

Commercial Viability of Woven Products Made by the Tribal Women in Manipur

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ABSTRACT

The occupation of weaving is the main source of earning for women in both hill and valley in Manipur. The types of design, pattern, place of weaving and types of yarn used in weaving differed from Tribes to other communities. Most of the tribal living in remote areas are dependent on traditional resources, knowledge and skills in weaving. Female weavers are selected for sample because the people of Manipur still follow patriarchy. And men are involved in other activities for earning. This study was undertaken with the objective of analyzing the marketability of the woven products, in two districts of Manipur where the tribal reside in big numbers, namely Tamenglong District and Churachandpur District. Purposive sampling method was used for collecting data. Fifty weavers each from two districts were selected, one hundred samples in total. The results in the study revealed that the handloom products are mainly confined to the local markets due to fact that most of these are cultural-specific items suitable for local use only. The business is confined to home-based business. They do not have a proper workplace, they either work in the lawn or in the kitchen near the fireplace. The weavers sell their finished products in the local market, and they take orders from contacted customers. Manipur, a state where the employment rate is very low while the corruption that takes place there is ominous, one cannot solely depend on a government job for livelihood. The weavers should be given the opportunity to market their products through social media and online market to increase the marketability of the woven products locally and in other parts of the country as well as in the international market.

Key Words : Tribal weavers, Marketability, Woven products, Wellbeing of weavers

INTRODUCTION

Weaving constitutes the main occupation for women in Northeast India. As a matter of fact, after agriculture, the Weaving Industry is the largest provider of workforce. Even though the Indian weaving industry employs a large section of the Indian population, the weavers are facing many challenges. The diverse communities in India have different and unique weaving patterns and design. Depending on the place, textile, design and the pattern varies.

The Handloom Census 2009-10 reported that Manipur has 2.04 lakh handloom workers (sharing 5.30%

of all India) and 1.90 lakh loom (sharing 8.02% of all India) (DIPR, 2016). Tribal textiles are woven on a loin-loom, a type of back-strap loom commonly used by hill people. The warp of manageable length and breadth is prepared and fastened at one end generally to the wall, window frame of a house or to two fixed poles while the other end is tied to the waist of the weaver with a cotton or leather belt. Sometimes the belt is woven out of cane or bamboo (The craft and artisans 2010). One of the special features of the industry is that women are the only weavers. A general pattern among the weavers in Manipur is that work for earning income is done along with household chores. These include taking care of

children, cleaning, cooking, collecting water, shopping etc. The weaver could devote time to weaving only when she is free from household chores.

The hill tribes of Manipur have been practicing weaving since the early days. Loin loom or back strap loom are the oldest and most used loom among the tribes of Manipur. The loin loom is the oldest method used for weaving cloth. Each tribe has its own motif and design which signify its distinct identity. From spinning of cotton to weaving on loin loom, the woman alone entirely carries out the process. Weaving on the loin loom is the craft tribal women are skilled at.

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in two districts of Manipur. Manipur is one of the states, which practices hand weaving in large. The two districts have been selected to examine the marketability of the weaving products and analyze the problem faced by the tribal weavers relating to marketability of woven products, health issues and the weaver's wellbeing. The two districts are Churachandpur district and Tamenglong district. Total of 100 weavers were selected for the study. The questionnaire was prepared with some close ended and some open-ended questions to collect information about the weavers, their products and the marketability of their woven products. The questions include information regarding the place where they purchased raw materials, how many products were sold in a month. The interview schedule also helped in understanding the weavers' working conditions, occupational health, marketability of the products and government initiative in weaving.

Observation was carried out in order to witness the weavers working, the type of equipment they use and the products they weave. Observation has helped in gaining knowledge about the working conditions, the types of equipment used, and various types of products they weave. It also helped the researcher to personally gather the information for the study. And case study on "Heirloom Naga" was also taken to get ideas on how they innovate tribal textiles using the help of traditional weavers. The data collected were coded, tabulated and analyzed using appropriate statistical methods. Frequency and percentage methods were used to analyze the tabulated data and presented in form of frequency, percentage and charts.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Background information of the tribal weavers:

Background information of the tribal weavers is shown in Table 1. All the weavers are females (100 %) indicating that the woven products are made by the tribal females only. The reason behind this is because the Manipur Society still follows the Patriarchy system, where men hold primary power and predominate in roles of political leadership, moral authority, social privilege and control of property. 29% of the weavers surveyed were below the age of 30. Among the weavers 64% were between the age of 30-50, and only 7 % were above the age of 50 Most of them are married women (83 %) while few of them are not married (17 %), which shows that majority of the married women are engaged in weaving. The younger generation are less indulgent in weaving as they have moved out of the village in search of better opportunities.

