



“ECONOMIC STATUS AND CHALLENGES OF MISING (ST) HANDLOOM WEAVERS: A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY OF SIVASAGAR DISTRICT IN ASSAM DURING POST LOCKDOWN)”

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ABSTRACT

The Mising is an indigenous tribal community of Assam. The community has a rich tradition of weaving. The handloom weaving is a source of income of the Mising women where they can run their socio-economic lives. They are very expert in their traditional weaving activities. They can weave basically in their traditional garments like mekhela chador, Galuk Ege, Gadu, Gachar, -Ege, Yambo, Gero, Ribbi, Gaseng etc. Now a day's their traditional garments are gaining more popularity and it plays an important economic role in the rural lives. The handloom weavers of the Mising women are trying to commercially upgrade their activities for their benefit. But they have been facing in various problems for bringing a good economic position. In particular, the running position of the sector was stagnant due to effect of pandemic in the last year. At present, Government support is necessary for developing the sector which will bring a ray of hope to the state economy. The paper focuses on the economic status and challenges of handloom weaving of Mising women in the Sivasagar district of Assam. The study is fully based on primary data.



KEYWORDS: Mising, Women weavers, Handloom .

1. INTRODUCTION:

In Assam after agriculture, handloom weaving sector is one of the largest economic activity. This sector provides employment to women in the era of globalization. It not only gives employment to women but also gives survival security to women workers. Their contributions are much more visible for socio-economic development. Through their involvement in this sector, women are gradually empowering this family as well as society. It is the most popular means of livelihood among underprivileged women of rural areas. Women artisans who are involved in this sector not only as the main work force behind this industry but also keep the ancient and traditional terms of art alive through their artistic work.

The women of the Mising (ST) community are very expert in the handloom weaving. They can weave various kinds of Mising traditional garments in Assamese culture. The Mising dresses have their own feature. They wear 'Galuk', Ege, Gachar and also attires of different colours such as lake-Ege, Yambo, Gero, Ribbi, Gaseng etc. Gadu is a rare asset of the Mising community. Various handicrafts and

folk-art-crafts reflect the love for fine art by Misings. The symbolic figure of ‘Do-ni-Polo’ is found on the Mising clothes and dresses. The Mising women can efficiently prepare the eri, muga and pat polu (**Barkakoty, 2017**). Most of the Mising women have been doing traditionally in this economic activity from long time. They take this activity as a source of earning. The handloom weaving sector of Assam can increase the rate of employment of women for betterment of their socio economic life as well as betterment of society. But unfortunately the sector was stagnant due to affect of covid 19 pandemic. This study mainly focuses on the economic status and challenges faced by the handloom weavers of Mising women under the scheduled tribe community during the post lock down period.

2. Review of Literatures:

Sehgal H. K. (2009) opine that as far as the garment export sector is concerned, there have been mixed signals: continuing world economic turn down; some late recovery, however temporary and for some people; recent Rupee appreciation and with a new Government, expected to be stable, assuming charge..

Muhammad Rabiul Islam Liton¹, Tahmidul Islam², Subrata Saha¹,(2016) in the study Present scenario and future challenges in handloom industry in Bangladesh explains about the internal and external factor which sometimes affect the growing trend of the industry. The systematic methodology has been used in the study.

Sahai (1956) studied the handloom industry in north India, focusing the attention on the competition faced by handloom sector from power looms and mills. The study suggested that handloom weavers should learn more designs and the production technology should be improved to face the competition. The Government should take steps to impart training to the weavers, and supply design books and other instruments free of cost.

Ramakrishnan, (1978) pointed out that that exploitation by middlemen and competition from power looms are the major problems faced by weavers in the handloom sector.

Rajamani Singha (1992) states that the national productivity levels of weavers and looms as a whole was quite low and varied from state to state. The marketing of handloom products is in a rudimentary stage and only middlemen are benefiting out of that. The government sponsored agencies lack professionalism in exploring new export market for handloom products.

Phukan Raju (2012) in his paper Handloom Weaving in Assam: Problems and Prospects reveal that the handloom weaving sector plays an important role in Assam economy. Most of the women in the rural areas are involved in the sector and this sector has been providing livelihood to the poor women in the state. It is a very systematic study for this sector.

Saikia J (nd) Handloom and Textile in Assam states that handloom is one of the most important cottage industries of Assam. In rural area of the state handloom is regarded as one of the most important activities of the rural folks gets engaged in wearing activities. He mentions about the various problems of the Mising women in the handloom weaving sector.

1.1. Objectives of the study:

- i. To examine the economic status of the Mising (ST) handloom weavers in Sivasagar district during post lockdown.
- ii. To identify the challenges of the Mising (ST) handloom weavers in Sivasagar during post lockdown period.

