

A Study on Handloom Role in Women Empowerment in Tribal Women weavers: Ukhrul District Manipur.

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Abstract

Handloom is a traditional wear all over India and has played a significant role in empowering women in socio-economic conditions. Handloom brand has ensured its uniqueness, the flexibility of the production, openness to innovations and richness in culture. Handloom in today is practice and well appreciated with no social stigma but consider pure and highly demanded occupations.

Introduction

Women play a vital important roles in our society from the time of birth to the end of the lifespan. She plays her roles and duty timely in an efficient manner to run the family but till now in our modern society

women is still considered to be the weaker and men are the stronger gender of the society. Many awareness programs, policy, rules, and regulation have been implemented by the government but still why is her life more complicated comparing to men. Women take care of her family member as a daughter, granddaughter, sister-in-law, wife, mother-in-law, and grandmother. The true essence of women is the unconditional love while childbearing and child rearing, nurture with care and bring up with responsibility. Women play great roles in our social development and growth. A famous saying by Brigham young that “You educate a man; you educate a man. You educate a woman; you educate a generation”. Educating of women overall is a very important aspect in



the growth of our society through women empowerment. Women play a great role in everyone's life with which we cannot imagine the success of life. They are the light to the path of our future.

Roles of women in weaving

Weaving has been associated with women in many culture and traditions. Weaving is considered to be a dowry for tribal women, she considered it as rich traditional pass down by her ancestor. Majority of the weaver in the North East are women. Many tribal women consider weaving as talents where they don't need a qualification to prove their capabilities or potential. Weaving directly strengthen the economics of our country by generating jobs and indirectly eradicated poverty. Rural villagers are now shifting from agriculture to weaving to have a better life and income in fewer efforts. Women weaving in distinct unbeatable design with different fabric, color, and design for the different occasion. The modern twist in the traditional dress has been highly demanded this help to restore our culture with the ongoing time and place. Many weavers today are highly trained to be compatible with the ongoing trend with

great enthusiasm and pride. Weaving has been a part of her life as she manages it with great care to show her potential and to be well appreciated. Women have engaged in weaving since she was young where her mother is a teacher and a guide. Today the new generation youth are not aware of the priceless art and culture of the ancestors but the women weavers play a role as a reminder through distinctive attire with their connection with existence, traditions, and richness in culture and diversity in race. Women play many roles in nurturing and educating the young ones in many possible ways.

Performance of women weaver in the socio-economic condition in Ukhrul

Tribal women weavers have been engaging long enough in traditional of excellent craftsmanship, the handloom sector in Ukhrul is considered next to agriculture for earning a livelihood. Before the introduction of handloom, women weavers depend on a traditional loom where they produce clothes for the family or personal use rather than market sales. Ukhrul handloom sector has taken a huge step in socio-economic factors; improving the livelihood and upholding the culture as part of life. The government has

provided financial assistance and health insurance for the weavers which are some of the interventions for the growth and progress in the handloom sector. Many women now opted for handloom as an occupation without qualification to expose their talents. Whether it is traditional loom or Handloom every household own it like a property or dowry. There is no social stigma of a woman working as a weaver cause culture demand and considered to be a pure and respected occupation. About 80 percent of the tribal women are engaged in handloom sector. Weaving is a part of their culture and a way of life with them irrespective of their social status or economic condition of the family. They considered being a culture started with emotional attachment since women and girls wove only for their near and dear ones and in each of their design they try to express their potential, personal emotional and communicate warm feeling through the fabric that was intended to be worn. Now the handloom sector in Ukhurul geared up for commercial production catering to the needs of the domestic market and for exporting products. Apart from any other occupation in Ukhurul, weaving is the largest economic activity in the current days. In the past cloths

are produce for the needs of the family or for the near and dears ones but now the existence of the market through sales have been introduced. Majority of the women in Ukhurul prefer working in Handloom sector rather than household traditional loom as they complain that traditional loom consumes an amount of time and health wise it brings a lot of difficulties. As for the case of handloom, women weavers are more comfortable with minimal consumption of time and new design with cheaper rate. According to the survey and analyses of date, women in Ukhurul prefer handloom product as they are more affordable and design of more choice. Market wise it has a tremendously positive outcome in the selling of product not only in the local market but all over India. To meet the demand and supply, the handloom sector in Ukhurul have to keep up to date to the changing market and ongoing trends, competition, management of equipment and without hesitation high qualified workers with good remuneration.