Table 1: Background information of the tribal weavers

Information	Frequency (n = 100)	Percentage
Gender		
Female	100	100 %
Age		
Below 30	29	29 %
30 – 50	64	64 %
Above 50	7	7 %
Marital Status		
Married	83	83 %
Unmarried	17	17 %
No. of Family members		
Less than 2	3	3 %
2-4	26	26 %
4-6	46	46 %
Above 6	25	25 %

Assessment of working condition:

Fig. 1 shows that out of 100 weavers 44% of the weavers work for 5-8 hours, while 34% of the weavers work up to 5 hours, 18% of the weavers work for 8-10 hours and only 4% of the weavers work for 10-12 hours daily. The weavers completes their household chores and send the children to school and husband to work, only after the completion of the household chores they start weaving. The weavers try to finish as much work during the day, because they do not get proper electricity in the area. There is continuous load shedding and sometimes the weavers are forced to work at night to meet the

customers' demand. The weavers also revealed that they work extra hours when the demand is high. Demand is generally high during peak wedding season, and during Christmas and New Year festivities.

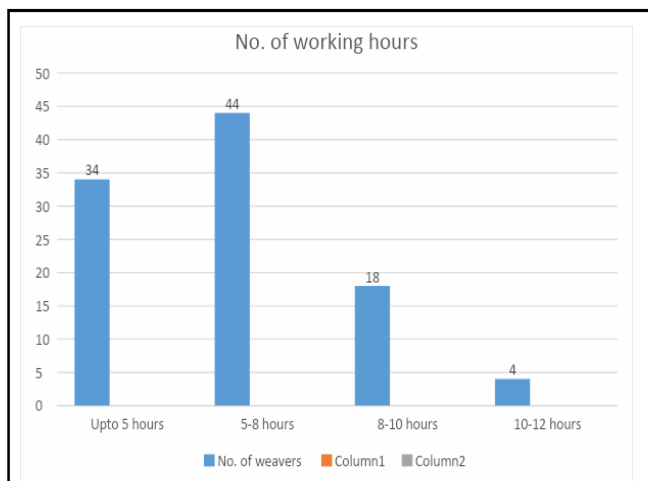


Fig. 1 : No. of working hours

Types of looms used by the tribal weavers:

Fig. 2 shows the type of loom used by the weavers is mostly the traditional loin loom. 65 % used Loin loom while 35 % used hand loom. The weavers who use handloom (35 %) are the weavers who join private weaving society, and the handloom belongs to the society. The weavers, who use Loin loom, mostly weave from home after their daily household activities. Loin loom are traditional weaving techniques and are widely practiced in Northeast India and mostly engaged by women to practice their indigenous craft. The looms have no permanent fixtures, and it can be easily shifted to places as per the weaver's convenience.

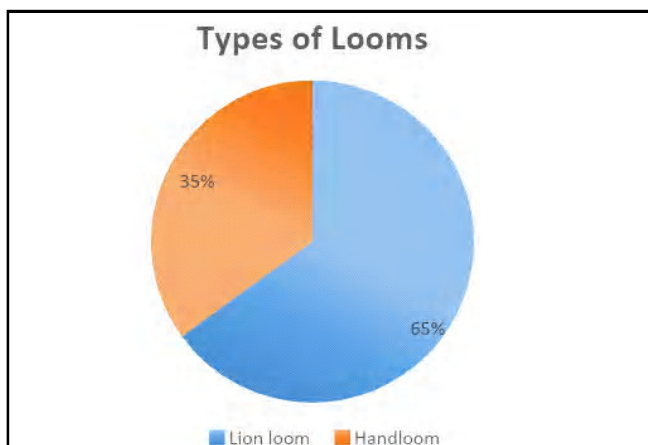


Fig. 2 : Types of looms used by the tribal weavers

Health issues face by the weavers:

Fig. 3 shows that majority of the weavers face many health issues, out of which Eye Problem (53 %), Neck Pain (51 %) and Back Pain (66 %) are the most common health issues among the weavers. Other health issues like Frequent Headache (8 %), Leg Pain (37 %) and others (4 %) are also experienced by the weavers frequently. The weavers revealed that there is no proper lighting while working and sometimes they are forced to work at night without proper electricity. The villages do not get proper electricity, load-shedding happens frequently in the villages, which lowers the production number of the woven products. Long hours of weaving leads to back pain and neck pain. This is because loin loom does not offer much comfort, weavers sit on the floor and weave at least 5- 8 hours a day. While weaving and designing, a lot of concentration is required and it leads to eye irritation, neck pain and back pain.

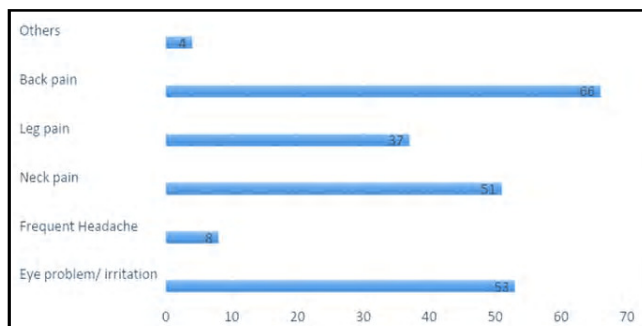


Fig. 3 : Health issues face by the weavers

No. of products woven and sold in a month and in a year:

The no. of products woven and sold in a month depends on the products they weave. Only one Pheisoi (traditional attire) and two shawls in a month is being woven because of the complicated design and pattern in the product. Smaller products like mufflers, neckties and bags are comparatively easier to weave and can be woven in multiple numbers. Majority of the tribal weavers (85 %) weave and sell up to 10 products, while the rest 15 % of the weavers can weave and sell 10-20 products in a month. The tribal weavers cannot produce in bulk. When asked why the weavers weave and sell products in such small scale, they responded that traditional attires take a lot of time to weave depending on the design and pattern of the product. Some products take at least a week to complete weaving the product, while some take 2-3 weeks depending on the pattern and design. They

weave mainly with loom, so it consumes a lot of time. Some choose to weave by loom as design pattern can be woven in detail, while some use loom not because they choose to but due to unavailability of handloom. And it was impossible for the tribal weavers to afford a handloom by themselves (Table 2).

Table 2: No. of products woven and sold in a month and in a year

Quantity of woven and sold products in a month	Frequency (n = 100)	Percentage
Up to 10 products	85	85 %
10 – 20 products	15	15 %
Quantity of woven and sold products in a year		
Up to 50 products	50	50 %
50 – 100 products	45	45 %
100 - 150 products	5	5 %

Assessment of marketability of the products:

Fig. 4 shows that the weavers get their weaving raw materials mainly from the local market (94%). 2% of the weavers get their raw materials from the Government raw materials bank. And 4 % of the weavers get their weaving raw materials from other sources *i.e.* weaving society. The weavers revealed that it is hard to get raw materials from the Government, and the Government does not give out raw materials to weavers without a yarn card. And the weavers cannot afford the

