CHAPTER VII

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The endi silk is indigenous to the state of Assam. The endi or eri as is locally known derives its name from the ara (Ricinicus communis L.) plant, and which constitutes its principal food. Among all the silk producing states of India, Assam occupies 5th position, producing 5 per cent of the world's raw silk. The importance of the endi silk production in the state can be gauged from the fact that 60 per cent of the world’s endi production comes from India and 90 per cent of endi production in India comes from Assam. Handloom weaving is one of the most important industries in the state and occupies 2nd position after agriculture. A total of 70 per cent of the total families in the state are engaged in endi culture. Spinning and weaving is a widespread economic activity in Assam transcending caste and economic borders. It is a women centric craft and is signified by the term sipini denoting a female weaver and there is no local equivalent of this term for a male weaver. The women of Assam is accustomed to spinning and weaving, and this craft is an integral part of the culture of this region. Endi is generally known as the 'Silk of the poor'. Textile woven with this silk is characterized by strength, durability and warmth. This industry is primarily dependent on the labour of women. Women have been predominant in the
rearing and weaving of *endi* textiles. In addition to their daily household activities, the women use their leisure time and with the help of their traditionally inherited knowledge produce beautiful *endi* products. The study on 'Women and *Endi* Silk Production in a Village of Kamrup district, Assam', is an attempt to study the weavers and the *endi* silk production in Rampur village of Kamrup district, Assam. Rampur is the largest and major *endi* producing area of the state as a whole. It is estimated that of the total production of *endi* silk in Assam almost 90 per cent of the silk comes from Rampur. Majority of the households in this region have taken up spinning and weaving as one of the sources of income.

Rampur being a big area with the Rampur Gaon Panchayat having 10 numbers of villages under it, only 2 villages namely Bhagabatipara and Bhurapara were selected for conducting the study. Demographic data were collected from 490 households, and it was found that 425 households were associated with spinning and weaving activities. From among the 425 households a sample of 200 households were selected randomly for collection of detailed data on issues related to spinning and weaving.

Availability of facilities and services to the villagers of the study area indicates that the area has a good road network with the rest of the district and other places of the state. The area has also easy access to the nearest post office, the telegraph office, police station, the Development Block office, the Revenue Circle office, the Dispensary, Bank, and educational institutions like Primary, High School, Higher
Secondary schools and colleges. Guwahati city which is the nearest city is at a distance of 40 kilometers from the study area.

A study of the demographic and socio-economic characteristics of the study households presented the following picture. The male population percentage of 490 households is 51.11 per cent while the female percentage is 48.89 per cent. Thus we see that the female sex ratio is slightly lower than the male sex ratio. The highest number of individuals fall in the 15-19 age group. The marital status of the household population shows that among males age 25 and above 42.57 per cent is currently married and among female age 15 and above, the percentage of married is 44.93 per cent. Data from the study indicates that women marry at a younger age than their male counterparts. The educational level of the household members show that 24.90 percent of the population has completed high school level. An overwhelming 13.78 per cent are illiterate. The percentage of female illiteracy is twice that of male illiteracy. The percentage of college going individuals is very low.

The household characteristics of all 490 households show that all the household members are followers of Hinduism. It is a multi-caste population. 81.43 per cent of the households are headed by males while 8.57 are female headed ones. The female headed households are a result of absence of elderly males in the households. The trend of nuclear households is also increasing in rural areas as is indicated in the study area where 78.98 per cent are nuclear households. The majority of the households have an average of 4 to 5 household members accounting for 49.38 per cent of the total number of households. The households'
characteristics of the study area shows that even today 34.70 per cent of households do not have electricity. A majority of the population depend on the hand pump for the purpose of drinking water. There is the provision of community piped water, but the facility has not reached the entire village. A majority of the households are still not aware of the utility of using safe drinking water as they do not treat the water before drinking. One third of the households of the study area use their backyard for the purpose of defecation. There is no drainage facility in the entire village. The hygiene aspects in the area are not favourable. This is unfortunate as water sources and sanitation facilities may have an important influences on the household members, especially children (NFHS II, 2002).