Women empowerment through Handloom

When women move forward, the family moves, the village moves, and the nation

moves said by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, which is often repeated because it is accepted the fact, that the nation's greatness and growth depend on how the women enjoy respect and status in the country. The condition of women should be improved for all welfare of the world with full participation on the basis of equality in all spheres of society including the decision-making process and access to power. Handlooms have an umbilical linkage with cotton farmers and the rural farm economy. Agricultural labor gets employed in the handloom sector during the non-agriculture season. The sector has a self-sustaining mechanism including training the women weavers and generation of a job for the younger generation. Handloom has become an environment-friendly with autonomous technology and the inheritance of skills, resources and capacities have remained beyond the realm and reach of modern training and educational institution. Empowerment of women weaver as a whole both in organized and the unorganized sectors have been done and there is a slow progress even if the government has initiated lots of policies. Currently the Tangkhul Naga women weavers has been highly

praised for there immense participation and contribution in weaving by spreading the unique production. Handloom empowers women not only economically but also socially by focusing on their health welfare and education. Today women are a no more economic burden and have contributed for the development of their families with no doubt. The participation of women in income generating activities for the families has rapidly increased over time which brings economic independence among women in the household. The economic empowerment has been visible where she had the full autonomy to spend their income and also control the recourses.

Study Area

Ukhrul district, Manipur the North East region of India came into existence in the year 1969 by the government of India with an area of 4544 km dominated with the language of Tangkhul. Ukhrul is a mountainous region with abundant flora fauna with moderated climate located 80 km from Imphal City. The area of the study is in Ukhrul District Handloom and handicrafts Co-operative Federation (UDHAHCoF) located in Phungreitang West Ukhrul Town.

Majority of the family still depend on agriculture and still unaware of modern technology but handloom has become an alternative income of the many grass root villager. Women in tribal are self-independent and are willing to take initiative for the improvement of family status and income. Due to the backwardness and underdevelopment, they lack behind in every steps and aspect of life. Handloom will generate job and income and their talents and potential will be displayed.

The methodology of the study

An in-depth face to face interview method has been applied to the study. It was conducted to mainly get the gist of the socio-economic status of the tribal women weavers and their contribution for the empowerment in our society. The sources are both primary data and secondary data will collect informative information. Simple random sampling was used for collecting of women weaver out of the whole population of Ukhurul women weavers. 85 tribal female weavers respondent were selected for the insight information.

The objective of the study

1. To analyze the contribution of women weaver in the community.
2. To examine the socio-economic condition of the women weaver.
3. To investigate the impact of handloom on weaver weavers.

Analysis

1. Age wise distribution of works among the women weaver in handloom sector (UDHACoF)

The Chart-1 shows the age wise distribution of work of the tribal women working in the handloom sector in Ukhurul handloom. The majority of the women weavers respondents fall in the age group of 30-40 (29%) followed by the age group of 40-50 (28%), 20-30 (27%), 50-60 (9%) and 15-20 (7%). This has come to the conclusion that many tribal women prefer handloom weaving and the age of 30-50, they need a lot of encouragement and motivation to sustain and empower women through handloom.

Handloom sectors are a mixture of work, where each woman plays important roles. Weaving form the majority with 50% then comes the following with embroidery with 17%, then tailoring of the finished product with 12% and followed by the

spinning of the wools, cotton, acrylic yarn with 12% and the remaining with a collection of raw material, artesian and

maintenance of the finished product. This whole process generated job and empowered women socially and economically.

