CHAPTER---I

INTRODUCTION

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1. A BRIEF REVIEW OF TEXTILE OF INDIA

The textile tradition of India is as old as its civilization. It has a long heritage. Initially, it was used only to protect physique from nature. It was made of the most of personal necessity and now it satisfies increasingly man’s aesthetic needs for colour and ornamentation. The textile was fabricated as a highly individualized and specialized cottage craft. But, in time and space, it has catered to a large scale mechanized industry. The creative mind, spirit and skill of people have contributed this evolution and development of the craft. The proficiency in weaving of this region was always incomparable. The different literary and archaeological evidence established the rich textile tradition of this country. The Indian textile reflects the historical uniqueness of this area and it influenced by the climate and environment comprised with water, salt, minerals and other resources.

As per Vedic perception, whole universe is comparable with weaving; where God is the weaver and rays of the sun can be assumed as yarn to weave cloth (Sarma, 2000:12).

In Rig Vedic Age (1500 to 1000 BC), the Aryan people used mainly two types of clothes i.e. bash (lower apparel) and adhibash (upper apparel). The hand woven tight fit cloths—they called anka. They also wore a scarf like cloth ‘drapi’. The costumes were usually made in woolen yarn. The deities wore deer skin and saint used skin of animal or cloth dyed with red chalk. The female had no separate dresses. But the brides wore special dresses known as ‘badhuya’ which later she presented to Brahma. She also wove dresses for her groom. The artisan used different weaving equipments like charkha, spindle, etc. and esteemed weaving and spinning like a religious work. The Vedic
literature Upanishads states that both male and female wore two types of cloths—*Uttariya* (upper apparel) and *Antariya* (lower apparel). Sometimes the poor people used only one piece of cloth and one end of the same cover the upper part of the body. The king wore ‘*tarpya*’ (a silk *churiya*, worn in lower part) and a woolen cloth with ‘*adhibash*’ at the time of *Yaugya* (a worship with offerings. He also tied a *paguri* (turban) on his head. On the occasion of ‘*Upanayana*’ the people used cloths made from cotton, woolen, linen, and hemp yarn. The woolen blanket and silk fabrics were also prevalent at that period.

In later Vedic Age (1000 to 600BC), people used three piece clothes instead of two i.e. *Nibi* (lower apparel), main dress ‘*Bash*’ and ‘*Adhibash*’ used like a scarf to cover the body. It was a custom of this time to keep the ‘*lagun*’ (a sacred thread investing a men) over the scarf. In post Rig Vedic epoch, the weaving, dyeing, designing, etc. were done by the people of all cast and it was prevalent as a respectable social work (Sarma, 1961:45-47).

The Atharva Veda stated about the weaver and loom and described that day and night spreads light and darkness over the earth like the weaver throwing a shuttle on the loom.

The Monusmriti also indicated the cotton string of Brahmanas, hempen thread of Kshatrya and woolen yarn of Vaishya. He pointed out the use of rice water as starch for sizing of yarn, which was likely the first sizing ingredients used in India. The Mahabharata and Manu Saghita stated about the use of silk cloth in different description. In Mahabharata people wore various designed fabric.

These Vedic Scriptures recorded the earliest literary evidence containing references to weaving activities in India, until the discovery
of the actual relics from Harappa and Mohenjodaro—the centers of the Indus Valley civilization discovered in 1920-21. The cloth fragments, bobbins, terra cotta spindles and a bronze needle found here poses as the first sign of the cultivation of cotton, spinning, weaving and embroidery in India.

The ancient historical epoch was mainly estimated from 600 BC to 800 AD. In this period different foreign historian, traveler, ambassador came to India and wrote various description about the political and social life of the people.

The discovery of madder-dyed cotton fabric in Mohenjodero is an important clue to the textile tradition of India. It proves the proficiency of the Indians over the complicated natural dyes like 'Manjitha' or 'Madder' dyeing. The knowledge of dyeing on cotton yarn was unknown till the 17th centur AD to the rest of the world.

In Mahenjodaro, a stone statue of a priest found is seen draped with a designed fabric that may either be woven or embroidered.

Two religions thoughts—Buddhism and Jainism were developed in 6th century BC, which draw out different art forms including textiles.

In the Jatakas, written in the 5th century BC also mentioned about different fabrics both dyed and embroidered with gold threads (Sarma, 2000:13-14).

