

Handloom and Handicraft of Nagaland: A study of Dimapur District

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Abstract

The Handloom and Handicraft sector of Nagaland is one of the oldest as well the most significant and important sectors of this region. In the state, it is mostly accomplished as a home-based cottage industry. This study will focus on the general working condition of the weavers and craftsman in the district of Dimapur, Nagaland. Diezephie the handicraft village has been considered for better understanding on handicraft sector. This study will also mention about how both the sectors are growing and being promoted and how these sectors serves as a means of providing livelihood to the Nagas.

Key words: *Handloom, Handicraft, tradition, culture, beliefs*

Introduction

Nagaland is a state situated in the north eastern region of India. A land inhabited by sixteen (16) major tribes along with other sub tribes. The state was inaugurated on 1st December, 1963 and has eleven (11) districts with Kohima as the capital and Dimapur as the commercial hub of the state. A land where 70% of the population depends upon agriculture, we see handloom and handicrafts emerging as the traditional cottage industry with self-sustainable rural economy and raw materials in abundance. Products made manually from indigenous technology can be termed as Handloom and

Handicrafts. The technologies which are common to all households are basketry, the simpler forms of carving, and spinning and weaving.¹

The state has an old tradition of wearing and craft making since time immemorial. It is a part of the culture and has been sustained till now by transferring skill from one generation to another. However the state has many tribes so traditions of weaving and crafting also differs from district to district.

Hand weaving textile and craft making is practiced in the state both for commercial as well as domestic purpose. Apart from economic purpose, the hand loom culture is also a part of traditional belief and practice followed up by every tribe of state. The textile carries with its social status of a person, the community they belong to and every design and colour portrayed in the textile has with it a significant reason and meaning. The textile of both men and women are different from each other. The traditional textile consists of unique shawls, wrap around commonly referred to as mekhala, scarfs, tie, waist coat etc. In every important aspect of the life. Nagas prefer to wear a piece of their traditional attire with respect. Also, these art and crafts are often used as valuable means for gifting purposes and Nagas till today follow the tradition of gifting some amount of traditional attires to the daughter during her marriage which makes the traditional textile even more special due to these purposes.

Julian Jacob's 'The Nagas, Hill Peoples of Northeast India' provides a vivid information about the Naga morung, Naga economy, climate and hills. The author also has spoken about the Naga art of basket making and about the ornaments of various Naga tribes.

'Social-cultural and political history of the Nagas', written by L. Atola Changkiri talk about the different shawls of the Naga tribes and also mentions how the attire of a merit man is different from a common man.

Historicity, Cultural Diversity and Identities in Northeast India,, a book written by different writers and edited by Temjensosang & Athungo Ovung which talks about multiculturalism in North-east India and also gives some insight on the formation of

¹ Jacobs Julian, The Nagas Hill People of Northeast India (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd London, 1998), 43.

Nagaland as a state of 16 tribes and the last chapter deals with the cultural aspects that is its rituals, belief system, festivals, marriage system, rituals relating to the death and birth.

The Various Aspects of Naga Art by Iris Odyuo deals with Morung, textiles, ornaments, weapons, tattooing and house decorations of the Nagas. These sub topics carries messages on the significance of these practices in Naga culture and also has mention of the age old tradition.

Both qualitative and quantitative technique of research has been used in the study. The study has also been carried out using both primary and secondary data. Further information was collected by holding personal interviews with the artisans of both the sectors. And the critical works of different writers has also been referred by the researcher.

This study will focus mainly on the working condition of the artisans in both the sector of Handloom and Handicraft in Dimapur. It will also try to understand the significance of these sectors in Naga life and will try to analyze the growth of art and craft making in present day life.

