

Marketing of Tribal-Based Handloom Products with Reference to The Bodo Tribe of Assam



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KEYWORDS

Handloom, Marketing, Product Lines, Channel of Distribution

ARTICLE DETAILS

Received 30 May 2025; revised 04 August 2025; accepted 04 September 2025

DOI: 10.26671/IJIRG.2025.4.14.337

CITATION

Goyary, S. B., Chanu, A. I. (2025). Marketing of Tribal-Based Handloom Products with Reference to The Bodo Tribe of Assam. *Int J Innovat Res Growth*, 14(4), 144095-144100. DOI



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Abstract

The main objective of the present paper is to explore the marketing of 'tribal-based handloom products' regarding Bodo tribe of Assam. An investigation is made to find out the Product Lines of select products and the Channels of Distribution of those products. The findings reveal that though handloom products are made from various fabrics including wool and silk, the widely used fabrics of Bodo traditional attire are cotton, mercerized cotton, and Eri silk. Four channels of distribution are also revealed from the findings. The present paper follows exploratory research design, and primary data were collected from the weavers from the Bodoland Territorial Region, Assam through personal interviews. The biggest challenge of the handloom weavers is the time consumed in the production process and price fixation; hence, a suggestion is made to provide technological orientation and proper marketing strategies among the handloom weavers of Assam.

1. Introduction

The handloom sector in India represents a deep cultural heritage. Northeast India, which is rich in its traditional handloom weaving, has different tribes, and the Bodo community is one of them. Though the Bodo people are mainly dependent on agricultural activities, handloom weaving is also one of their livelihood practices. In the Bodo tribe, especially women are traditionally skilled weavers. This skill of weaving is transferred from generation to generation. They weave unique designs in their handloom products. This practice is mostly prevalent among the women in the rural areas. Initially performed by them in their leisure time, weaving gradually emerged as an income-generating activity among the women, contributing to their empowerment. So, the handloom sector can be treated as one of the employment sources in rural areas, which contributes to the economic growth of the region. Efficient marketing of handloom products is very necessary for the survival and growth of the handloom sector. Efficient marketing refers to prioritizing in reducing the marketing cost without compromising the output. As the handloom products of the Bodo tribes are unique in design, it is needed to be efficiently marketed. There are various types of fabrics that are used by the Bodo tribe to weave their products like Eri silk, Muga Silk, etc. Irrespective of being credible in producing a unique variety of handloom products, the weavers suffer from numerous challenges such as lack of awareness of the latest market trends, lack of upgraded looms, lack of required count of yarn, poor quality yarn, etc. (Goswami & Jain, 2014) which hinders the popularity of these products among the customers in general. However, through proper marketing, the weavers would not only be able to reach the customers but also earn sufficient profits to continue their business. This would in turn also act as a stimulant for future generations to carry out this activity on a large scale and reach global markets as well.

Over the years, with changing market needs, the traditional way of weaving process which included cotton cultivation, yarn spinning, and dyeing with natural colours got replaced with automation and the use of acrylic colours. Further, the weavers also started weaving with different types of fabrics apart from cotton. Again, with the effort of some qualified individuals, aspects like labelling and branding were incorporated into the marketing practices of the Bodo handloom products. The Government of India has played a great role in this regard. Besides providing the weavers with financial assistance, yarns were also provided through the National Handloom Development Corporation (Ministry of Textiles, Government of India). The implementation of the GI tag on Bodo handloom products like Dokhona, Fasma, Gamsa, and Aronai in 2024 was another landmark decision of the Government of India in this endeavor. This was done to protect its authenticity on the one hand and enhance its popularity among the general masses on the other. The effect of the GI tag on the demand for these products is an area that needs to be explored. However, the weavers should also strengthen their marketing practices to reap benefits from the GI tag as well efforts should be made by them to include other handloom products with the domain of GI.

2. Statement of the Problem

The Bodo tribe who are rich in cultural heritage plays an important role in the economic growth of the country through the handloom sector. Bodo tribes are famous for their uniqueness in the design of their handloom products. They use different kinds of fabrics for weaving their products. The fabrics and designs included in the products create a unique product line in close association with their cultural heritage. So, what are the product lines of the tribal-based handloom products? Further, handloom weavers of Assam use different channels of distribution to sell their products (Baruah *et.al*, 2023). In this context, what are the channels of distribution used by the Bodo weavers for the marketing of the products?

The present study is an attempt to answer these questions.

3. Review of Literature

A study titled “Problems Faced by Handloom Industry - A Study with Handloom Weavers’ Co-operative Societies in Erode District” which was conducted by Kumudha & Rizwana (2013) explored various input-related, weavers-related, and marketing-related problems faced by Handloom Weavers’ Co-operative Societies. It is revealed by the study that the major input-related problem is continuous increases in yarn price which leads to the high cost of production, and there is a lack of active members in the study area and competition from mechanized sectors such as mill and power loom sectors is the major marketing problem.