1.2. Research questions:

- i. Is saving pattern of the families involved in handloom weaving sector has an upturn?
- ii. Whether the handloom weaving sector contributes to the economy in terms of employment generation?

1.3. Methodology:

The method of the proposed study is descriptive in nature.

1.3.1. Sources of Data:

Both primary and secondary sources of data are used in the study. Mainly the primary source of data has been collected from the respondents through questionnaire and direct interview method. As a secondary source some information are taken from some books, journal, official report and different web site.

1.3.2. Universe of the study:

The study has done among the handloom weavers of Mising women in the selected district of Sivasagar during the period of post covid -19. The two Gaon Panchyat is Dikhowmukh and Dishangmukh where a significant number of the Mising Community people belong. It is the current study because the period is covered from the month of September 2020 to February 2021.

1.3.3. Sample Size:

The small sample size of the respondent is selected. Only 80 nos. of respondent i.e. 20% has been selected in random basis from the total members of the handloom weavers of Mising(ST) women in the two Gaon panchyat of the Sivasagar district.

1.3.4. Tools and techniques:

The questionnaire and personal interview with the respondents is the main tool of the study. After collecting, the data is properly classified, processed, tabulated, with the help of statistical tool like percentage, bar diagrams, chi square test etc.

2. Analysis & Interpretation :

The economic status and challenges of handloom weavers of Mising in the study area are analyzed in the following.

2.1. Income Status:

The income status of the handloom weaver of the Mising community in the study area are stated in the following table no-1

Table No-1: Income Status of the Respondents in the study area (half yearly)			
Sl No	Income Category	Nos.of respondents	Percentage
1	Below 20,000	11	13.75
2	20001- 40000	19	23.75
3	40001- 60000	23	28.75
4	60001-80000	13	16.25
5	80001- 100000	08	10
6	100001- above	06	07.5
Total		80	100

Source: Field Survey

In the above table it is found that most of the respondent (28.75%) have an income (half yearly) between the categories 40001-60000 (thousand rupees). Only 7.5 percent respondent can able to earn more than one lakh. 23.75 percent women have 20001-40000 (thousand rupees), 16.25 percent have 60001-80000 income and 10 percent have the income between 80001-100000. Majority of the respondent produced huge quantity of the product before the lock down period and some respondent prepared during the lock down period. But during the period their working were closed and economic activities were stagnant. At present also the weavers cannot able to upgrade their socio-economic status. The earning came to their hands in the post covid period when the lock down removed

gradually. From the table it is clear that the majority weavers of the Mising cannot enhance their income satisfactorily in the post covid period. The income status of the respondents is shown in the following figure no-1

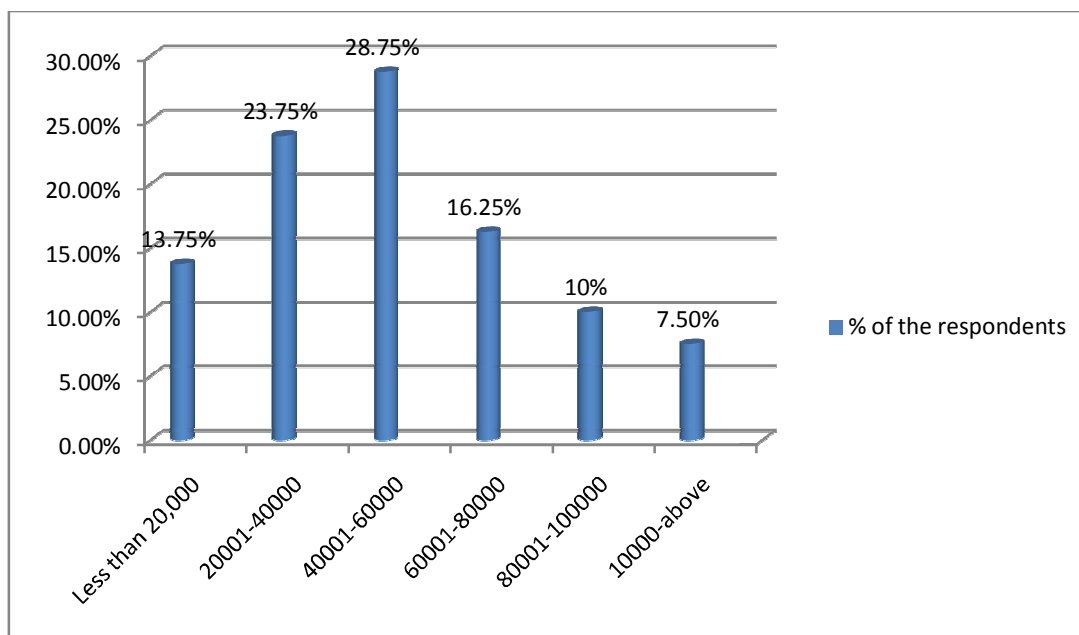


Figure -1

1.4. Expenditure:

Table No-2:Expenditure Pattern of the Respondents (Half yearly)		
Sl No	Items	%
1	Food	31.25%
2	Handloom weaving activities	40.0%
3	Medical	7.5%
4	Education	10%
5	Festival	11.25%
Total		100.00%

