Chapter 1
Introduction

1.1 Growth of handloom industry in India

The way of life of a group or conglomeration of people is characterized at the first instance by what and how they wear. The geographical condition, ethnicity and historical connections, singly or in combination, determine the economic, social and cultural activities—in a word the life style of the people inhabiting the area, including their eating habits, daily round of activities, festivals and particularly the way they dress ordinarily and on special occasions as also how they weave them. Thus it is handloom, which gives an insight into the way of life of people. Handloom is a time honoured traditional industry. History reflects how the industry has withstood several adversities during its development stage. Even today the industry is having a similar fate. Historians consider India to be the birth-place of cotton which is recorded to have originated during the Vedic period.  On the export front the industry flourished "that the coloured cloth and rich apparels brought to Tyres and Babylon from distant countries were partly from Indian manufacturers." This industry is prevalent all over India but it is observed that mostly women are engaged in this activity. The handloom industry is not confined to a particular section of society. All who desires either as full time activity or as a hobby practises it. The industry was mainly confined to the cottage and cloth manufacture was a family occupation. Spinning, weaving and other processes
were done only by hand. Even the best fabrics were made with the help of rudimentary tools by people in their own home.

Historical account shows that even before 5000 BC Indian muslin was the choice of Egyptians for dressing their mummies. Renowned scholars like Herodatus, Megasthenes and Pliny have spoken highly about Indian cloths. Herodatus remarked that Indian woven cloth was made up of a type of wool which did not come from goats or sheep, but was grown like plants; Megasthenes wrote that Indian textiles were worked in gold and were decked with costly jewels; Dr. Robertson had said that gold and silver was brought in loads to India from other countries as required by her textile industries. Similarly famous persons like Bernier, Tarvenier, Voltaire and Daniel Defoe have spoken about the beauty, sensitivity and uses of Indian handlooms.

After the British rule started in India, the handloom industry suffered a major set back. The British Government in conscious effort to pave the way for Britain manufactured products in markets of India, a deliberate policy was adopted to throttle the Indian handloom industry. With the introduction of spinning jenny in England, hand spinning which provided occupation to a large number of people was completely replaced by the increased use of mill yarn. Even after the inception of textile mills and factories in England, Indian fabrics were so cheap that the British trade found threatened with extinction. The British Government knowing that its textile was in jeopardy decreed drastic reduction in the import of Indian cloths and levied more duty on it. In
spite of all such constraints Indian textile products were found to be cheaper. Thereupon more rigorous measures were adopted to discourage the use of Indian cloths. British and their Indian employees were discouraged to use cloths manufactured in India. The above accounts testify to the international reputation of Indian handloom fabrics in older times. The handloom industry has been playing a dominant role in economy development of rural sectors in some of the states in North-east. Out of 380 lakhs units of handlooms in the country, approximately 182.00 lakhs (household + non-household units) are in the five states of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Nagaland and Tripura as per handloom census of 2004-2005. Assam accounts 38% looms, 35% of manpower and 11% of production all over the country.  

The history of handloom industry in Assam can be traced back to 3rd century B.C. In Kautilya’s Arthashastra, he mentioned that several regions of ancient Kamrupa had produced three varieties of silk fabrics viz: Dakula, Patrona and Khauma. Historians have identified Dakula as Muga (scientific name- *Antherea assama*), Patrona as Pat or Patta (mulberry) and Khauma as Eri (scientific name- *Philosamia ricini*). It is worthwhile recalling that Kautilya, also known as Vishnugupta, was the prime minister of Chandragupta Maurya who reigned India during 321 and 296 B.C. So it follows that Kautilya lived and wrote his work somewhere between 321 and 300 B.C. From the date of Arthashastra it also follows that sericulture and fabric weaving were prevalent in India since the 4th century B.C, about 100 years before the
Empress Si Ling Si introduced it in China in 2640 B.C. In Assam Handloom Industry is concentrated in certain areas like Sualkuchi, Nalbari, Palasbari, Cachar and Nowgaon.

Some chronicles of the Ahom period have also made references to silk products woven by a Tanti caste in the seventeenth century. Ample references are however available in English literature of nineteenth century. In the book "An Account Of Assam", the author Francis Hamilton, had mentioned that Assam's annual export of Muga Yarn and fabrics to Bengal during 1808–1814 were 65 maunds (24-26 quintals) respectively. William Robinson wrote in 1941 that while plantation of Mulberry was done only by some families for their own use; for the members of the royal families and the grandeur, every cultivator had a patch of land in his homestead, full of *Ricinus communis* for rearing Eri – the fabric of the common. Muga culture was also widespread and its dress was considered rich and valuable. Eri and Muga fabrics were also popular among the Bhutanese and the Tibetans. Weaving In Assam though practised through centuries has remained a subsidiary avocation of a section of the farmers mainly due to technological stagnation at the stages of reeling, spinning and weaving. Muga and Eri cultures are widely practised in the state while mulberry is negligible and Tasar is a recent introduction.

Certain kinds of silks had existed in the climatic conditions of some countries since time immemorial. Historical evidence however, shows that silk was discovered first in China and its authentic reference is said to be found in the chronicles of Chou-King (2200 B.C) where silk figured prominently in
public ceremonies as a symbol of homage to the Emperors. The emergence of the silk industry paved the way for weaving and thus the handloom industry. The weaving of silk items is said to have originated in the Chinese province of Chan Jung and the secret was jealously guarded for about 300 years. It is said to have been introduced by the Chinese Empress Si Ling Si around 2640 B.C. It is said that mulberry cultivation in China was taught by Emperor Chin Nong, one of the successors of Emperor Of Fo-Hi around 2800 B.C. and the weaving of silk products was developed in the Chang-Tong province. After establishments of commercial relations between China and other countries and along with the export of silk and silk goods, the industry spread to Persia and later on to other countries through the silk routes.

Mulberry culture, according to western historians is said to have spread to India from China via Tibet by about 140 B.C. The other view is that mulberry, silk culture and weaving originated in the lower slopes of the Himalayas and as such might have originated either in China or India or in both the countries at the same time. As a matter of fact Indian handloom industry is said to be as old as Indian civilization itself and wild silks are said to be indigenous to India. Some Indian authors maintain that some Vedic terms like Suklambar, Pitambar or Pitabasa denoted respectively white silk, yellow silk and yellowish brown silk. The production of silk and simultaneously weaving of silk fabrics was done by the people of India not only as a source of earning; the country had also taken interest in its
production. An official known as 'Sutradhyaksa' or Director of Textiles was appointed by emperors of the Maurya dynasty to look after the production and trade in silk and other threads as well as fabrics.\textsuperscript{19} Even women of different social strata were appointed for wages and different workshops were established for them separately. It is a well-known fact that the handloom industry in India had passed through several phases of prosperity and depression. Although historical data are not available export of handloom products from India to England maybe cited as an example. "Almost all the cotton stuff sold in London and in the chief towns came more or less from India...........We saw our persons of quality dressed in Indian apparels which but a few years before, the chamber maids would have thought too ordinary for them; the chintzes were advanced from lying on their floors to their backs, from the foot cloth to the petticoat and even the Queen herself at the time was pleased to appear in China or Japan – means in China silk and calicoes. Nor was this all, but it crept into our houses, our closets and bed chambers, curtains, cushions, chairs and at last beds themselves were nothing but calicoes or Indian stuff."\textsuperscript{20} This import of Indian calicoes to England continued during the seventeenth century till an act was passed in 1700 forbidding absolutely the import of printed fabrics from India, Persia and China.\textsuperscript{21} The calicoes, linen and other stuff, which India had exported, might have also included hand-woven silk fabrics although not clearly mentioned by the historians. According to the great Indian economic historian Ramesh Dutta "the Indian handloom industry started sliding when silk manufacture declined
from the days of East India Company and their export was insignificant. In Assam silk still continues to be the national dress of women and the handloom industry is mostly confined to household one, each family weaving fabrics for its own use, and only a few cater to the local market as commercial purpose. Finer silks produced by the mulberry feeding worms are obtained in Bengal districts and some improvements has been affected by the adoption of scientific methods of testing the 'seed' and rearing the worms. In Punjab, however the endeavor to reintroduce the cultivation of silkworm has ended in failure. In Kashmir, the industry is indigenous and the state is endeavoring to develop it by importation of 'sound seed' from Europe. The silk weavers of India possess the very highest skill in their craft and it is probable that under competent and energetic direction with the assistance of capital, the handloom industry could be revived and extended. 22 The foregoing is a description of the conditions of impact of Indian silk on handloom industry during the late nineteenth century.

