary methods of selling handloom products, along with their corresponding percentages. In the above figure only 2 (two) out of 20 (twenty) respondents sell their handloom products through online platforms. A single respondent sells directly to tourists, accounting for just 5 percent of the total. This indicates that direct sales to tourists are not a common practice among the respondents. The Majority, 17 out of 20 respondents, sell their products through cooperatives or groups. This method is the most prevalent, representing 85 percent of the total, suggesting a strong reliance on collective selling mechanism.

The data suggests the selling handloom products through cooperatives or group is the dominant method in this context, while online platform and direct sales to tourists are less common. This could reflect various factors, such as the accessibility of online platforms, the presence of tourist markets, and the strength of local cooperative network

**Table 1.2**

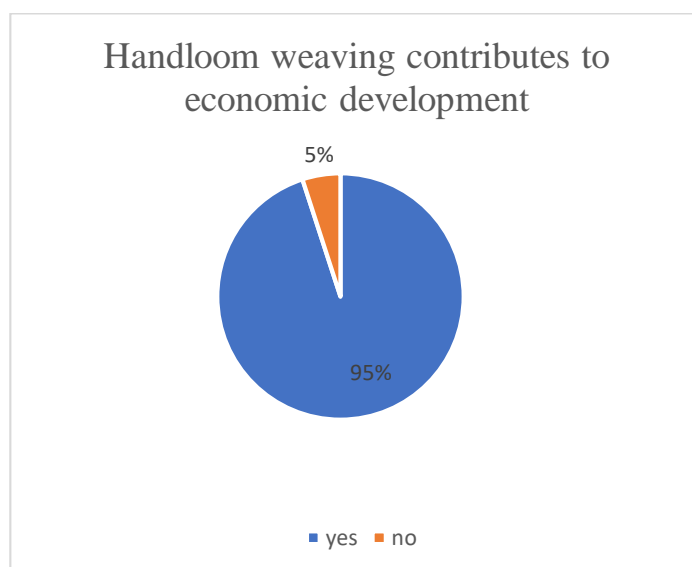
**On average income earn per month from selling handloom products**

Sl. no	Income generation from weaving	No. of Participants	Percentage
1	Below-5000	7	35%
2	5000-10000	7	35%
3	10000-20000	5	25%
4	Above-20000	1	5%

*Source: Field survey, 2025*

The table 1.2 shows the average monthly income earned from selling handloom products, based, on a field survey conduct in 2025. The table shows a significant portion of participants, 35 percent earns between ₹ 5,000 and ₹10,000 per month and another 35 percent earn below ₹5000. Only a small percentage i.e. 5 percent of participants earn above 20,000 per month. The data suggests that the majority of individual involved in selling handloom products earn modest income.

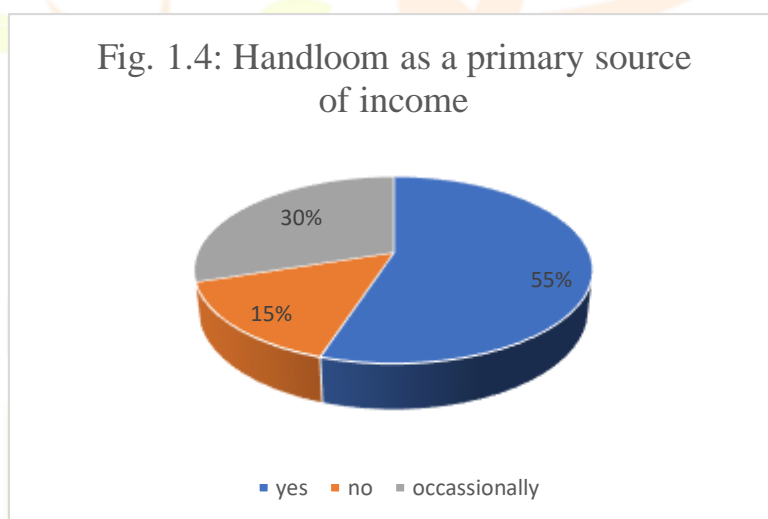
**Figure 1 below shows the handloom contribution to economic development**



*Source: Field survey, 2025*

Above pie chart show the percentage of respondents believe that the handloom sector significantly contributes to economic development in rural areas, generate income and generate self-employment. The most of the respondents agreed i.e. is 95 percent of the participants and 5 percent are disagreed.