Discussion and Analysis

In ancient times, the best of Naga wood carving was seen in the village gates, morung and in front of the house of a warrior or a rich man, however, the origin of wood carving can be traced back to the beginning of civilization where man started cultivation of food crops and people began making baskets, mats and many other products of household use with bamboo that was abundantly available in nearby forest. Also, Naga weaving in ancient times was done with the purpose of proving clothing to the members of the family particularly by women of the family belonging to rural areas by use of simple equipment's and during leisure times. The art of textile weaving was taught to the girls at a very young age by their mother, aunts, sisters or grand-mother and even through morung where the girls were taught the simple ways of weaving and in the youth by joining self-help groups where she is further able to polish her earlier learned skills and that is how one gains exceptional craftsmanship in weaving intricately colorful fabrics. Handcraft is an art requiring skills with hand. In Nagaland, the craft making has the dominance of manhood. The state has been practicing the art of handcraft since time immemorial. Like the textile wearing, Handcraft too has been passed on from

generations. Today due to its fine, rich quality, eco-friendly and less maintenance aspects this craft has been in huge demand and sold off frequently, which are bought not only by the local people but by people of other parts of the state and country.

In the district of Dimapur, Diezephe is the one area where there are ample amount of small cottage industries producing handicrafts items and this village is also referred to as the handcraft village.

The craft making in this area consists mostly as a means of family business process where no help from outsider is considered and the crafts produced are mostly sold in bulk to the buyers. Even though, there are few houses who are engaged in expanding the art of craft making. These private entrepreneurs sometimes themselves and at times employ skilled craftsmen who in return would providing training to those who are not only from the state but are from other parts of the states. Training of one month is provided by skilled artisans to maximum six hundred (600) people. Who are from the neighboring state like Assam, Arunachal Pradesh etc. And to those indigenous people in the craft.

The working condition of artisans differ as there is no government training center in this area and the households who are in practice of handicrafts are all supervising themselves as private entrepreneurs running their own business. However, it is observed that normally 4 to 5 artisans worked on daily basis and they are the ones employed by the entrepreneur running the business. On daily basis hundred (100) products in the maximum and fifty (50) in minimum were made by the local artisans. In case of high demands, the number of artisans rises up to 30 in maximum and ten (10) minimum. There is no fixed time of work for this private cottage industries.

The tools used are chisel, axe, dao and adze. The craft is mostly handmade but sometimes machine is used for producing a finer piece. Fine chisel and tools are used for carving out design, the carved-out pieces are then assembled together and prepared for a coat or paint.

For handicraft the artisans mostly use wood, bamboo and cane. Handicraft making can be further divided into articles of everyday use and into decorative items. Everyday use - tables, baskets, chairs, wooden plates and spoons, bamboo mugs and cups etc. Decorative items- miniature arts made from bamboo, wooden artifacts.

The fine works of arts and crafts are indeed the result of some skilled artisans who work with much dedication and patience to produce the finest products that are admirable and are of much use.

There is no permanent or fix name to the crafts made by various craftsman and it may differ in terms of design, quality and even price. The prices of the products may vary depending upon the size and the quality of wood, bamboo and cane used.

With no financial help from the government towards those keeping up the traditions of handcrafts, the entrepreneurs make sure to make maximum promotions of the products by advertising them through newspaper, social media and by opening stalls, showrooms around the city.

Handloom is the only industry which has maintained and preserved the ancient craft even today. The industry is unique in its own way and it requires no form of energy such as electrical, coal, solar etc. It works completely on the skilled human hands.

The art of weaving has been an integral part of the Naga society and is considered a part of the social-cultural structure of the Naga people. In Nagaland, handloom has the monopoly of the women folk. The Naga method of weaving is simply but the design, motif and pattern are complex. The weaving also reflects the rich artistic skills and creative imagination of the local weavers.

The 16 major tribes of the state have their own unique and distinctive traditional attire which is hand woven and carries cultural significance and also reflects the community or tribe one belongs to.

The practice of weaving is now gradually extending and it serves not only as means of providing clothing to the members of the family but also as a source to generate income.

The district of Dimapur, in the state of Nagaland is the main handloom industrial area due to the location of the state, its climatic conditions and easy availability and accessibility of raw materials. Mostly, it is the middle-age women who run the business of Handloom by opening small cottage industries. In this type of enterprise all equipment's, raw materials and necessity factors for weaving is provided by the owner and training is given by the skilled weavers to the girls and women interested in this field and hence, they are equally distributed with the task of weaving. The women folk involved in the process of weaving has their own role to perform and each are expert in

it, which include weaving, stitching, design making etc. The pattern for weaving can be further divided into grid, pattern or plain; however, the Naga attire mainly consist of variety of patterns. Weaving is further done in two panel meaning it takes weaving of two different piece of textile in order to form one complete piece which is later on joined together by the process of stitching and in some textile cowrie shells are added in order to add more beauty to it and the last part that follows is the pleading of the dashes to provide a cleaner and complete finish.