It is always seen that it is silk mostly which dominates the handloom industry in India, particularly Assam, when compared to cotton. No doubt cotton clothes are also woven but mainly as household items. China is the largest producer of silk in the world with an annual output of 60,000 metric tons. 23 It produces mulberry and Tassar silk and exports about 80% of its produce. The USA is the largest importer of Chinese silk made up while India remains its largest importer of raw silk. Other silk producing countries pale into insignificance when compared to China. This becomes evident from a
cursory glance at the table 1.01 below indicating the world silk output in metric tons since 1997. Countries producing less than a thousand tons like Turkey, Vietnam, Korea are included in "others".

Table 1.01 Global Silk Production

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>China</th>
<th>India</th>
<th>Brazil</th>
<th>Japan</th>
<th>Uzbek</th>
<th>Thailand</th>
<th>Others</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>55000</td>
<td>14048</td>
<td>2120</td>
<td>1920</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>1039</td>
<td>3899</td>
<td>80016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>49430</td>
<td>14000</td>
<td>1821</td>
<td>1108</td>
<td>1500</td>
<td>900</td>
<td>3016</td>
<td>71775</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>55990</td>
<td>13944</td>
<td>1554</td>
<td>649</td>
<td>923</td>
<td>1100</td>
<td>2252</td>
<td>76312</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>60000</td>
<td>15214</td>
<td>1389</td>
<td>557</td>
<td>1100</td>
<td>955</td>
<td>2115</td>
<td>81330</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>58000</td>
<td>15857</td>
<td>1484</td>
<td>431</td>
<td>1260</td>
<td>1510</td>
<td>3734</td>
<td>82276</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


India is the second largest producer of silk with an annual consumption of 16,000 MT, the demand–supply gap is bridged by the import of cheaper varieties from China. We consume about eighty percent of our total produce and export only about a fifth. The export earnings were expected to touch a mere USD 511.73 million on 2003-04. The Indian silk is not really export oriented. India also produces two known commercial varieties of silk named Eri and Muga. Muga is the most expensive silk in the world while Eri is the cheapest. These are not available in China or anywhere else and hence have no real competitor.
Muga is an exclusive product of North East. Though statistics show that Central Indian States also produce Eri, but from the result of recent attempts of Eri production there is enough testimony of the fact that it is also an exclusive product of North East. Assam particularly has a virtual monopoly in Muga and also the dominant share in Eri. These are the inherent strength of the Handloom industry in Assam. Garments are manufactured by weaving various textile fibres – which includes cotton, Eri, Muga, Wool, Nylon, Polyester etc. Cloths manufactured through manual process in looms are known as handloom cloths. There are again various types of looms - Loin Looms that is tied around the waist of the weaver; country loom; fly shuttle loom; semi-automatic loom and automatic loom. Apart from automatic or power loom all other looms are handled manually. In North East loin-looms are mostly used by tribes of hills. The weavers of the plains who are economically backward use country loom and the upper middle class weavers use fly shuttle and very few semi automatic looms. Most of the handloom clothes are not completely finished goods. These cloths are prepared in such a way that they can be sold even without giving the final touch of completion. Cotton handloom cloths are needed to be finished to the maximum extent or these cloths do not catch the fancy of customers unlike clothes woven by silk threads.

The name of Assam for its handloom weaving industry is also found in Ramayana where it has mentions Assam as the land of “Cocoon Rearers”. It is clear from the reference made to Kiskindhyankanda or as the places that one comes across while traveling towards East – Magadha (South Bihara),
Anga (Bhagalpur), Pundra (North Bengal) and the country of cocoon rearers, that is Pragjyotishpur (Assam). In the Gurucharita of Ramcharan Thakur we find, during the reign of King Naranarayan, under royal auspices, the great spiritual and religious leader Shri Shankerdeva wove 'Brindabaniya Bastra' (a special variety of cloth) of 120 cubits in length and 60 cubits width and embroidered on that the eventful life history of Lord Shri Krishna from Lord's birth till the episode of killing of Kansa by Him.

1.2 The problem under investigation

In view of the important role, played by handloom industry on the people of Assam especially Sualkuchi, it has been worthwhile to carry out an investigation with special emphasis on the marketing perspective of the industry. Hence we have undertaken the problem "Marketing Problems of Handloom Products: A Micro Level Study on Sualkuchi Village, the Prominent Silk Weaving Centre of Assam," for our research investigation. Our investigation besides being able to throw light on general characteristics of the industry, also presents a historical account, factors leading to its decline, its strength for survival and its relevance to economy of the State. The study also gives attention to problems of marketing, finance and supply of raw materials. The State policies towards the handloom industry have been examined and likely consequences of different policies are presented. This single study is not sufficient to justify all aspects of the industry. Hence, further research in other dimensions are required.
1.3 For the research work, the following objectives were outlined:

1. The prime objective of the study is to know the problems faced by the weavers and the co-operative societies in respect of marketing of handloom product produced at Sualkuchi.

2. To study the assistance received by weavers of Sualkuchi from co-operative societies in marketing of their product.

3. To look into the role being played by financial institutions in extending finance for marketing of handloom products.

4. To highlight how government assistance have helped in promotion and marketing of handloom products.

5. To suggest measures for the development of weaving activities in Sualkuchi.

1.4 Research questions to be investigated

To achieve the above objectives the following research questions were formulated to analyze during the course of the study:

1. Whether the present production and sales & distribution process of handloom products at Sualkuchi have given market acceptance?

2. Whether the weavers' co-operative societies are playing the desired role in creating marketing opportunities for Sualkuchi handloom products?

3. Whether the promotional and marketing activities organized by state government and central government are producing desired sustainable results?
4. What is the role being played by financial institutions at Sualkuchi and Guwahati in providing financial assistance to the weavers' societies and weavers?

5. What appropriate suggestions and measures can be outlined for weaving for stakeholders (weavers' co-operative societies, weavers, retailers, government NGO, financial institutions and public) of Sualkuchi?