According to Greek writers, Herodotus, the Indian cotton floral costumes were exported to Asia (minor), North East Africa and South Europe. The Esther of Bibel stated about the white and violet coloured cotton cloth, which was kept in the palace of Chochan. That proves that, the Indian costumes were exported up to Rome also.
As per Roman Historian Neearkash, Indian people wore two types of cloth. The lower apparel was like a dhoti or sari and extended between knees and ankle joint. The upper portion was covered by another piece like chaddar and one end of the cloth was hanged in left shoulder over the head of the wearer. When people were staying at home then the one end of lower apparel covered the upper portion of the body. The female of aristocratic family used coloured dresses. But, widows wore always white dresses.

The Greek ambassador, Megasthenic visited the Mauryan capital and wrote about the cloths in his journal ‘Ta-India’. He stated that though the life style of Indian people was simple but they liked decorated dresses and ornament. He referred that the white cotton garment worn by the natives contrasted sharply to their tanned skin (Chowdhury: 2001:74). The inhabitant of Patolly putra, used decorated dresses adorned with golden or precious stone. They also used decorated muslin cloth. The people cultivated cotton plant at their home. Kartiyash stated that the king attended in his counsel house with red coloured dress adorned by golden thread. In this period, muslin cloth occupied a big export market in Rome.

Kautilya, the minister of King Chandra Gupta Maurya, documented a department of ‘Director of weaving and spinning’, which supported this craft and supervised the production of cloth made of wool, cotton, silk, hemp and flex yarn. He spoke in his book ‘Arthasastra’ the details about the textile craft of India. The Indian textile was run this time as a developed craft and controlled by the Government. The people used two special types of cloth i.e. ‘Dukul Bastra’ (made from silk or cotton-silk mixed yarn worn as wrapper) and
‘Patroma’ (made from muga, pat and cotton and the product of Subarna kunda was the best). In this period the ascetics used apparel made of ‘kush’ (a kind of sacred grass) and fodder or they wore ‘balka bastra’ (made of tree-bark). They tied their lower apparel by a cord or ribbon on waist (Sarma, 1961:64-66).

In 100 BC to 200 AD the Greek and Shak-Kushan introduced new dresses in India. Some people especially women imitated these new style and wore blouse, jacket, frock, etc. The Buddhist Binoy-Pitkat referred some equipment used in weaving process. During this time, people used tussock and pillow made from cotton and mosquito net (athuwa), blanket (Kambal) and Door mat (dolicha).

In South India, archaeological sites like Paiyampalli and Adichchanallur have produced spindles made of betel nut beads. The Sangam classics produced silk and cotton cloth within First to 6th century AD. Weaving reached its zenith in South India during the reign of Pallava and Chola dynasties. Large quantities of cloths were exported from the ancient part of Arikamedu, situated in Tamilnadu, Kanchipuram (Kanjiveram) was the principal centre of weaving activities which were patronized by the royal households. There were centers where cotton weaving was the commercial hobnob of hundreds of artisans (Chowdhury, 2001:75). In Chola and Vijaynagara reign, the weavers lived in the temple campus, made fabrics not for temple and the idols or priestly class but also for local people.

In Gupta era from (400 AD to 500 AD) the textile of India emerged in a developed form. The people wore both stitching and non-stitching garment and used silk, muslin, cotton, linen, flex and wool yarn for production of cloths.
The caves of Ajanta near Aurangabad comprising of Buddhist art also show some figures wearing tie-dyed ikat lion cloth and fabric adorned with stripes and check pattern (Sarma, 2000:14).

In Indian history, the middle age is assumed from 800 AD to the beginning of British age. In this period, the first 500 years are known as Kanouj empire age where the textile was identified as an advanced craft. The man wore dhoti and ‘prawaran’ (a scarf type fabric). Sometimes they used a weighty coat chola known as ‘brihattaa’. They also used woollen cloth ‘rawkhika’ and silk fabrics both local and Chinese made. The female wore ‘chandatak’ (mekhela) and ‘kurpus’ (bodice, a chest covering).

Different religious order prescribed various types of dresses for their members. People belonging to different region also dressed in separate styles. People of torrid region chose soft and light cloth like fine muslin. They also made it an export item. Men living in cold areas used warm and woolen shawls and blanket. The wool yarn they obtained from dear, goat and sheep’s.

After Kanouj empire age, the next 400 years, India was under the rule of Delhi Sultan and Mogule Empire. In this time, different cottage craft were improved. The Turky-Afgan royal family prevailed anew fashion on Indian dresses. India produced some finest muslins (fine cotton cloth) and brocades. Indian textiles reached a new height due to confluence of the Persian culture of Mughal and Hindu aesthetics.