The types of threads and yarn used for weaving include doli, thailand, polyester, rayon, 2 ply, 4 ply. The number of days taken to complete a piece of textile depended upon the pattern used. In order to complete a designed wrap around it usually takes more than a week and for the completion of plain wrap around maximum of one week is taken.

Use of the colours black, red and white are more as it symbolizes certain beliefs among the Naga's; red indicating blood or war, white as peace and black symbolizing the dark part of the life. The pricing of the different textile product differs from one owner to the other depending upon the quality, consumption of time, money and labour they put in.

The finished products are further sold in bulk sometimes and mostly sold in showrooms in around the state and in trade fairs, expos and some are showcased in local cultural modelling shows.

However, in some houses individual weavers are present that produces textile in order to maintain the economic stability of the family, this type of weavers usually weaves during leisure times as they are mostly looking after the household chores, the raw materials and all other equipment's belong to the weaver herself and she is not employed under any one.

Development of the Handloom and Handicraft sectors in present day

In present scenario, we see huge growth in both the sectors of Handloom and Handicraft as not only individuals but also the government of the state to some extend is taking up initiatives in improving and preserving the state's art and craft which is unique and serves significant purpose to the people residing in the state by initiating formulation of Nagaland Handloom & Handicrafts Development Corporation Limited (NHHDC) in 1979 which is located in Half Nagarjan, Dimapur whose main objective

is to promote and develop the vibrant traditional Handloom and Handicraft products that are indigenous to the state. This corporation also provides training to those interested in learning the craft making and has 7 sales emporium in and around the state for sell of the products.

With modernization, changes are further being brought in the textile of the Nagas where modern clothing like scarf, skirts, dress, waist coat, necktie etc. being made in traditional designs in order for one to feel more comfortable and modern at the same time not forgetting the roots. These days many young entrepreneurs are coming up who are working upon in preserving the Naga textile and craft by innovating new designs and style of wearing the Naga ethnic wear and by handcrafting woods in order to make pieces for the purpose of fridge magnets, souvenir, memento, bookmarks, key chains etc. which carry in it the image of Naga warriors, Naga morung, mithun horns, tribal shawl and various others which are all related to the Naga society.

Naga handloom and handicraft belongs to the state itself and is not borrowed from any other, it is indigenous to the state and is a past on tradition from one generation to other. It gives Nagaland a sense of pride, rich heritage and a sense of self sufficiency.

Conclusion

The Naga Handloom and Handicraft has and still is given utmost priority by the tribals as it is a part of their cultural identity and is what makes them different from people of other states. These practices has been followed since ancient times due to its various significance and the art of handicraft and handloom were simpler and crafts produced were less complex but today we do witness many new addition in the Naga handloom and Handicrafts of the state which are made in order to meet the needs and demands of the people. Many new equipment's has also been initiated for better production of the crafts and showrooms, craft bazaar, expos, trade fair are opened and conducted in and around the state regularly in order for the artisans to showcase and sell their hand made products, also the Lands famous Hornbill festival which is usually held during the month of December and is visited by people from all over the world serves as one of the greatest platform for promotion of the crafts where the tourism department of the state also makes sure that specific days are provided only for the two sectors that is Handloom and Handicraft alone to be displayed and showcased to the tourist and people gathered in the festival.

Recommendation

In order to continue the tradition of weaving and crafting and to preserve the culture of Naga society and for these sectors to continue with the purpose of serving as a source of earning and means of livelihood for some and generate more income for the state, more government involvement and support in providing funds to not only those registered under Nagaland Handloom & Handicrafts Development Corporation Limited (NHHDC Ltd.) but also to those household industries and small scale cottage industries in and around the state is needed.

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