1.5 Rationale of the study

The Government of India has been formulating many policies and schemes for the handloom industry which plays a vital role in Indian economy. Handloom ranks next only to agriculture in terms of economic impact on rural employment and income, providing livelihood to millions of people in weaving and associated activities. The Government of Assam has also taken up many projects for weavers in the State. The handloom weavers constitute a major portion of the population of Assam. The weavers are combination of both male and female gender. However, no exhaustive analytical study has been made during the study on income/expenditure of handloom weavers. Our study will enable us to have an insight into the problems faced while marketing of handloom products by this group of citizens who constitute a significant part of our State's population. It is generally felt that weavers are socially and financially backward. This research work will throw some light on the financial condition of both organized and unorganised sector of weavers at Sualkuchi and help to formulate appropriate policies for their upliftment by the concerned authorities.
1.6 Methodology of the study

The study is conducted to examine the problems of marketing of handloom products at Sualkuchi. The study is mainly divided into three stages:

1. Objectives of the study.
2. Collection of information.
3. Analysis of findings.

Data collection method

A. Source of data: The data for the study have been collected from primary source that is through questionnaire and personal interviews from handloom weaving units. Secondary data were used from printed books, journals and circulars of government.

B. Research Instrument: The questionnaire method of survey was undertaken due to its main advantage of sensibility, speed and cost. The questions were by and large structured and designed as far as the services for which the project was being undertaken.

The questionnaire was designed only after the attributes were identified by personal survey. Considerable amount of work have been done up to the phase of constructing the questions short, simple and precise.

Primary data: For the collection of primary data 35 co-operative societies of Sualkuchi were selected. These co-operative societies again have certain units comprising of weaving and related activities. The total numbers of staff were 105- three from each co-operative society. Apart from this, out of the total weavers, again 600 weavers under co-operative fold and 600 weavers
under unorganised/private were selected as respondents and were provided with questionnaires. All the 107 retail stores of handloom products were also visited to collect primary data. Due to time constraints and vastness of the topic it was not possible to cover all the co-operative societies within a specified time. Hence sampling methods were used to select the co-operative societies as well as their units, so that samples obtained were truly representative and the result obtained from them were accurate to a great extent.

Discussions were also held with managers, assistant manager, administrative officer, staffs, bank officials and other interested parties.

Secondary data: Secondary data were collected from:

A. Published annual reports from co-operative societies and Apex body.

B. Journals and leaflets published financial institutions.

C. Government report/circulars, journals and periodicals.

The sampling process in this study consists of following steps:

Step I. Defining the population. The primary steps was to define in terms of:

(A) Elements: Handloom Weavers.

(B) Sampling Unit: Households consisting of handloom weavers was taken as the first stage of unit; then handloom cloth/product sellers/retailers as second stage unit and the weavers' co-operative societies as the third or final stage.

(C) Extent: Sualkuchi village.
Step II. Identifying the sample: The next step was to identify the sampling frame. In this study the sampling frames were:

(A) Handloom weavers whose primary and only source of income is weaving and selling of handloom products.

(B) Co-operative units dealing with handloom products.

Step III. Selecting the appropriate sample design:

To collect primary data the following sampling methods were used:

Stratified Random Sampling: Out of the total households consisting weavers, the weavers were divided into mutually exclusive groups that is only those weavers were selected as respondents who are purely commercial weavers—either on their own or through aid of middle-men or through assistance of co-operative societies. The co-operative societies were selected through convenience sampling method that is the most accessible population members were selected. Judgement sampling procedure was applied to select the government organizations that is those population members who are good prospects for accurate information.

1.7 Limitations of the research study

The present study has the following limitations:

1) During the field survey the weavers and sometimes secretary/member of co-operative societies were reluctant to provide certain necessary information required for the study. Repeated attempts were made with the questions restructured and informal discussions were done to get
the data. However, there might be some aspects still overlooked on being an individual researcher.

2) The weavers or members of co-operative societies of Sualkuchi are quite hospitable and most of the time they have obliged to part with information related to annual income, amount of stock spill-over, profit and loss, amount of loan taken, assts and liabilities and investments made. It is to be mentioned here that most of the individual weavers do not maintain proper books of accounts. Out of the 35 sample societies visited at Sualkuchi only 29 of them have maintained books of accounts in a proper manner.

3) The field survey has also allowed the researcher to know that the Directorate of Handloom and Textiles, Assam; ARTFED; Directorate of Sericulture, Assam, do not have disciplined records of annual accounts related to aids, rebate subsidy and funds provided to handloom sector/weavers district wise. This proved to be a constraint while studying the financial assistance received by the handloom sector at Sualkuchi.

1.8 Handloom industry during the Ahom rule

During the reign of Ahom rulers the handloom weaving industry made more progress because of their personal care and interest in silk industry. Sibsagar being the capital of Ahom kings became the hub of different varieties of silk. It is since then that the fabrics prepared from Muga, Eri, Pat became the folk dress of Assam. The cultural life in Assam during the reign of Ahoms was also simultaneously developed along with other aspects. Various cottage
industries were set up and developed and for these purpose persons who were experts in respective fields were brought over to settle within the Ahom territory. Swargadeo Rudra Singha who reigned the Ahom kingdom from 1696–1714, brought eight Muslim families and made them settle within his kingdom. These families were well conversed in their respective professions. The Ahom king also maintained department of weaving and skilled weavers to supply the royal wardrobe with varieties of clothes. In return these weavers got grants of rent-free land and other favours. The interest and the desire to make the handloom weaving industry prosperous can be observed by the advancement made in this field during the reign of Ahoms. Swargadeo Rudra Singha also adopted various measures to flourish the trade of art and culture. He encouraged envoys and messengers to visit Kingdom of different rulers of India to know, learn and spread the best part of their art, culture, and tradition within his kingdom. He also established an extensive trade with Tibet. Even varieties of clothes for presentation were kept in the royal store for foreign courts and dignitaries. So it can be assumed how far the Ahoms were involved to make the indigenous handloom products popular all over the world. During the reign of Swargadeo Pratap Singha (1603-1641), his minister Momai Tamuli Barbarua made it mandatory that every adult male member of the society will have to make a bamboo basket and every female member will have to spin certain quantity of yarn. The village headman would go around next day how far the works have been carried out. Those who failed had to go through corporal punishment. There was also a rule that
every Assamese household needed to deposit one fourth of a seer of silk to the royal treasury. Due to the meticulous effort of the Ahom rulers the handloom industry and other handicrafts developed to a great extent. Existence of spinners, weavers are found since then. The skill and beauty in weaving of embroidered silk clothes are reflected even in the words of Mohammedan historians. Even the export of these multifarious handloom fabrics can be traced as far as first and second centuries through the writings of Ptolemy. Historically the Moghuls were great patron of silk clothes. King Jehangirs wife Noor Jahan was one of the greatest patrons. Legend has it that Assam silk were so fine that an entire Chador Mekhela, the traditional dress of Assamese women would easily pass through a finger ring.

It has come to be known that women folk used to weave a special type of cloth known as 'Kavach Kapor' (a talisman cloth). A legend holds that soldiers who use these clothes while on a battle would not lose the war. This special cloth had to be woven overnight, so that the warriors could wear it next morning before leaving for the battlefield. History relates that the Ahom General Phrasengmung Borgohain, husband of Mula Gabharu, died in the battle field as he went without wearing the Kavach Kapor. It seemed magic was woven in the handiworks of the women folk i.e. mothers, wives, sisters of the warriors. The Ahom rulers also took keen interest to bring about awareness of education amongst women. It is said that Queen Sarbeswari Devi, consort of King Shiva Singha (1739-1744 A.D) admitted girls within
palace enclosures and taught them to spin. To further aggravate the designs and patterns, the Queen collected designs and brocade from different parts of India to be reproduced by Assamese weavers. Only a great connoisseur of art and culture can go to this extent at that age. This also manifests her love for her kingdom and her people to promote the art and culture of their region. During Ahom regime it was also observed that skillful persons were granted with appropriate measures so as to preserve their interest in the art of producing handloom products. The Ahom kings housed skillful weavers to supply clothes to the royal wardrobe. This fact helps to find out that during the reign of Swargadeo Purandhar Singha a person named Modhurom Tanti who belonged to the class of weavers, excelled in all spheres of weaving. Hence for his superior quality of service to the royal family he was granted rent-free land by the king. The Ahom rulers also took necessary steps to settle professional community and placed them under different ‘castes’ and ‘Khels’ in the province especially during the reign of King Pratap Singha. Accordingly in the district of Kamrup, weavers from Southern and other parts were organized and settled at Sualkuchi.