Goswami & Jain (2014) in the study titled “Strategy for Sustainable Development of Handloom Industry” explored the problems of the handloom industry in Jaipur District. The study revealed that the problems faced by the handloom industry are low sales at exhibitions and retail showrooms, absence of scientific market research, improper promotional activity planning, insufficient budget, and lack of proper infrastructure and the problems faced by the weavers are unaware of latest market trends, lack of innovative designs, lack of upgraded looms, lack of required count of yarn, poor quality yarn.

Tanushree (2015) in the study titled “A Study of the Present Situation of the Traditional Handloom Weavers of Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, India” explored the various problems of Handloom Weavers of Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh. The study revealed that major problems of Handloom weavers are the Invention of new technology (power-loom), capitalist control, drop off in wages, increased price of yarn.

Khakhlari (2020) in the study titled “Silk Products and Marketing Strategy of a Weaving Industry in Assam” explored the organizational structure of the Sualkuchi weaving Industry, highlighted the problems faced by the industry, and analyzed certain issues for the development of the silk industry. It is revealed by the study that the organization structure starts from the purchase of yarn to the delivery of the final products. The actors involved are the owners of silk looms, the weavers, and the co-operative. The weavers work on a wage basis under the master weavers or the cooperative. Further, with the help of middlemen, the independent weavers sell off their products through stores that either belong to the middleman or shops to whom the middleman sells. Problems faced by the industry are lack of organization of the handloom industry, weavers relying on middlemen to sell their finished products, and selling the products at low prices which does not even cover the cost of purchasing the fabric.

Faruque & Guha (2024) in the study titled “Determinants of Marketing of Handloom Products across Heterogeneous Weaving Business Units: A Study of Rural Assam” examined the success in the marketing of handloom products among diverse groups of weaving units in rural Assam and identified the factors determining the marketing of handloom products across weaving business units in rural Assam. It is revealed by the study that the master weaver system has become dominant in Assam's production and marketing of handloom products, and due to the availability of low-cost power loom products in the market, there is low demand for hand-woven cloths in the market. Large traders can attract customers for their imported products through various sales promotional activities, but the same cannot be affordable for handloom weavers due to their financial constraints.

4. Research Gap

The existing study reviewed mainly focused on the input-related, weavers-related and marketing-related problems (Kumudha & Rizwana, 2013; Goswami & Jain, 2014; Tanushree, 2015 and Faruque & Guha, 2024); the organizational structure (Khakhlari, 2020) and success in the marketing of the handloom industry (Faruque & Guha, 2024). There is no thorough investigation of the product line and channel of distribution of tribal-based handloom products in the existing literature. The present study is an attempt to fill this gap.

5. Objectives of the Study

- (i) To find out the Product Lines of tribal-based handloom products.
- (ii) To investigate the channels of distribution of tribal-based handloom products.

6. Research Methodology

The present study follows an exploratory research design. It is based on both primary and secondary data. The primary data were collected from 30 weavers of the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR), Assam through personal interviews. A convenience sampling method was used to select those 30 weavers. Secondary data were collected from journals and reports of Ministry of Textiles, Government of India.

7. Findings

7.1 Product Line of Tribal-Based Handloom Products

Table 1: Product line of Tribal based Handloom Products.

Name of Product	Fabric	Price (Rs.)	Time of Weaving	Brand
Dokhona	Cotton	500 - 1500	6 hrs – 15 hrs	✓
	Mercerised Cotton	1000 - 3000	6 hrs – 15 hrs	✓
	Eri Silk	10000 - 30000	6 hrs – 15 hrs	✓
	Muga silk	15000 - 50000	6 hrs – 15 hrs	✓
Fasra	Cotton	200 - 700	4 hrs – 10 hrs	✓
	Mercerised Cotton	300 - 750	4 hrs – 10 hrs	✓

	Eri Silk	1500 - 4000	4 hrs – 10 hrs	✓
	Muga silk	2500 – 5000	4 hrs – 10 hrs	✓
Gamsa	Cotton	400 – 1000	4 hrs – 6 hrs	✓
	Mercerised cotton	500 - 1500	4 hrs – 6 hrs	✓
Aronai	Cotton	250 - 500	10 hrs – 15 hrs	✓
	Mercerised Cotton	300 - 700	10 hrs – 15 hrs	✓
	Eri Silk	1200 - 3000	10 hrs – 15 hrs	✓
	Muga Silk	3000 - 5000	10 hrs – 15 hrs	✓

Source: Field Survey

** Time of weaving is the actual time required to weave the products. It excludes time taken for processing before actually carrying out the weaving.

*** Prices of the products vary as per the design involved in it. More design requires more weaving time and accordingly the prices of the products go high.

Table 2: Images of some of the handloom products of Bodo Tribe.