The ownership of house, land and livestock gives an indication of the socio-economic status of a household. The members of households in the study area live in their own dwellings. Agriculture land has decreased. One fourth of the households own agricultural land. Hence, households depending on the income from agriculture are very low. Half of the population has livestock. For a majority of these households, livestock forms a source of secondary income, through sale of animals and animal products like eggs and milk. The possession of durable goods is another indicator of a household's socio-economic level although these goods may also have other benefits and improve the quality of life of its members. The loom is the most common assets for 85.91 per cent of the households. This is understandable for a society where weaving forms an intrinsic part of their culture and contributes considerably to the economy of the households. The villagers have also come to enjoy the amenities provided by modern life. To make life more convenient, they use
watch, radio, transistor, television, sewing machine and cycle. The use of the bullock cart and the tractor for the purpose of cultivation has become scarce.

Data from 200 households of weavers show that a majority of the weavers are from Rampur itself or from the nearby area. The educational level of household members indicates that 1/4\textsuperscript{th} of the members of the households have completed middle level school. College going females are less than college going males. The occupational data of household members show that almost 1/3\textsuperscript{rd} of the study population are engaged in weaving. They are the female section of the population. Hence we can determine the importance of women's role in the household economy.

A majority of the women in the productive age group, saving the old, infirm, infants and school going females, are engaged in spinning and weaving activities. They are contributing to the family's subsistence. S.K. Bhuyan (cited in Das, 1986:44) has also the following to say with regard to women's involvement with weaving activities and their contribution to the household economy, 'An Assamese maiden of the marriageable age, tarrying long in her mother's roof, is not a financial burden to her parents. Many Assamese families have been saved from ruins by the labour of their womenfolk. An Assamese widow, however destitute she may be, is never driven to the extremity of earning her bread by living a life of shame'. This is not same in case of the male members in the society. There are a large number of school dropouts and young men who are unemployed and dependent. They remain idle, while female of the same circumstances use weaving as an occupation. Looking at the monthly income of the households it has been found that 12 households depend on the income earned from weaving, although for 10 households the income is not more
than Rs. 1000/- monthly. This indicates that for a majority of weavers, the income from spinning and weaving helps them to overcome acute poverty but is not sufficient enough to make a comfortable living. Never the less earnings from spinning and weaving contribute to the earnings of 87.5 per cent households. The weavers regard the loom as an asset. Only 22 of the total 200 weavers possess land and houses which they regard it as their own property. These women are from female headed households either single or with minor children, who have claimed ownership of land and house in the absence of adult males in the households. Fifteen per cent of the weavers save money. The rest have the willingness but not the capability to save. There is also a problem of indebtedness among a few households in the study area.

A woman's role in the household in matters related to the daily chores was an area of interest due to the fact that this gives an indication of the kind of assistance she receives in the household. This in turn helps to understand how she manages spinning and weaving activities with other household chores. Traditional beliefs associated with division of labour in the household are very much in practice in the study area. Cooking and serving food, washing clothes, cleaning of house and surrounding are considered chores to be done by the women folk. Going outside to purchase grocery is on the other hand a male prerogative. The work related to caring of children, the sick, helping the children in studies is performed by both males and females. For weavers of the study area, weaving is not a whole time activity; a weaver has to find time for weaving in the course of her daily chores. She usually takes to the loom after the chores in the morning are finished. After weaving for a few hours, she has to find time to prepare the afternoon meal, feed her family
members and herself, and clean the dishes. She again takes to the loom, before she gets up to prepare dinner and then go to bed. This is in contrast to a male professional weaver. For a male weaver of Kanchipuram (Artherburn, 1982) a typical day for a weaver begins at six in the morning and goes until 12, when there is lunch and a period of rest. It resumes again at two and goes until five-thirty or six in the evening. In the evening from six to nine, there is a period of relaxation. Adult males work fulltime at weaving. Adult females are engaged fulltime either in weaving or more usually in assisting their husbands at the loom.