**Figure 2 depict the handloom as a primary source of income**



*Source: Field survey, 2025*

The diagram is a pie chart illustration of the responses to the question of whether handloom is a primary source of income. The chart is divided into three segments, each representing a different response. The segment, color blue, indicates that 55 percent of respondents consider handloom to be their primary source of income. The orange segment shows the 15 percent of respondents do not rely on handloom as their primary income source. Represented by the grey segment, 30 Percent of respondents indicates that handloom is occasionally a source of income for weavers.

## MARKET DYNAMICS

Traditional Handloom sector is heavily influenced by tribal culture and weaving practice. The market is characterized by a strong focus on local production, limited commercialization outside of urban areas.

**Table 1.3 : Markets for handloom products**

SI. No	Market	No. of participants	Percentage
1	Local village market	15	75%
2	District level markets	4	20%
3	State level markets	0	0%
4	National online platforms	1	5%

*Source: Field survey, 2025*

The table above shows the market dynamics for handloom products, especially focusing on the locations where these products are sold. It outlines number of participants and the percentage of sales occurring at each market level. The majority of the handloom products are sold in local village markets i.e. 75 percent, with 15 respondents involved. District level markets account for 20 percent of sales and national online platform contribute 5 percent to the sales. According to the above table, the local markets are primary channel for selling handloom products, while online platforms and district markets play a smaller, but still play significant role. The above distribution could reflect the preferences of both seller and buyers, the accessibility of different market levels, and the involving impact of e-commerce on the handloom industry. The increasing demand for eco-friendly and traditionally crafted items is driving the authenticity and unique of these products.

**Table 1.4**

#### **Factors that influence the price of Handloom product**

Sl. No	Factors Influence the m price	No. of participants	percentage
1	Quality of raw material	1	5%
2	Size and complexity of the design	18	90%
3	Time taken to weave the product	1	5%

*Source: Field survey, 2025*

The table above presents factors influencing price of the handloom products, along with the number of participants and their percentage contribution to price. These indicate that the size and complexity of the design significantly impact the price of the handloom product, accounting for 90 percent of the price influence. This highlight that the intricacy and scale of the design are the primary drivers of the products cost.

## ECONOMIC CHALLENGES

In the study area of survey, the economics challenges faced by the weavers are highlighted in the below table:

**Table 1.5**

### Economic challenges faced by Weavers.

SI. No	Economic challenges	No. of participants	Percentage
1	Limited access to raw material	14	70%
2	Lack of skill weaver	1	5%
3	Low Markets Demand for traditional handloom products	4	20%
4	High competition from machine made products	1	5%

*Source: Field survey, 2025*

The above table presents data on the economic challenges face by the weavers. The data is based on responses from a sample of weavers, with the number of participants vary for each challenges. Here, 70 percent participants reported limited access to raw materials, while only 1 reported lack of skill as a weaver. It also highlights that the primary economic challenge for weavers is the limited availability of raw materials, followed by low market demand for traditional products. A small percentage of weavers also struggle with a lack of skill and high competition from machine-made products.

**Table 1.6**

### Challenges in selling handloom products in the market

Sl. No	Challenges	No. of participants	Percentage
1	High Transportation costs	4	20%
2	Limited access to large markets or retail outlets	3	15%
3	Lack ,of marketing or promotional skills	9	45%
4	Low awareness or Demand Outside the Local Communities	4	20%

*Source: Field survey, 2025*

The above table present a data on the challenges faced in selling handloom products in the market, based on a survey of the participants. In the above table, the lack of marketing or promoting skills is the most significant challenge, cited by 45 percent of participants. This data could be used to understand the primary obstacles faced by seller of handloom products and develop strategies to address these challenges, such as improving marketing efforts, reducing transportation costs, and expanding market access.