This maybe a principle factor which maybe attributed to the present status being occupied by Sualkuchi. A large number of professional weavers are concentrated in Sualkuchi and their work of art on handloom products can be compared with only a few weaving centers of India. Dr H.K. Barua has expressed that hand woven dress by Assamese men and women was initiated during the Ahom period itself. The use of three-piece cloth that is
Riha, Chadar and Mekhela is in practice only by Assamese women in India. The efforts of Ahom mostly contributed to the development of designs like "Kin-Khab", "Mijankari" and silk and Muga industry in Assam.

1.9 Weavers and art of weaving in Assam

Assam has the largest concentration of weavers in India. Handloom weaving is inexorably linked with the culture and tradition of Assam. The vast ranges of handloom designs reflect the sartorial taste of the multifaceted composite culture of Assam. Skill in weaving was the primary qualification of a young girl of her eligibility for marriage. More than 17.16 lakhs of weavers are engaged in 14.09 lakhs of looms and producing 167.00 million meters of clothes annually against the clothing need of nearly 370 million meters in the state of Assam. There is hardly any village in Assam where one will not hear the rhythmic sound of the looms and shuttles. Sualkuchi in Kamrup district has been identified as the most weaver concentrated area within the state and is called the "Manchester of East". Designed dress materials produced by weavers of Sualkuchi are highly acclaimed for its uniqueness and quality standards. Mahatma Gandhi during his visit to Assam in 1921 was so impressed with the talent of Sualkuchi wavers that he commented; "She weaves fairy tales in cloth". When Gandhiji came to Sualkuchi in 1946, he paid highest compliment to Assamese women when he said "When I came to Assam in 1921 I said that Assamese women were really born weavers. Today I have seen at Sualkuchi that Assamese women are really ideal for the rest in
Gandhiji was highly amazed when he saw two expert weavers at Sualkuchi had depicted him in loom and one goldsmith engraved his silhouette in the place itself. He also highly appreciated the art and culture of weaving when he visited the exhibition of Eri and Khadi clothes at Sualkuchi. In that exhibition the founder of Khadi Pratishth, Satish Ch. Dasgupta also remarked, "It is a matter of pride to the weavers of Sualkuchi maintaining their traditional skill in weaving by overcoming the competition against manufactured clothes".

There are also evidences of paying glowing tributes to the Assamese women by many distinguished writers as well. Dr S. K. Bhuyan, in 'History Of Assam' has referred about the saying of great Bengali preacher Pundit Shivanath Shastri that the "universal popularity of weaving in Assam and the consequent partial solution of the problem of existence led to remark during his visit to Assam that he found a justification for the alleged derivation of the word wife from weaver." In the present decade the tradition and culture of weaving represent the past glory. The skill in the art of spinning and weaving has always been held as one of the highest attainments of Assamese women. Even at the beginning of marital relations it was asked if the girl knew the art of weaving and spinning. This almost became a tradition for many decades. A unique feature of Assamese society is the absence of any specific class reserved for weaving. Every Assamese woman whether she is a daughter of Brahmin or a Christian, a princess or a beggar is a weaver by birth. Thus it is clearly seen that weaving was not confined to any particular caste or creed.
The art of handloom weaving is pursued with zeal and enthusiasm by every Assamese woman. The industry has both cultural and economic impact on the people of Assam. Unlike other states womenfolk irrespective of the status, caste, creed, in both plains and hills district of Assam feel proud of using their home made fabrics. They produce various artistic designed fabrics according to their own pattern and choice. This tradition is still maintained in spite of stiff competition from the mill made fabrics. Handloom weaving is one of the main performances of the women generally utilizing the leisure hours. The weavers weave cloth for their domestic as well as commercial purpose. Handloom weaving is looked upon as folk art of Assam and hence every Assamese girl in spite of high or low birth she is expected to be aware of it.

Dr. N.C Das has very aptly remarked in his book "Handloom Industry In Assam" that the loom was as precious as life itself to Assamese girl. There is a folk song that the loom also wept along with the members of the family on the departure of the bride after marriage:

*Barghorot kandile Make bapeke
Moralot kandile Bhoni
Barir pisephale kande tatar sale
Aideuk Bia dibor suni...*

Which literally means -- on hearing the finalization of marriage of the damsel of the house, parents started weeping in the dwelling house and the younger sister wept in the marriage pandal, while the loom also partakes in the weeping behind the dwelling house. It still remains a tradition in Assamese society to offer a self woven "Bihuwan" as a token of love to her
beloved and as a mark of regards to her elders. The importance of development of this vital cottage industry for providing suitable assistance and facilities for fuller employment and additional self employment opportunities so as to enable the people to raise their earnings specially to the families living below the poverty line. It has been given prominent place in Economic Development Programme also. To evolve suitable policies and formulate specific programmes for development various data on the industry are urgently required. Regular collection of data was found to be insufficient and the data furnished by the field staff are only from a limited area covered by them.

With the passage of time mill made new clothes and designs have taken up a lot of market share, yet love for handmade clothes is still found amongst the Assamese women. The hand woven clothes may be of cotton threads; or creamy white (Eri silk); or golden yellow (Muga) but the clothes reflect the aesthetic and majestic moods as well as ethos of the people of Assam. Even a simple saree or a Mekhela Chadar is simply a gesture that is enough to express the luxury and quality of the product. The art of fine weaving and the complex process of loom embroidery have been practiced by the people of Assam from time immemorial. The craft is mostly hereditary and the qualities required of a true artisan are apprenticeship, devotion to duty and co-operation. In Assam hand-woven clothes mostly comprises of silk products of Muga, Eri or Pat, which are also known as Assam silk. The Assam hand-woven silk products still retains a standard of its own and it excels all other textiles in its regal excellence as a fabric. It was once, worn only by kings and emperors, queens and consorts. Apart from beauty, it possesses some extra-
ordinary qualities including supreme comfort for the wearer. Warmth without weight, high retention of pleat and strength combined with delicate appearance. Insulating characteristics, which keep the wearer warm in winter and cool in summer, are its special properties. In fact handloom has become a part of the cultural heritage of the Assamese people and a matter of pride and glory.