Chart 1

Types of works	Age Groups					
	15-20	20-30	30-40	40-50	50-60	Total
Weaving	4	20	15	10	1	50
Spinning	1	2	0	1	0	4
Tailoring	2	4	4	2	0	12
Embroidery	0	1	8	6	2	17
Maintenance of finished product	0	0	0	2	2	4
Collection of raw materials	0	0	0	5	1	6
Artesian	0	0	2	2	3	7
TOTAL	7	27	29	28	9	100
Percentage	7%	27%	29%	28%	9%	100%

Source: Field data

2. Education qualification of women weaver

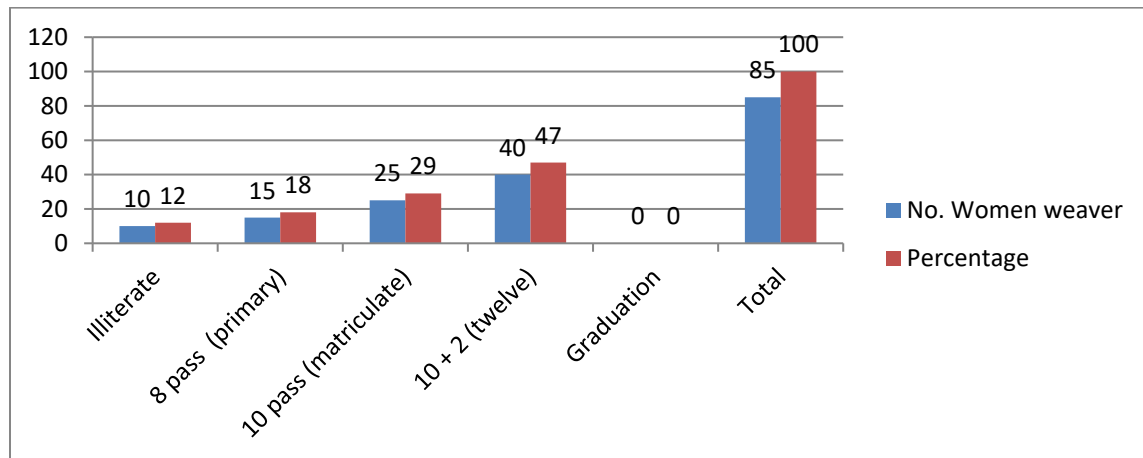
The Graph-1 shows the education qualification of the women weavers in the handloom sector, where 10 (12%) are totally illiterate with no education qualification just experience in weaving followed by 15(18%) with has completed till

primary education and 25(29%) respondents completed till high school or matriculate and the majority of 40(47%) weavers completed with higher secondary respectively. According to the data collection, there were no weavers who have completed graduation. The graph highlighted that working in

handloom sectors does not need a high education qualification, it just a mere of experience and hard working

to earn efficient income with sufficient information and training.

Graph-1



Source: Field data

3. Types of looms and usage: a

Handloom is a simple machine used for weaving. A loom is used to weave cloth and tapestry with the basic purpose to hold the warp threads under tension to facilitate the interweaving of the weft threads. There are varieties of loom machine but the basic function is the same to manufacture textile.

a. Modern Up gradation

Tangkhul Fly shuttle loom:

This loom is commonly used in handloom sector in all over Ukhrul District and is one of the

most demanded loom as it creates the unique attire for the Tangkhul Naga community. The weavers held a picking stick that is attached by cords to a device at both ends of the shed. With a flick of the wrist, its cord is pulled and the shuttle was propelled through the shed to the other end with considerable force, speed and efficiency. A flick in the in the opposite direction and the shuttle was propelled back with a single weaver had to control of this

motion wide fabric with an arm length at many great speeds through hand threw shuttle.

- b. Advance Loom:** Advance loom or Automatic cloth advance system is to make the processing of weaving much easier and less time-consuming. No longer do the women weavers have to break her cadence to manually advance the wrap and adjust the cloth rather it automatically beat and hit the cloth the same position resulting in a constant distance range of 4 to 120 approximately between picks and consistent piece of cloth. It is compatible with A-series, Production, Technical ultimate, folding and AVL40 dobby loom.
- c. Loin Loom:** Loin loom is made from the bamboo and woods. In other words, it is called as back warp yarns are stretched between two parallel bamboos, and the bamboo at the end is fixed to the wooden stick and held firm by the means of straps worn around the lower back of the women

weaver. In the Northeast region, loin loom or weaving is done by the women only. Loin loom consist of (a) Bamboo which serve the same purpose as warp in an horizontal frame loom (b) the bamboo rod act as a lease rod (c) Bamboo shed stick (d) made with bamboo heddle stick to hold the yarn heddles (e) wooden beater (f) leather back strap (g) the continuous warp (h) mat spread on the floor for the purpose of weavers to sit.