Source: Field Survey

According to the table no 2, the respondent spends on various items like food, education, handloom weaving activities etc from their earning which is expressed in percentage term. It is observed that majority of the respondent in the study area spend 40 percent of their earning on handloom weaving activities. 31.25 percent on food, 11.25 percent on festival, 10 percent on education for children and only 7.5 percent earning spend on medical ground. From this analysis it is found that most of the weavers of Mising spend on handloom weaving activities because it is their source of income.

1.5. Saving Status:

Saving is a factor for measuring the economic status. The saving statuses of the respondents are examined in the study. Saving depends upon the income. The following table shows the saving status of the respondent in the study area.

Table No-3: Saving Status of the Respondents (Half yearly)			
Sl No	Source of Savings	Nos.of respondents	Percentage
1	Bank	04	05.0
2	Post office	07	08.75
3	No Saving	69	86.25
Total		80	100

Source: Field Survey

During the post covid period the few women start to save at the bank and post office. Only 13.75% respondent can able to save. Most of the respondent cannot think how they will save during the lockdown and post lockdown period? In the post lockdown period they cannot run their activity smoothly like earlier period of lockdown. From the study it is proved that the pandemic was badly affected on the economic status of Mising handloom weavers in the study area. For that affect, the income level of the respondent has not been increased satisfactorily till the present time. That is why the saving pattern of the respondents has not been upturned. The following figure is shown the saving status of the respondents.

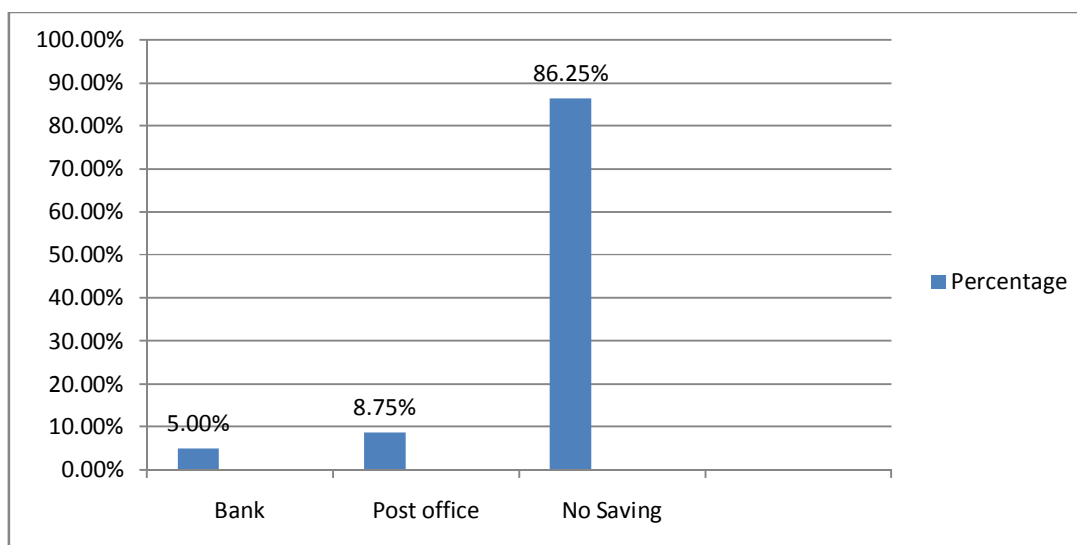


Figure-2

1.6. Source of Finance:

The two sources of finance i.e. informal and formal are found among the respondents in the study area. The table no-4 shows the borrowing status of the respondents.

Table No-4 : Source of Finance in the Respondents

Source of Finance		Nos.of Respondents	%
Informal	Private money lender	26	32.5%
	Friends & Relatives	09	11.25%
	Total	35	43.75%
Formal	Bank	16	20.00%
	Micro finance (NBFC)	19	23.75%
	Total	70	87.5%
None		10	12.5%
Total		80	100%

Source: Field Survey

As an informal source 20% respondent take borrowing from the private money lender and 11.25% respondent take borrow money from their friends and relatives. In the formal source 20% respondent take borrow from the bank and 23.75% from some micro finance company and 12.5% respondent does not take borrow from formal and informal institution. So, it is clear that most of the respondent have able to take loan in the post lock down period of the state.