After Kautilya, historians claim that it was in Greek writings that mention was made about Assam’s sericulture and hand-woven materials especially in Periplus, which was the first publication of first century B.C.\textsuperscript{44} The first data to be published by the government on sericulture and handloom was published in 'Travervier' in 1662 as mentioned by sericultural scientist Dr. Satyandranath Choudhury.\textsuperscript{45} Also British authors like Francis Hamilton, Captain Pemberton, and William Robinson also discussed Assam’s handmade fabrics. According to Francis Hamilton in the year 1808–1809 about twenty-five ton of Muga yarns and twenty-eight ton of hand-woven clothes were exported to Bengal.\textsuperscript{46} In the writings of Captain Pemberton it has come to light that in the beginning of nineteenth century there was huge production of Muga yarns and handloom fabrics. William Robinson has also highlighted in his article of 1840 most of the people from common man to high class wore garments made of handloom.\textsuperscript{47}
1.10 Tribal weavers of Assam

Assam's handloom cannot be exclusively of Assamese people only, as various tribes inhabit it. Each tribe has its own entity and special features. Every tribal community has its own traditional features in weaving and designing the clothes. Some of the tribal women produce most rare and valuable decorated fabrics and preserve for decoration purposes. Some women take it not only for personal necessity but also take it as their hobby. The Manipuri community especially in Cachar and Nowgaon district are skilled weavers and produce special type of fabrics such as Laichangphi generally used as wrapper and bed cover. Besides domestic consumption their products have a commercial significance. So far as commercial weavers are concerned the weavers of Sualkuchi occupies the first place. According to historian Kanaklal Barua, he has mentioned in his book 'Studies In The Early History Of Assam' that it is difficult to ascertain correctly the cultural items of the Bodo tribe who settled in the plains of Assam valley and Northern Bengal and who latter came into contact first with the Mediterranean, then with the Alpines and lastly with the Vedic Aryan Colonist in North-Eastern India.48 It seems that these tribes settled as agriculturist who knew the art of irrigation as well as that of weaving garments not only from grasses and fibres but also from cotton which they grew and from silk both wild and domesticated. In fact, it is not at all improbable that the art of handloom was introduced in the Northeastern India, many centuries before the advent of the Vedic Aryans, by the fore fathers of the Bodos. According to Sir George Watt the practice of rearing mulberry silkworm was introduced into Northwestern India, notably
Kashmere, possible from the division of Khotan and into Assam and Bengal across the Chinese frontier. It is for this reason that in ancient Indo-Aryan literature Pat silk is mentioned as Cina-patta, Cinamsuka and Cina-bhumija. Duncan has rightly said “Nagas have been expert dyers and produced extremely brilliant colours. As to the skills and artistic designs of the Manipuris they may have been better in this respect than any other people of Eastern India.” Historian P. C Bhattacharya has said that Mongoloids and the Kirats exercised considerable influence on the habits and customs of the Aryans, particularly in the weaving of Pat silk clothes. Dr. N.C. Das has rightly pointed out that the tribal designs of the Nagas and the Mizos hand-woven fabrics are universally admitted to be truly adorable even today. Tribal like Apatanis, Mikirs, Lalungs, Kachari etc have their own textured textiles with simple geometrical floral designs and intricate patterns using some natural dyes in the yarn. The artistic minds of the tribes can be seen if one observes at the placement of right colours combination in designs.

Assam has the largest concentration of weavers in India. Handloom weaving is very closely linked with the culture and tradition of Assam. It has been providing gainful occupation to the largest chunk of rural population with minimum investment. For those residing in interior areas not easily accessible by roads and communication, weaving is mainly for personal consumption. Weaving activity especially in the non-commercial sector is spread throughout the State. But due to the locational advantages of supply points for raw materials commercial activity is concentrated in a few districts. The
persons engaged in weaving and allied activities turn out to be approximately 2,322,278 in number.\textsuperscript{53} Table 1.02 gives a breakup of the same.

\textbf{Table 1.02}

\textbf{Persons engaged in weaving and allied activities.}

\begin{center}
\begin{tabular}{|l|c|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
Name of state & Weavers & Preparatory & Hired & Rest & Total \\
\hline
Assam & 259878 & 544875 & 15206 & 502309 & 2322278 \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{center}

\textit{Source North eastern Industrial & Technical Consultancy Organisation (NEITCO)}

Table 1.03 in the following page displays the distribution of weavers in different districts of Assam.

\textbf{Table 1.03}

\textbf{The distribution of weavers in different districts in the state}

\begin{center}
\begin{tabular}{|l|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
District & Commercial & Semi-commercial & Non-Commercial & Allied \\
\hline
Gaolpara & 7366 & 4391 & 129901 & 141658 \\
Kamrup & 36738 & 30757 & 786880 & 854375 \\
Darrang & 4923 & 4431 & 236806 & 246160 \\
Nagaon & 9899 & 4849 & 187290 & 202038 \\
Dibrugarh & 4342 & 1105 & 73510 & 78957 \\
North Lakhimpur & 3717 & 8364 & 297709 & 309790 \\
Cachar & 16873 & 1411 & 69257 & 97535 \\
Karbi Anglong & 1097 & 164 & 3991 & 41104 \\
N.C, Hills & 453 & 151 & 29585 & 30189 \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{center}

\textit{Source -NEITCO}
Kamrup, Sibsagar and North lakhimpur accounts for 63 percent of the total number of weavers and looms in the state. These three districts also accounts per 62 percent of the total production of handloom cloth in Assam.\textsuperscript{54}

Commercial weaving activities although at a low key are concentrated in selected pockets of Kamrup (undivided), Cachár, Nagaon- and Goalpara districts. Table 1.04 shows the location where commercial weaving is predominantly found.

Table 1.04

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area of concentration of commercial weaving</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kamrup (undivided)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sualkuchi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nalbari</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hajo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rampur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palasbari</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barama</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: NEITCO

Weavers in the state can be divided into the following four ethnic groups:

- Assamese
- Bengali
- Manipuris
- Tribal.
Asamese weavers are mostly found in the Brahmaputra Valley and are concentrated in Sualkuchi, Palasbari, Rampur and Hojai. The women folk are skilled weavers of handloom products. In certain pockets of Sualkuchi and Lakhimpur Mulberry and Muga silk fabrics are mostly woven. Commercial weaving of cotton and staple yarn among Assamese were not very significant earlier but has picked up in recent times. Throw shuttle frame looms are preferred by these weavers. Many of them use the fly shuttle looms. Bengali weavers are generally men folk who take up this activity, they are found mostly in:

- Bilasipara and Golakgunj in Goalpara
- Hojai in Nagaon District.
- Hailakandi of Cachar District.

They generally do not weave with extra weft design. They are generally weaving with 40s and lower counts of cotton yarn. But have started weaving 60s and 80s count of Cotton yarn. The products are mostly lungis, gamochas, sarees, dhotis and mosquito nets. They prefer semi-automatic and fly shuttle pit looms. Manipuri weavers reside in and around Hojai in Nagaon District and in various places in Cachar District. They specialize in weaving Laichemphi a special fabric woven for commercial market using staple and cotton yarn and ginned cotton. They also weave bed covers, quilts, scarves etc. They prefer to use loin looms. Tribal weavers are found both in plains and hills of Assam. The different tribes and their locations are given in the following page:

29
TRIBES
Boro

Miri

Dimasa, Kachari, Kuki
and Zemi Naga

LOCATION (DISTRICT)
Goalpara and Kamrup

Sibsagar, Darrang and North

Lakhimpur.

North Cachar Hills District.

The Miri weavers are noted for their production of a special kind of Mekhela known as Mirizina. The Bodos specialize in the weaving of Dakhanas (a local wear for ladies). While the Dimasa Kacharis weave mostly Risa, Reganpaini and Reekacha made out of coarse cotton. The Kuki and the Zemi Nagas usually weave Khamtang, Puan, Saipikhup Puan, Puan Nongrrom, Pamong Pakpai (all tribal worn clothes). Apart from cotton weaving tribal in the Brahmaputra valley have picked up silk weaving in recent times. They produce substantial quantities of Eri fabric too. Commercial weaving among them is rare though off late it is picking up. They prefer to use loin looms. Some of them are also using fly shuttle looms now.