In this period, the Government established handloom production centre at Lahor, Fatehpur, Agra and Ahmedabad. The Iranian weavers, on invitation by Akbar, penetrated into Agra, Lahor and Fatehpur Sikri and created carpets, which were on par with their Iranian and Turkish
counterparts. During this period, Indian textiles adopted some new design and motifs that were of naturalistic form. The floral and leaves are entered in this time into Indian costumes. The people knew the use of golden and silver thread to adorn the cloth. The decorated cloths were exported from Surat to Poland. Every home comprised of two or three looms and it fulfilled the domestic needs of cloth. People also reared caterpillar and produced silk fabrics. The silk art was mainly prevalent at Assam, Banga, Kashmir and South India.

In Muslim epoch, the Hindu male wore *dhoti-chador* and female used *sari-dolai*. But Muslim gents used *paijama, kurta*, long coat, etc. and women worn *paijama* and *sari*. Instead of that the women from Hindu community used *'Oronee'*(a Veil) and Muslim used *'Borka'*. No vast distinction had been found in dresses amongst the common Hindu and Muslim villagers.

In the last part of Mughal Empire, the Indian textile industry declined due to famine and war. Ibn Batuta, a Moroccan who visited and stayed in India from 1333 to 1346 century AD, explained about the greatness of the Sultanate dynasty and also wrote that more than 500 specialized artisans engaged in production of silk and gold brocades for the royal wardrobe.

After declination of the Mughal administration, the Persian and Hindu artisans spread out into Gujrat and Rajasthan and bear a rich and long standing textile tradition in these parts till date. The Persian and Hindu aesthetics were mixed together in South under the Persian rulers of the Decean. In this incident the traditional block printing and resist dyeing united with hand painted *'kalamkari'* and gold leaf techniques to produce work of great excellence.
The textile was one of the most important items of trade through the centuries. The trade cloth discovered at Al-Fustat near Cairo in Egypt, around 13th to 15th century AD were supplemented by the Asian and European trade Gazettes and that are the evidences of a passage through which Indian textiles traveled to the rest of the world.

Indian decorated textile was placed in palace of Babylon and other museums, which reflects the pride of the craft. The Babylonian Seals suggest an early cotton trade with the sub-continent. The silk yarn from China also suggests that there were trade link between the two countries by an overland route to the countries north of the Himalayas.

With the expansion of the Persian Empire to Kabul by the 6th century BC, the Indus Valley was linked to the Mediterranean. India was a major conveyance point of silk and cotton trade between the East and West during the Magadhan regime. By the first century AD, the Persians and the Romans for its brilliant colours chose Indian textile. Cotton was called ‘carbasina’ by the Romans which are derived from the Sanaskrit word ‘karpacea’. Indian muslins were fashionable in Rome and were known by the name ‘nebula’ and ‘venti’ which meant ‘woven winds’.

The Roman historian Pliny opined to impose ban on the import of textiles from India because it was emptying the state coffers. The quality of Indian dyes was best and it is acknowledged in the 4th cent Latin translation of Bible by St. Jerome. The Arabian also traded Indian textile and they spread the cotton plant to Islamic region (Sarma, 2000:16).

In 1498 AD, Vasko-di-Gama discovered India and then Partugis, Olondus, Farasy and British company came to India for extent their business.
The advent of the British and the East India Company in the 16th century AD, the Indian textile especially handloom weaving were almost rub-off. The British Parliament obstructed in export of Indian textile, because it affected the silk and woolen industry of England. The light weight, colourful and washable cotton fabric were changed into the concept of fashion in Europe and it dominated the British trade. The artist came from Dutch (Holland) and British designed and adopted the traditional Indian patterns and motif for European taste. Of course, these designs were later re-executed in India also by some Calico artisans.

After Independence, the National Government has been taking different steps to improve the productivity of raw materials and the Government constituted the ‘Indian Central Cotton Committee’ to obtain the long cotton fibre length. It is worth mentioning that, in 1840, East India Company was migrated 12 numbers of American cotton planters with cotton seeds to India for cultivation of cotton having long fibre length. But they were not successful. They imported the same from America, Misore and East Africa (Sarma, 1961:159-184). In post Independence period, the Indian textile both weaving and spinning gradually rose with increasing the productivity. The textile mill also established at Bombay and Culcutta. The cotton textile industries were instituted in different areas of the country and it closed the import of textile product from England.

The flow of Calico product to Europe declined the silk industry (both wool and pat) of the continent and the producers forced a ban on the import of Indian cottons and later export duties were levied on Indian textiles.
The British colonial policies dictated by the law that all the cotton grown in India be exported to Britain at very nominal prices, while British mill cloths flooded the Indian market and forcing the local people to buy the product.