### Major Problems Identified

The study identified several critical challenges impacting the traditional handloom sector in Pasighat:

1. **Limited Market Access:** Handloom products are predominantly sold in local village markets, with minimal penetration into district, state, or national markets. This limited exposure restricts the income potential of the weavers. A study revealed that a significant 70% of respondents reported challenges in obtaining quality raw materials, which affects production quality and consistency.
2. **Competition from Machine-Made Products:** The influx of cheaper, machine-made textiles poses a significant threat to traditional handloom products, which are often more expensive and labour-intensive to produce.
3. **Decline in Youth Participation:** Younger generations are increasingly moving away from traditional crafts, seeking employment in modern sectors, leading to a loss of skilled artisans.
4. **Lack of Modernization and Innovation:** Many weavers continue to use traditional methods, which, while preserving cultural heritage, can limit productivity and appeal to contemporary markets.
5. **Inadequate Marketing and Promotional Skills:** A significant number of weavers lack the necessary skills to market and promote their products effectively, limiting their reach and sales.

### Suggestions for Improvement

To address these challenges and foster the growth of the Traditional handloom sector, the following are the suggestions:

- **Training and Skill Development:** Implementing comprehensive training programs can equip artisans with modern techniques and design innovations, enhancing the quality and appeal of their products
- **Marketing Support:** Establishing marketing platforms and facilitating participation in exhibitions can help artisans showcase their products to a wider audience, increasing visibility and sales opportunities. Facilitate access to broader markets through digital platforms and participation in national and international exhibitions.
- **Financial Assistance:** Providing loans and subsidies can alleviate financial constraints, enabling artisans to invest in better equipment and expand their production capabilities.
- **Promoting Geographical Indications (GI):** Obtaining GI tags for unique products can protect traditional crafts from imitation, enhance their marketability, and preserve cultural heritage.
- **Youth Engagement Strategies:** Develop programs to engage the youth in traditional crafts, emphasizing the cultural significance and economic potential of handloom weaving.

- **Strengthening Cooperative Models:** Enhance the capacity of cooperatives to provide better support to weavers, including access to raw materials, training, and market linkages.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the research highlights the integral role of traditional handloom weaving in the socio-economic fabric of the Adi community. Weaving of the traditional Handloom, predominantly practiced by women, serves as a significant source of income and a vital cultural tradition. Despite the high literacy rate among weavers, with 60% being graduates, reflecting the community's value placed on education. The sector faces challenges such as limited market access, competition from machine-made products, and a decline in interest among younger generations due to globalization and modernization.

The study revealed that handloom weaving is predominantly a female-dominated activity in Pasighat, with 100% of the surveyed weavers being women. The majority of these weavers fall within the productive age group of 20-40 years, indicating a strong workforce engaged in this traditional craft. Economically, weaving serves as a significant source of income, with 50% of respondents identifying it as their primary occupation. However, the income levels remain modest, with 70% earning below ₹10,000 per month from weaving activities.

Market dynamics indicate that handloom products are primarily sold through cooperatives or groups (85%), with limited penetration into online platforms (10%) or direct sales to tourists (5%). The local village markets (75%) serve as the main outlets for these products. Despite the cultural significance and intricate designs of handloom items, the sector faces several economic challenges, including limited access to raw materials, low market demand, and high competition from machine-made products.

Thus, the traditional handloom weaving in Pasighat, Arunachal Pradesh, holds immense cultural and economic value. While the sector faces several challenges, targeted policy interventions focusing on skill development, market expansion, and financial support can significantly enhance the livelihoods of weavers and ensure the preservation of this traditional craft. By addressing these issues, the handloom sector can contribute to the socio-economic development of the region and empower the weaver communities.

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