The organizational structure of the handloom industry could be divided into four segments. They are:

1. Independent Weavers
2. Master Weavers
3. Co-operative sector
4. Corporate Sector

An independent weaver performs all the functions relating to the cloth weaving alone, that is, from purchasing of raw yarn and chemical,
arrangement of finance, weaving of cloth to the marketing of the finished goods. He does not employ any outside labour. Most of the time, due to lack of finance he is forced to depend upon the master weaver for all practical purposes.

Master weaver is similar to independent weaver except for the fact that he employs labour for weaving. He advances raw materials and also cash, pays wages of the weavers on the condition that the weavers should supply him fabrics of a particular design. Historically, the growth of the master weavers or the middlemen (according to function) is the after-effect of the first world war.\textsuperscript{55} Weaving by the hired weavers can be done on the looms owned and installed by the master weaver at his place or on the looms owned by the weaver. Another class of master weavers is only middlemen. They do not engage in weaving but concentrates only on supplying of yarn, cash and marketing of cloth. Handloom being a house-hold industry can best develop in the co-operative sector. Apart from co-operatives there cannot be a more non-exploitative institutional mechanism of the weavers owned by themselves for their common collective good. Co-operativization of handloom has thus been the major plank of the co-operative policy for a long time so as to cover all stages of the process relevant to the weavers.\textsuperscript{56} The co-operative sector with its principles and policies was felt that it could remove the inherent weakness in the organizational structure of the industry. But still it is seen that amongst different types of co-operatives, weavers' co-operatives is perhaps one of the weakest type of co-operative in the country as a whole. The membership
coverage of handloom co-operatives is much less compared to the total persons involved in the industry.

Up to the Fourth Five Year Plan weavers were getting assistance from the co-operative sector only. Weavers outside the co-operative fold were not getting any benefit. It was felt that weavers outside co-operative fold should also receive appropriate assistance. That is why the Shivaraman Committee recommended the establishment of Handloom Development Corporations in different states. The main aim and objectives of the corporations are to promote, own, establish and assist the rehabilitation, development and growth of handloom industry outside the co-operative fold. Corporations also undertake other activities for the benefit of the weavers that include modernization of looms, planning of production, payment of remunerative wages and technical training for weavers.

1.11 Handloom industry as heritage of India

"Weavers weaving at fall of night

Why do you weave a garment so bright?

Like the plumes of a peacock –

Purple and green,

We weave the marriage veils of a queen."

- Sarojini Naidu in 'Indian Weavers'.

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Be it the image of Mahatma Gandhi busy at the Charkha spinning the ubiquitous "livery of freedom" or the age old description in the Atarva Veda wherein day and night are personified as two sisters weaving with the warp symbolizing darkness and the weft of daylight, our country's textile/handloom tradition is as ancient as the Indus valley civilization. It touches the lives of people in the mundane, commercial religious and intellectual vistas. Our textile heritage is a virtual barometer that measures the mettle of a nation that has produced an astonishing array of finely woven fantasies — all displaying an exceptional talent that was way ahead of times. The gossamer weaves and breathtakingly beautiful fabrics produced by Indian crafts persons, have caused poets to wax lyrical and artists and sculptors to immortalise the sheerness of the drapery. Birbal called the cotton flower the loveliest flower of all, as merchants prized the fine fabric made from it, thus spreading the fame of Emperor Akbar's empire worldwide. Poets of the Moghul durbar compared our muslins to 'baft hawa' (woven air) and 'Shabnabi' (morning dew). Roman emperors paid fabulous sums for the prized Indian cotton or 'mulmul khas' calling it "vent nebula" or "clouded winds", thereby etching its ephemeral, airy texture.59

The myriad fabrics produced have been recorded in the Rig Veda and the Ramayana. Both refer to the opulent dressing of the aristocracy on the one hand and the coarser, plain garments of the common people and ascetics. Legends maintain that the courtesan Amrapalli met Gautam Buddha weaving an ornately woven, diaphanous saree verifying the technical accomplishment and fineness of the ancient Indian weaver. The
Kancheepuram weavers, said to be the descendants of Sage Markanda — the Weaver of the Gods, who wove the earliest fabric from the lotus fibre — to date, produce veritable poems in silk and gold. Handlooms comprise the largest cottage industry of India, with millions of looms across the country engaged in producing cotton, silk and other natural fibres. In all the villages of our vast country, weavers are industrially creating the time-honoured magnificence of India’s own priceless legacy. The weaver’s loom as a metaphor conveys the ancient perception of the universe as a fabric, wherein life unfurls like a canvas splashed by the dazzling hues of our emotions. It is where life’s warp and weft come together to form a cloth; its shuttles move back and forth to click out the passage of time; its frames are draped with nebulous dreams still taking shape. Madras checks from Tamil Nadu, Bandhanis from Gujarat and Rajasthan, Ikats from Andhra Pradesh, ethereal cotton of Venkatgiri and Kerala with their sheer gold borders, eye-catching Chirala sarees from Andhra Pradesh, exquisite Maheshwaris from Indore, Balucharis from Bengal and Muga from Assam. The romantic South Indian heavy silk, the gorgeous Kancheepuram silks and cotton with their solid borders and weavers or the absolute elegance of the Benaras Jamdani sarees, which surpass all weaving ability in cotton and silks. The Kashmiri artisan is celebrated the world over for his incredibly light and warm pashmina and Shahtoosh shawls. India is the only country in the world that produces all four commercially known silks – Mulberry, Tussar, Eri and Muga. From the Runn Of Kutch to the Coromandel Coast, from Kashmir’s mountainous vistas to Kerala’s backwaters, from urban centers to rural outposts — the handloom
weavers, block printers, textile printers, dyers and embroiderers labour to maintain the tradition of Indian textile crafts. India was known to the world for its extensive use of cotton and silk goods, from about 1500 B.C to 1500 A.D. For about thirty centuries India held the world monopoly in the manufacturer of cotton goods. In the laws of Manu, the sacrificial threads of the Brahmins are mentioned as having been made of cotton. Herodotus of the fifth century of the Christian era speaks of the Indian cotton in the highest terms: "The Indians possess likewise a kind of plant which instead of fruit produces wool of a fine and better quality than that of sheep. Of this the Indians make clothes."

1.12 Decline of handloom industry:

Satya Narayan Dash in his book "Handloom Industry in India" has aptly remarked that during the British reign dissolution of higher ranks and middle classes in the society caused a sizeable part of the market for the artistic handloom fabrics to disappear leading to increasing reliance of weavers on outside market. The terms of trade between the East India Company and the weaver favoured the former. The government too always wanted to provide a hassle free market to British traders. The Indian handloom weavers were already under too much of turmoil and this was further intensified when the parallel private trade of Company's official was taken into account. Satya
Narayan Dash has given a full accounting that led to decline of Indian manufacturers as follows.\textsuperscript{65}