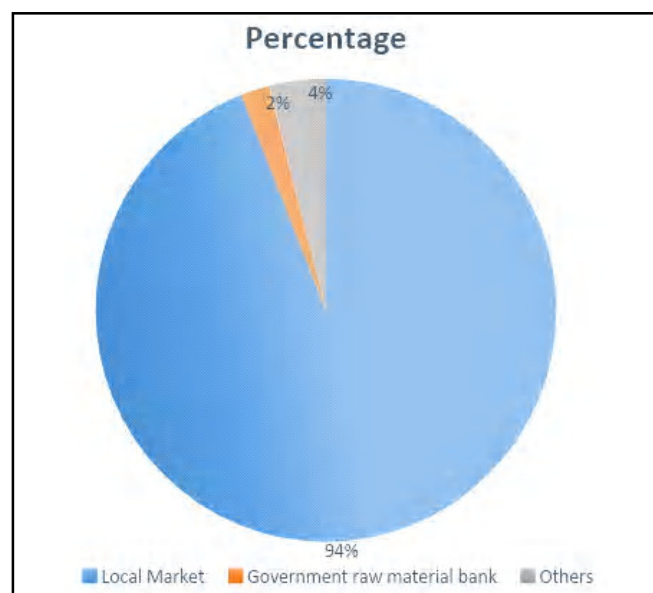


Fig. 4 : Source of raw materials acquired by the tribal weavers

capital as the government does not give out in small quantity and other issues like transportation and distance. So, they depend on the local market.

Platform for marketing the products:

93 % of the woven products are sold in the local market, since the product is mostly cultural-specific items suitable for local use only (shown in Table 3). The weavers revealed that some of them receive orders outside the State, but they cannot meet the demand, since they do not have proper materials and the weaving of even one product consumes a lot of time and labor, and issues with transportation. And they do not have the proper equipment in order to produce the products in bulk. Only 8 % of the tribal weavers sell their products to their contact person. The marketing platform is limited to the local market and contact person. There is high demand in the local market, but the weavers could not meet the customers’ demand since weaving by loom is time consuming. Customers usually place orders for occasions like traditional wedding, cultural event, religious event, gifting special guests and for daily use.

Table 3 : Platform for marketing the product

Platform for marketing the product	Frequency (n = 100)	Percentage
Local Market	93	93 %
Contact person	8	8 %

Determining and assessing existing government initiatives:

Majority of the tribal weavers are aware of the Government initiatives but there are many shortcomings in the services provided by the Government officials. Schemes are not utilized properly and many of the tribal weavers do not get the privilege to enjoy the benefits provided by the government as the facilities do not reach to the tribal weavers. Table 4 shows that out of 100 respondents only 15 % get government initiatives, while 75 % of the tribal weavers do not get government initiatives.

Table 4 : Government initiatives

Government Initiatives	Frequency (n = 100)	Percentage
Yes	15	15 %
No	75	75 %

The tribal weavers earlier used to get raw materials in the Self-Help Group and Society but now they do not get any raw materials, Skill development training is also

held by the government, and promotional events like “Handloom Mela”, “Exhibitions” used to take place at district level as well as state level. Self Help groups provide financial aid to build work sheds for the weavers. They also revealed that solar lamps used to be distributed among the tribal weavers but as the government official changes, facilities no longer were provided. With the change in the government officials, weavers were greatly affected

in terms of receiving funds and raw materials from the government. The tribal weavers also added that they want flying shuttle looms, but they do not get any initiatives.

Conclusion:

This study was undertaken to explore the marketability of the woven products. The business is confined to home based business. They do not have a proper workplace, they either work in the lawn or in the kitchen near the fireplace. They start weaving after completing the household task and sending their children to school. The weavers sell their finished products in the local market, and they take orders from contacted customers. The weavers who used loin loom lack behind in producing products in big numbers, as it takes longer time to make weaving products from loin loom. The tribal weavers do not have the luxury to afford handlooms or flying shuttle on their own. And there are no proper government initiatives among the weavers.

Manipur follows a Patriarchal system where men do not take part in weaving, and rather, they are mainly occupied in outdoor activities and weaving is considered as a “Women’s job” among the locals. Manipur, a state where the employment rate is very low while the corruption that takes place there is ominous, one cannot solely depend on a government job for livelihood. The weavers face a lot of challenges weaving and marketing their products yet found their way to earn their livelihood on their own. Even though the markets are restricted to local markets, weaving helps the tribal women to earn their own livelihood. The tribal weavers can enhance their marketability through an online platform and building good network with merchants in other parts of the country as well as in the international market. Provision of designers to innovate the traditional textile into globally acceptable

products and not confine to local markets.

The central government has implemented enormous amount of funds for the weavers in the country, but the tribal weavers in the rural region of Manipur do not get to enjoy the opportunity and the cause of this is not known whether the officials in the rural region are not performing their job properly or the tribal weavers are ignorant. Revival package from the government can be considered for the tribal weavers. Tribal weavers should be encouraged because they are real artisans who preserved the original traditional art of the country.

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