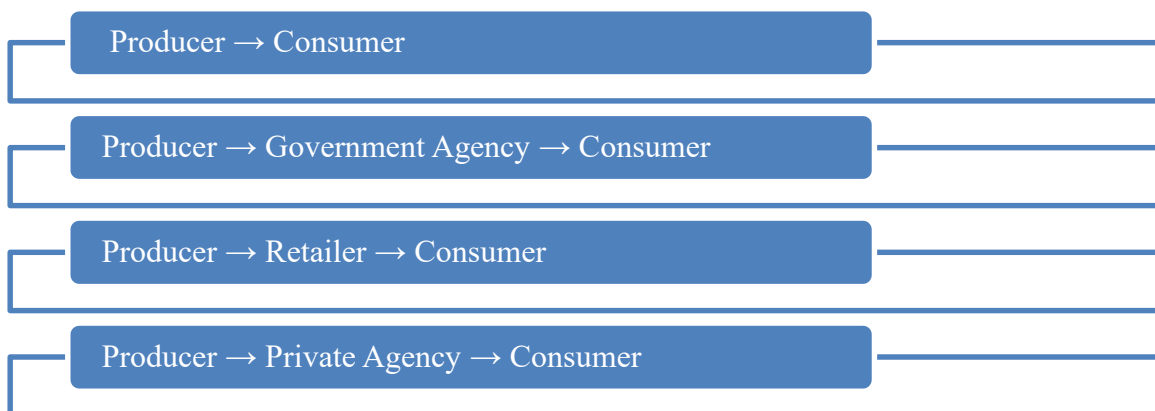
Name of Product	Image of the Product	Description
Dokhona		Dokhona is the main traditional cloth worn by the Bodo women. It represents the Bodo culture and identity. Dokhona is available in a wide variety of designs, colours, and fabrics. Different colours and designs of Dokhona are used for different occasions. <i>Dokhona Thaosi</i> , which is red in colour is worn at the time of wedding. Mostly, yellow colour Dokhona is worn by beautiful women and girls at the time of Bwisagu (Rongali Bihu), Dokhona of other colours are worn by women in their day to day lives.
Fasra		Fasra is the upper garment also called a shoulder scarf worn by the Bodo women with the Dokhona. Fasra is of various colours and designs and different colour and designs are worn by Bodo women on different occasions. Mostly, red colour Fasra is worn at the time of Bwisagu (Rongali Bihu) and in the wedding ceremony by the bride.

Aronai		Aronai is a small traditional scarf worn by both men and women. It represents the tradition and culture of the Bodo tribe. Aronai is available in numerous designs and made from various types of fabrics and it reflects the diversity and richness of the Bodo weaving tradition. Aronai is a symbol of gratitude that is offered to the elders and distinguished personalities as a token of respect.
Gamsa		Gamsa is a traditional cloth mainly worn by the Bodo men. It is basically used as household attire as well as cultural dress. It holds cultural significance, especially during festivals or occasions, and is also presented as a mark of respect.

Source: Field Survey

P.C: Sabitri Bala Goyary.

7.2 Channels of Distribution Used by The Sample Weavers.



Source: Field survey

Fig.1 Types of Channels of Distribution.

The sample handloom weavers of the Bodo tribe of Assam use four channels of distribution for marketing their products. These channels of distribution are (i) Producer → Consumer (ii) Producer → Government Agency → Consumer (iii) Producer → Retailer → Consumer (iv) Producer → Private Agency → Consumer.

8. Conclusion

The handloom sector among the tribal people of Assam holds immense potential for cultural preservation and economic development. Bodo tribes wear traditional dresses on different occasions. These dresses also form a part of their daily lifestyle. The present study highlighted several Bodo Handloom products namely Dokhona, Fasra, Aronai, and Gamsa, etc. woven with different fabrics like Eri, Muga, cotton, and mercerised cotton. The study also revealed that the average time required to weave those products is 6 to 15 hours depending on the fabrics used and designs included in the products. Different colour and designs of traditional dresses are worn by the people of the Bodo tribe on different occasions such as Dokhona Thaosi is worn by the bride at the time of marriage, Aronai is used as a symbol of respect, etc. Further, the study reveals that the sample weavers use four channels of distribution as Producer → Consumer; Producer → Government Agency → Consumer;

Producer → Retailer → Consumer and Producer → Private Agency → Consumer. It is suggested that in order to increase the marketability of the handloom products, the weavers also use various social media platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, etc. Direct marketing aided by technology would help them to have direct access to the needs of the market and modifications in the weaving process can be made accordingly.

Acknowledgement

I'm deeply grateful to the Entrepreneurship Laboratory, Department of Business Administration, Mohanlal Sukhadia University, Udaipur, Rajasthan, for giving me the opportunity to present my research paper at the 4th Global Conference on Emerging Trends in Research & Development and the International Journal of Innovative Research & Growth for the publication opportunity.

Conflict of Interest

No conflict of interest in this manuscript in any manner.

Funding Statement

I have not received any grant from any institution or agency.

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