Women's role in decision making in the household was another subject of investigation in 200 households. It was found out that in majority of the issues discussed, women along with their spouses take decisions jointly. Even matters related to seeking health care for the women and recreation for the women are joint decision of men and women. Women's role in decision making in matters related to what to cook in a meal and family planning is very low. There are households where women play a substantial role in decision making like making and maintaining the household budget, obtaining health care for the women and management of family fund. Views on women's educational aspiration for their children differ on matters of gender. Though women want both their sons and daughters to get a formal educational degree, yet in majority of cases it was found that they wanted that the boys should have a higher degree than a girl. In addition, more stress was given to a boy than a girl in getting a technical degree.
In recent years there has been increasing concern about violence against women in general and domestic violence in particular. In patriarchal societies such as India, not only are women socialized into being silent about their experience of violence, but also traditional norms teach them to accept, tolerate, and even rationalize domestic violence. (NFHS-II.2002). In this study while women wholeheartedly disagrees on the views of domestic violence as a result of a husbands suspicion towards the wife's infidelity, for dowry not being given by a wife's family and also for the wife not cooking food properly, they again on the other hand believe that a husband is justified in beating a wife if she is disrespectful to her in-laws, and goes out without informing her husband. This finding attests to the widespread socialization of women to norms that give husbands the right to use force to discipline wives who are thought to be breaking traditional gender rules. Women have limited scope for recreational activities. The radio is the sole form of entertainment, although the popularity of the television is not uncommon. Majority of the weavers are members of different organizations related to the socio-economic development of the area.

*Endi* spinning and weaving is practiced in 425 households of the study area. It is disheartening to note that rearing of the *endi* worm which was popular earlier has almost decayed, except only one household who has been trying to revive this tradition by rearing *endi* worms since the last 3 years. The reason behind the fading of this art is the lack of food plants for the worms, lack of space to rear *eri* plants and also absence of individuals knowing this art. Spinning and weaving is thus the two important works associated with *endi* in the area. Although the villagers also
make use of other yarns for the purpose of weaving, the use of endi cocoons and yarns surpasses the use of any other raw materials. They use other yarns like Thailand, Madras, nuni, ghisa, cotton, masraj, etc., which they purchase from the market. The region is known for its beautiful endi products and the weavers of the villages have over the years been producing endi clothes of different types. There is the presence of the traditional endi market in Bijaynagar. The villagers make their buying and selling of cocoons, yarns, and finished products every Tuesday and Saturday of the week in this market. They have been applying their age old learning and wisdom and using the traditional methods and appliances for the purposes of spinning and weaving. One of the major reasons for the existence of this craft is the transmission of indigenous knowledge acquired from one generation to another. The craft requires very simple tools and equipments which is not very expensive. This is another positive factors accounting for the survival of this craft. Over the years the scenario in weaving in the area has undergone changes as told by weavers. Earlier, woven products were basically used only for consumption at home, but now, it is also woven for sale in the market. There have been changes in the use of designs and types of woven products. Besides the wrapper, weavers now weave endi shawl and stoles, towels, fabrics, upper and lower wrappers for women of different yarns. The focus now is to make the designs easier to weave. The preferences of the clients have also changed from earlier times. The process of manufacture has not undergone changes. Weavers still prefer the throw shuttle loom for weaving endi products. The fly shuttle loom is a new addition and is much preferred for its efficiency and time saving qualities.
Spinning and weaving has been a traditional craft in Assam and women from an early age are inducted to this tradition. The women have been trying to keep this craft alive by teaching the younger generation. The role of women in keeping alive weaving as a tradition is immense. The role of the mother is most important in imparting all the knowledge of weaving to her daughter as has been seen in a majority of cases. So immense is the contribution of weaving in their household economy that majority of the weaver accounting for 91.5 per cent cannot think of giving up this occupation in the near future. Saving a few, young girls of the village are also taking up spinning and weaving as a source of income.