The company's official in Bengal and Madras were engaged in export trade beside company's investment. Thus trade practices adopted by East India Company were highly oppressive and worked to the disadvantage of weavers. Secondly trade and commerce under the company suffered because the company and its servants enjoyed duty free trade while the merchants of the land had to pay transit duty. These practices of unfair trade competition became so acute in Bengal that Mir Kasim, the then nawab of Bengal was forced to declare all trades free of duty. This finally caused the overthrow of Mir Kasim. Thirdly the fiscal policy was so framed that Indian Manufacturers had to face prohibitive duties in the British market and certain classes of textiles were totally prohibited from exportation so as to encourage British manufacturers. Finally when the stage for acceptance of British manufacturer was set import of cotton textiles was initiated. Mr. Whitmore stated before the select committee of Parliament in 1814 that the amount of manufactured cotton exported from England to India was 81,230 yards which rose to 4,350,000 yards in 1828. In value terms the export increased from a paltry 90,000 pounds to 1,900,000 pounds in 1828, not withstanding a great fall in price. When the monopoly trade of East India Company was abolished in the twenties of the 19\textsuperscript{th} Century and the foreign trade of India was opened to the merchants of England, the condition of the Indian manufacturers declined further.
Ramesh Dutta, one of the leading economic historians of Indian classical economy developed specific theory of decline of Indian Handloom Industries after referring to the decline of Indian manufacturers by expostulating travel account, parliamentary proceedings and report of the administrators. He has developed the theory of decline of handloom industry.66

The handloom industry was in flourishing condition before the advent of East India Company as a political force in the country. It was destroyed under its political incursion. The internal market for handloom too shrank because of the following reasons:

A. Frequent wars dislocated the normal life of the people.

B. The change of political equation within the country rendered some of the middle and higher-class people redundant leading to their destruction in many places without any corresponding gains in employment under the company.

C. Agricultural activities were reduced to the minimum because of the competition introduced into it and a series of experiments on land settlement principles and policies.

D. Under unstable land settlement and high exaction, cultivators lost zeal and resources to carry on agricultural developments.
E. Revenue collected was not spent in India for creation of income but was drained out to England.

F. Frequent famine and natural calamities had broken the backbone of the cultivators beyond repair.

G. The traditional market outlets such as village fairs, festivals, weekly markets, pilgrim centers, towns etc declined in importance.

H. The export trade fair for textile was crushed in 1769, when the company directed its servants to discourage manufacturing of silk fabric and employed the silk vendors in the company's factory and prohibited the weavers to work on their looms.

I. Various village institutions were undermined in the new political set up, which brought about the decay of the traditional life in India. These forces caused a decline in the handloom industry of the country and a fall in the demand for handloom textiles. Not only did the demand for textiles decline but supply constraints developed in the economy forcing an absolute decline in the demand for handloom products.

The national income of the country also suffered during the period mainly because of the unstable condition created by the political and economic turmoil of the nineteenth century. This precarious situation turned out to be directly proportional to the weakening of the economic conditions of
the Indian weavers as demand for handloom cloths fell low in demand. Handloom activities were reduced substantially in the absence of any fostering role of the political authority of the country. Only in the post-independence period the Indian government initiated promotional activities to rehabilitate the decaying of handloom industry. The decline of handloom is often associated with the increasing competition from the mill sector, as it competes with the handloom in the sphere of superior and fine fabrics. The inception of import of textiles in the pre-independence period subsequently leading to export trade gave the final blow to the Indian handloom industry. After independence the Indian government became aware of the problems faced by the weavers and gave special importance to the industry. The five year plans are emphasized with special agendas for the handloom sector. From time to time to look into the difficulties of weavers and the industry, different committees are appointed.

1.13 Review of literature

In India, handloom industry is the oldest industry with a glorious past. The industry has reached the twenty first century after withstanding several adversities. The industry has found its way to all regions of the country. It maybe recalled here that the Indian handloom industry is as old as the Vedic age. The arrival of British rule in India and their attitude towards India's handloom industry brought its doomsday. The establishment of the first textile mill in Bombay in 1851, the already decaying handloom industry started facing stiff competition from indigenous textile molls too.
In context of handloom industry and its development, few empirical research studies have been conducted in our country. They have unanimously emphasized how the handloom industry should be freed from the perverse system of exploitation and other age-old problems, take full advantage of modern weaving and production technology. Hence the study has been conducted mainly on:

1. Studies on handloom industry in general perception.
2. Studies on handloom industry in particular.

The report of different agencies of Government of India, Government of Assam and different policies of five year plans; Textile policy resolution from time to time, report of different comments on handloom industry; Annual report of Directorate of Handlooms and Textile, ARTFED, Directorate of Sericulture, National Co-operative Development Corporation, Indian Institute of Handloom Technology, Weavers' Service; survey reports on Indian handloom industry; report on handloom industry by Development Commissioner of Textile; Organisation of buyers and sellers meet etc have highlighted several issues concerning the Indian handloom industry.

Studies on the handloom industry and its marketing aspects are mainly in the form of committee reports, research studies, research papers, Annual Report of Directorate of Handloom and Textile, ARTFED, Directorate of Sericulture, research report of Weavers' Service Centre and Indian Institute of handloom Technology.
Following are some of the important studies worth referring:

Dr. N. C. Das, in his book 'Development of Handloom Industry' has analyzed in detail the historical background to the origin and development of handloom industry, handloom industry vis-à-vis state economy, organisation of handloom industry in co-operative and non co-operative sectors, production inputs and outputs, marketing, finance and modernization of handloom industry. Some concrete suggestions are also made by the author for further development of the industry. It has been rightly mentioned in this book that apart from being a source of livelihood, handloom weaving is woven into the very cultural heritage of Assamese society. Assam has a hoary past of handloom culture and in the process of its transformation, it had once risen to the zenith of artistic glory and found markets in far away European cities. However, in the modern era of emulative competition and high technological advances, the handloom sector of Assam has constantly been facing hurdles, sometimes menacingly insurmountable. Due to inadequacy of power-looms and other technological sophistication, the cost of production is rather high in the handloom sector of Assam in comparison to mill made equivalents and also produce of similar type of the handloom sectors of other parts of the country, which have taken full advantage of modern handloom production technology. It has been mentioned in the book that without adoption of sophisticated technology, large scale production is not feasible. Again, without large scale production, unit costs of production cannot be kept within reasonable bounds. In this way, the handloom sector in Assam has indeed been caught in a vicious cycle. In spite of its long tradition and with rich
cultural heritage and background, the handloom weaving as an industry could not however make much headway as an well organized sector of production expected of it. But it is a well noted fact that it has been continuing, glorifying the culture of the region and has become a subsidiary occupation contributing to the socio-economic growth of the state. Mention may be made of Sualkuchi in this context. Sualkuchi is associated with weaving since a long time and the economy of the village is primarily dependent on weaving. While referring to Sualkuchi, the census of India 1961 observed “though silk weaving is not uncommon in other parts of Assam, yet Sualkuchi claims a technique, quality and reputation of its own are unique in so far as Muga and mulberry silk fabrics are concerned. The census report further observed “Sualkuchi silk is as old as its people. Although the origin of silk weaving at Sualkuchi is still obscure, there is no doubt about its antiquity. During the olden days, the industry appears to have been patronized mainly by the ruling kings of Assam.”

Dr. P.C. Mahapatro in his book “Economics of Cotton Handloom Industry in India” has presented a historical account of the cotton handloom industry, factors leading to its decline, its strength for survival and its relevance to the economy of the State. It also attempts a scrutiny of general characteristics of the industry. In addition the organizational and capital structures of the industry, output, employment and income of the weaving households, have been examined. The problems of marketing, finance and supply of raw materials have also received attention in the study. After examining and evaluating the State policy towards handlooms, the study
gives broad indications of the likely consequences of different policy options. Although the study recognizes the role of the industry in the economy of the State, it does not make any case in defence of outdated mode of production. In fact, it underlines the urgent need for bringing about appropriate technological changeover and policy measures to usher in the same.