This cotton revolution of England and the industrial revolution with the discover of the spinning jenny and the power loom, the reverse flow of cotton, the machine made copies, all pushed the Indian weavers into socio-economic deprivation. The hand spun and hand woven textiles were lost and along with it; a whole reservoir of precious traditional and indigenous textile knowledge also disappeared. They installed different textile industries in this country. The modern cotton mill was started first in Mumbai in 1854 by C.N. Diwar. In 1861 Sahpur factory and in 1860 Calico factory were set-up at Ahmedabad (Social Science-IV, 2005:40).

It was the efforts of Mahatma Gandhi and the India’s freedom movement that revived and re-invented the handloom industry of the country and they brought a creative spirit amongst the weavers. Gandhiji attempted to make the act of spinning and weaving in a political strength. The Charkha (spinning wheel, made of wood and bamboo) became a symbol of independence and self-dependence.

After independence, the Government of India also took more initiative to upgrade the handloom industry. Because this craft largely associated amongst the economically backward rural class. The handloom activities were prevalent mainly in Assam, Manipur, Tamilnadu, Andhra Pradesh and Orisya (Datta, 1976: 5).
2. Aim of the Study

The 'textile' takes a significant role in understanding the culture and history of mankind. Its relationship with man is as like the body and soul. As an aspect of material culture, it warps not only the human body but also culture at the same time. It reflects the cultural need of the population at given space and time.

The textile of this province is an age old indigenous traditional craft and it prevalent among all casts and is exclusively feminine one where she acts like a scribe and records the ethno history in floral language on fabrics. So, the textile exists as a document for ethno history of preliterate people.

Assam is the land of confluence of different ethno-cultural groups; each has cultural background and distinct history of its own. The ethnic groups have their respective specialty as well as peculiarity in weaving and in designing. The design and costumes always symbolize the cultural identity of each group in the society. The geo-cultural boundary between two ethnic groups is not in a watertight form and one never stood hostile to another. Rather, they co-exist peacefully and make a common culture that exhibit in the textile traditions of this region. In traditional context, the textile is marked by continuity and homogeneity at the same time.

The economic change brings qualitative and quantitative change in the life and culture of the people. For this change, new elements of textiles have found their way in Assamese culture. It was transformed identifiably more in urban area in comparison to rural settings. In rural area, the textile has not lost its traditional elements; it continues more or less unchanged and distinct and remains uninfluenced of urban cultures.
For this reason, researcher has attempted to record the traditional textiles that constitute the base of Assamese culture and society, before it is swayed by the waves of commercialization. Here also described how far they have been changed due to co-existence with different cultural groups as well as modernization of the craft. It is also observed the trend of protest and changes in textile tradition both in rural and urban settings.

3. **SCOPE OF WORK:**

The Kamrup district is the home of variety of Cultural groups, where different ethnic groups maintaining their distinctive indigenous character especially in textiles and people preserved the folk-tradition in better way. Here weaving of fabrics is a way of livelihood of large numbers of rustic families and artisans. Loom is part and parcel of rural households.

Generally, the inhabitant of this area is Assamese speaking people and they are influenced by different neighboring ethnic groups like Boro, Rabha, Lalung, etc. All of them have atleast one traditional loom at their home. They weave cloths basically for their personal use. Only limited section takes it as a source of income.

Changes have pitched both in economic, technological and socio cultural sphere. In the face of such changes also the people try to retain their traditional heritages and on the new technological media they try to reflect them. At the same time the new elements are accommodated within the traditional elements. This is a juxtaposition or synthesis that we are to examine.
4. METHODOLOGY:

The present study is mainly based on primary and secondary data. The data have been collected from different areas of Kamrup district as well as institutions related to textiles. Some materials are also collected from the rural, semi-urban and urban centers.

The fieldwork includes both observation and interview methods with the help of a structured scheduled. It may be noted here that, in view of the subject of the study, mostly women informants were approached for collecting data, as the women folk are the bearer of the traditional knowledge of textiles of Assam. The schedule was employed to gather information on various aspects of weaving including different beliefs, custom associated with this craft. Further, the data have been documented photographically.

Besides this, considerable library work is also involved with this study. The data collected for secondary sources are from various relevant books, journals, literature, news papers, reports, bulletins, etc of different departments.

The library work was undertaken mainly in the K.K. Handique Library in Gauhati University, Library of Folklore Research and Anthropology department, Gauhati University, Assam Textile Institute, Indian Institute of Handloom Technology, Assam Institute of Research for Tribal and Scheduled Castes, Guwahati, etc.

Later, systematically collected all data’s are analysis

5. DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY:

The area of study is vast in comparison to the duration of the study. So, the textiles of the ethnic groups or population distributing in Kamrup district have been brought under this study.