Although endi spinning and weaving is an exclusive prerogative of the women folk, we also see that there is complete cooperation from the male folk. Weaving requires assistance from several hands and in the absence of other females, the males members help in the spinning and weaving activities. They also take the products to the market for the purpose of selling. Weaving endi is laborious and includes a number of tasks to get a finished product. Weaving as already mentioned, demands the labour of more than one individual. Ample cooperation and support which is the basis of rural folk is seen in the study area too. Similar observation by Artherburn in her study of weavers of Kanchipuram is made as she cites the proverb that ‘the Chetti (merchants) lost by partnership, while the weavers come to grief by isolation’ (Thurston 1909: VI: 276, cited in Artherburn, 1982: 36). This proverb expresses the necessity for weavers to work together. They are economically dependent upon one another.
In course of discussion with the weavers it has been found out that the weavers has to undergo certain problems. Unlike other yarns like cotton, which is comparatively cheaper, the price of endi cocoons and yarn is expensive from the weavers' point of view. For a poor weaver, it is a heavy investment. She cannot afford to keep the money locked in a pair of woven endi wrapper. She has to dispose the item, often selling it at a low price. The margins of profit after selling the woven products in the area depend on the quality of the product, design, and the bargaining power of the seller. In most cases, as reported by weavers, the profit margin for the sale of a product is not commensurate with the labour. Majority of the weavers are not much aware about modern machines and tools, designs and trends in the market. They are still weaving the same kind of fabrics that have been in vogue since the last few decades. Hence, we find that the endi wrapper which has been in use since early times is the most common woven products in the study area. The quality of product is also a matter of concern. Since the quality of weaving varies from weavers to weavers, the price also varies. The weavers use a part of their dwelling, generally their verandah or their courtyard for activities related to weaving. Often they lack proper work-shed for weaving, which would help them to work even during foul weather. As a result their working times depend on the vagaries of weather. Adulteration in silk which is taking place is also not uncommon in the area. Endi cocoons and yarns are available in the market but since the business is maintained by the private sector, the cost is substantially higher than the government rate. Weavers in the area generally buy raw materials from the private sector. The middlemen who skim the cream from the profit is also a problem in the study area. Although the role of the middlemen has been a subject of concern for a long time,
their role has not diminished. In fact, taking advantage of the weavers' illiteracy and poverty, they are making good profit by procuring yarns and finished products at a low price and selling cocoons and yarns at a high price. The government has through SHGs and cooperative societies supplied new machines like the Jacquard and Dobby looms, and the electric spinning machine. But the use is very limited in the village. A majority of the weavers are not aware of its existence. One of the major problems faced by weavers is the lack of money to invest in weaving. Many weavers who have received looms from government projects have found out that the looms are of inferior quality and are not operational. Similarly, weavers who have received the electric spinning machines find that the machines consume high electricity. Thus these all indicates that schemes and programme meant for welfare of weavers have not always been able to meet its objectives. But amidst all these problems there are some positive signs also. The government in its list of activities is giving a high priority to the handloom and weaving sector. Various departments like the Sericulture Department, the Handloom and Textile department and the Central Silk Board are implementing different schemes and programme for development of handloom and textile in the state. In the study area we find that many schemes are in operation. The case studies also indicate that weavers from the area have been able to get benefits from government by ways of receiving looms and accessories, yarns, training in design, and weaving. Many weavers have been able to form SHGs and weaving cooperatives and through these they have been able to organize as a group and sell their products. They have also become aware of the changing trend in the market. Some weavers have also started to learn about the market demands and have been weaving quality and stylish products. Another important trend is the
growth of NGOs in the area. These organizations have been able to understand the growing potentialities of the weaving industry and its impact on rural households. They have tried to bring weavers under a common platform, and provide them with cocoons, work-sheds, looms, accessories, trainings, and social security in the form of insurance. To make weaving commercially viable and more profitable, weavers need to be motivated through sustained efforts by government and non government organizations working in this area. While on one hand, we see the plight of weavers leading a hand to mouth existence, we also find a few weavers in the area who have been earning handsomely from spinning and weaving. Non government organizations besides weaving related activities can also extend their work in the field of socio-economic development of weavers of the area.