Dr. P. Baishya in "The Silk Industry of Assam" has thrown light on the sociological aspects and customs of the Sualkuchi area. In Assam, silk fabric is the regional dress and worn on special occasions. In spite of host of competing glossy fabrics and man made fibres, the silk fabric is the most preferred, to those who can afford it. Hence, as sericulture exists, handloom industry of Sualkuchi survives which is by far the best rural industry, to provide jobs and generate income in the rural areas. Sericulture also helps creating a humanized habitat of green cover in the face of the increasing ecological degradation around us. He has also highlighted the fact that most of the commercial looms weaving particularly Mulberry and Muga fabrics are concentrated since time immemorial in Sualkuchi.

A.C.K. Nambiar in his book 'Handloom Industry in India' has mentioned that given the right backing the industry can play a much more useful role in the economy and this fact has been well recognized since the era of planning in the country. Accordingly a number of policy measures were adopted to protect and develop the industry. However, the developmental impact of the measures were subject to considerable speculation. This book is based on a micro level study of handloom units at two points in time sheds much light on this aspect. After examining the structure and the question of growth of the industry the study comes to the startling conclusion that the handloom
industry is languishing. In the private sector the productive sectors are subjected to intense exploitation and unable to withstand the exploitation the handloom units are withering away. Though the co-operative sector succeeded in protecting the interest of the labour under their fold the unfair practices of the private sector badly affects the competitive strength of the co-operative sector. Unless remedial measures are taken to correct the malady the study notes that the handloom industry will become a relic of the past in the near future.

An industry which received the highest official patronage all along these years is on the decline in the area on account of the perverse system of exploitation and other age old social problems. The study highlights that the co-operative sector development has accomplished a good job as labour employed in the sector is assured of reasonable days of employment and wage. However, how far the sector can make sustained progress in the midst of unfair competition from the private sector is the moot point as already signs of financial weakness of the sector is very conspicuous.

The study of 'Handloom Industry in India' by Satya Narayan Dash depicts the nature and characteristics of handloom activities in the traditionally and classic form and the changes introduced by development and planning. The industry is studied disaggregatively by major types of products that is by detailing a broad product called handloom cloth. It has highlighted the sociological aspect of production by considering the association between caste and product. The economic analysis pursued is superior in the sense that the author has put questions he is addressing in the form of hypotheses and tested them with refined statistical tools. The study all talks of potential
Demand and potential supply and thus has presented a fairly detailed and illuminating account and analysis of the problems faced by the handloom industry. Apart from these certain innovative analytical tools such as working capital, net surplus, caste factor has also been employed to derive meaningful statistical and economic relation. An analysis of comparative cost advantages is also incorporated which has a special relevance to a theory of specialization and economics to scale which the study has purported to outline.

In the study ‘Crisis of Handloom Industry’ by M.L. Narasaiah and C.H. Krishna, have mentioned that in spirit of the prominent position enjoyed by the handloom in the state’s economy and the statutory protection extended by the government at the centre, the handloom industry is not free of handicaps. Though the contribution of the handloom to the Indian culture as well as to the national exchequer presents a rosy picture, an insight into the socio-economic and working conditions of the weavers – the human factor constituting the kernel of the problem- leaves much to be desired. The fruits of the industry are actually grabbed by the usurious money lenders and exortionate middlemen. A pilot study conducted in a few parts has been brought to focus. In fact, that a majority of weavers are not conscious of their profession and are averse to their current activity. However, they are continuing in the profession; not because they like it but because they have no other way out. The chief aim of the study is to make factual contribution in the existing stream of knowledge about the economic and social conditions of the weaving communities. This apart, the study hopes to provide academic insight into the actual problem faced by the handloom industry.
'Handloom Industry in Action' a study by U.C. Patnaik and A.K. Mishra, have presented the Indian handloom industry as a time-honoured cottage industry, which has a legacy of unrivalled craftsmanship, providing employment directly or indirectly to millions of people in India. The industry has vast inherent potentialities and contributes a significant amount to the foreign exchange earnings of the country. In the domain of artistic fabrics, handloom became the pride of India and has attracted the attention, not only of our masses and the gentry but also of many abroad. Despite a glorious historical and traditional background and multiple growth of the handloom industry, over the years in quantitative terms; generally it is felt that the lifestyle and economic standard of weavers have not improved in any significant way. The feeling assumes further importance since this has been directed towards weavers of institutionalized sector (co-operative sector) of handloom industry. In the above context, therefore, the book is a modest attempt at finding out, how much the weavers have gained being the members of handloom co-operative societies. It brings out the real impact of handloom co-operative on the social and economic development of weavers.

1.14 Contribution of the study

The problems of marketing of handloom products is rampant both in organized and unorganised sector. Although the causes of problems varies from organized sector to unorganised sector but certain causes are common to both the sectors. The study has shown that one of the most common causes is lack of supply of raw materials. Most of the people at all levels are lacking the basic knowledge between marketing and selling. The government
is spending huge amount of capital from the public exchequer to enable the
handloom industry to become a self-sustainable industry.
If every rupee has a cost then it is high time someone must come up to
measure how much money is lost each year due to subsidies offered but
outcome is that the industry is still dependent on the government. More and
more societies are registered each year. The motive behind it is to reap the
benefits provided by the government to registered co-operative societies.
Therefore an attempt has been made to study the problems of handloom
industry of Sualkuchi from marketing perspective in the true sense and
explore the possible remedies for the same.
It is hoped that this study will be of immense help to the weavers and co-
operative sector, both present and prospective, academicians and future
researchers.

1.15 Plan of Work

The thesis is divided into following chapters:

Chapter 1. Introduction

This chapter provides introduction of the research study, its objectives,
methodology, data collection method and sampling process. It also
brings forth the historical background on the role and beginning of
handloom practice in the civilization flourished in India and Assam,
survival of the handloom industry through different reigns of Ahom
Kingdom, Moghuls and the British; the brilliant contribution made by
each genre and the industry’s rise and downfall.
Chapter 2. *Sualkuchi Village-The Prominent Silk Weaving Centre of Assam*

This chapter devotes on the village of Sualkuchi where the research study has been carried out. It highlights the lifestyle of the general people, the weavers and their livelihood through weaving of handloom products. Apart from providing historical insight of the village, ancient trade relation developed through the river Brahmaputra, its handloom industry, income and employment generation by the industry and the problems faced by the weavers are also presented.

Chapter 3. *Weavers' Societies: Their Role in Marketing of Handloom products.*

The co-operative societies are the backbone of the handloom industry. These societies are aided by the Apex body. This chapter finds out how far the weavers are able to avail the assistance from these societies while marketing their products.

Chapter 4. *Support from Financial Institutions to Handloom Industry in Marketing Perspective*

This chapter analyses the assistance provided by the financial institutions to the handloom sector. How far the money is sincerely utilised in development of the sector? Is the financial support adequate? Are the weavers aware about the schemes provided?
Chapter 5. The Marketing Process and Problems

This chapter analyses how the marketing of handloom products are carried out at Sualkuchi; losses occurred due to faulty marketing techniques; problems faced by the weavers; prevailing competition in the market and what improvements are to be implemented to achieve successful marketing are studied.

Chapter 6. Government’s Assistance in Promotion of Handloom Industry and Marketing of Handloom Products

This chapter deals with the objective to analyze how government assistance have helped in promotion and marketing of handloom products. It also checks if the industry has gained maximum benefits through the government policies.

Chapter 7. Findings, Suggestions and Conclusion

This is the last chapter of the thesis that contains the findings of the study carried out. Various suggestions are also laid down to overcome the problems and lastly conclusion for the whole study is provided.
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