2. Challenges of Handloom Weavers in Mising Community :

From the observation of the study the following challenges are found in the study area which has been faced by the handloom weavers of Mising community. The seven challenges have been identified from the opinion of the respondents on the basis of some measuring scale like agree, strongly agree, disagree and undecided. In the following table the challenges are examined and justified.

Sl. No	Table No-5: Opinion of the respondents on various problems of Handloom Weaving Sector										
	Challenges Faced by respondents	Sivasagar									Total %
		AG		DA		SA		UN		Total Resndnt	
		Nos.of rspdnt	%	Nos.of rspdnt	%	Nos.of rspdnt	%	Nos.of rspdnt	%		
1	Financial challenge	67	83.75	Nil	Nil	13	16.25	Nil	Nil	80	100
2	Price rise in the raw materials	62	77.5	03	3.75	15	18.75	Nil	Nil	80	100
3	Repayment of loan to Micro finance	48	60	12	15	16	20	04	5	80	100

4	Lack of proper Market	42	52.5	19	23.75	08	10	11	13.75	80	100
5	Lack of raw materials	50	62.5	08	10	07	8.75	15	18.75	80	100
6	Deprive from Using the modern technique	53	66.25	10	12.5	11	13.75	06	7.5	80	100
7	Availability of outside product	58	72.5	07	8.75	09	11.25	06	7.5	80	100
8	Lack of Awareness about the Government schemes.	55	68.75	11	13.75	09	11.25	05	6.25	80	100

Source: Primary Survey

From the above table it is found that the respondents have been faced by the above challenges. The challenges are- financial challenge , price rise in the raw materials, repayment of loan to micro finance, lack of proper market, lack of raw materials, deprive from using the modern technique, availability of outside product and lack of awareness about the government schemes. Out of these challenges most of the respondents are mainly faced by the financial problem. Almost respondent of the study area agree and strongly agree that without finance they cannot run their business because during the post lockdown period they faced burning problem. Majority respondent take financial support from the private money lender, friends and relatives. The second challenge is the price rise in the raw materials. In this challenge 77.5% respondents agree, 18.75% strongly agree, 3.75% disagree and no respondent take the decision on this challenge. During the period of lockdown the women could not run their activity properly therefore they stopped their activities about 8 to 10 months. The post lockdown period the weavers have been trying to run their activity at a certain level but they are faced by these challenges.

The availability of outside product is another major challenge in the study.72.5% weavers agrees that this challenge really hampers the Mising weavers from the long time which is directly affected on their economic status. It is threatening for this domestic industry in the state. In the study 68.75% respondent agree that they are not aware about the government schemes and supports. Most of the weaver could not able to get financial support during the period of lockdown from the state government because of their ignorance and lack of awareness.

Lack of using the modern technology among the handloom weavers of Mising in the study area is also found another challenge. Here, 66.25% respondent agree, 13.75% strongly agree, 12.5% disagree and 7.5% respondent play undecided role on this challenge. A significant numbers of the women in the state are still running the handloom weaving activity in traditional way. Therefore they could not develop their activity speedily than the other handloom weavers in the country.

The study reveals that 23.75 percent respondent have been running their weaving activity by taking loan from the micro finance company from the last 2 years. The financial transaction was running smoothly between the parties. But suddenly started the lockdown in the state and the country the running process was stagnant. Due to economic stagnant of the period the weavers could not repay their loan to the company. As a result the micro finance company losses their capital and the weavers also loss their economic ability. Besides, lack of proper market is also identified as great challenge in

front of the weavers. The availability of imported products takes place in the market. So, the handloom weavers are not able to get huge amount of profit from their product. In the study 52.5% respondent agree, 10% strongly agree, 23.75% disagree and 13.75% respondent do not take any decision on the challenge.

3. SUGGESTIONS AND CONCLUSION:

The study reveals that the women of Mising practice weaving mainly as a cultural practice and the commercialization is also starting from the practice. The weaver of the study have enough skilled and potentiality. They have immense scope to contribute the state economy. The government should highly supports to the handloom weaving sector in the rural areas of the state then the sector will be gaining more popularity among the women. Mainly the state government should provide financial support and give proper training to the handloom weavers. Besides, the weavers must be equipped with the modern technology which can be facilitated by the state government.

Proper marketing is also required for the supply of the material made from weaving. The government has to take some initiatives for organize the products from the handloom weavers and adopting some strategies to proper placing in the market where the weavers can able to get more profit. The traditional craft of handloom weaving of Mising women has a very bright future prospect in the state and within the country. Gradually these traditional products are able to take place in the international market also. Therefore the state government has to organize some commercial festivals like expo and trade fairs in the state and international level where the traditional product will familiar among the visitors.

At last not least it can opine that the state government must provide financial support to the handloom weavers to run the business properly because due to lockdown period (about one year) the weaving sector was stagnant and at present also they have confronted many financial crises to run the business.

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