- d. Jacquard Loom:** Jacquard loom is a device fitted for the power loom that simplifies the process of manufacturing textile. It was invented by Joseph Marie Jacquard in 1804. Each position in the card corresponds to a “Bolus” hook which can either to be raised and stopped according to the hole punched out of the card. The hook raises or lowers the harness, which carries and guides the warp thread so that the weft will either lie above or

below it and create a pattern where each hook will be connected to a number of threads allowing more than one pattern. The threading of Jacquard loom is so labor intensive that many looms are treaded only once. Warps are tied into the warp with the help of a knotting robot which ties each new treads individually and it takes days to the threading.

- e. **Dobby Loom:** Dobby looms or the floor loom that controls all the warp threads using a device called dobbie (draw boy refers to the weaver's helper who controls the wrap thread by pulling on draw threads). Dobby function in which every warp thread on the loom is attached to a single shaft using a device called a heddle where each shaft controls sets of threads raising and lowering several shafts displaying a wide range of gaps through which the shuttle containing the weft can be thrown. There are two types of

dobby loom, manual dobbie loom, and computer dobbie loom. Manual dobbie loom using chains of bars or lags which is inserted pegs shafts to move. On a treadle loom, each foot-operated treadle is connected by a linkage called a tie-up to one or more shafts. One treadle can operate a single shaft. The tie-up consists of cords linkage tying the treadles to the lams that actually lifts the lower the shafts.

Computer dobbie loom is computer controlled shafts; it is one step further by replacing the mechanical dobbie chain. The construction of shafts sequences is done on the computer screen rather than building a mechanical dobbie chain. This makes easier for the weavers to the design and fabric on the screen by visualizing looking at the dobbie chain.

- f. **Warping Loom:** The warp-weight loom is a vertical loom that has originated in the Neolithic period. Warp threads

are put on a creel and using a warp applied with even tension to a metal warp beam and then brought to the loom with a forklift or crane and put into the position with a cross and lease rods are knotted onto the ends of the previous warp behind the heddles than the reed was slain the first time that pattern was set up. The warp ends are tied onto the apron rod with even tension and the warp materials are measured and secured by bringing loops of warp material through the slits and anchoring them on the warping peg and warp is tied onto apron bar with even tension than warp is beamed on a warping board with one or two crosses choke tied and removed. Moving the leases stick to a convenient spot behind the shafts frames, the warp is cut and the threads inserted into the heddles in the proper order to achieved planned pattern. Warping loom is a time-consuming process and

sequences. The tools and application may differ associated with the design whether to use coarse reed or a raddled or how to hang the lease sticks, whether to use shoelaces or thrums or to use warp chain or a board to chain a warp these all depend on the choices related to the manner of execution.

4. **Types of production:** The Tangkhul Naga people wear a colorful traditional motif, Kashan, Khongsang as their identity. Weaving is considered closely associated with the self and soul. Tangkhul women would spend tedious hours with concentration while weaving and she considers it as her prized possession with beauty and finesse. The Tangkhul people are called the warrior and the wardress consist of the spear, headgears, bangles, breastplate, war tail, horns, shield, armllets, stocking of bamboo, bows and arrows and dao. Their different costumes, utensils, architecture, monuments, and

memorials depict their dexterity in art and rich culture and sense of beauty.

a. Chongkhom (woman wear):

Size (128cm x 212 cm)

Chongkhom is a red shawl of Tangkhul Naga tribe of Manipur residing in Ukhrul region. It is woven by the tribal women using loom Loom with acrylic yarn 2/32s, 2/34s both in wrap and weft. In Tangkhul red color has a major portion its considered with a good omen, which is complemented by a little black and distinctive design of animals and nature. According to a different design, it has a different name like Raivat Kachon (war shawl), Thanwon Kachon, Thangkang Kachon, and luihim.

b. Haora (man wear): It is a mixture of red and white color, worn only by the men of Tangkhul tribe with the size of (130cm x 240 cm²) and is woven by women with the attachment of respect, purity, and emotional connection. Haora means the

originality of tribal Tangkhul people handwoven cloth. It is worn by the head of the family in a special occasion like wedding, luiiru phanit (seed sowing festival), Therleo (harvesting festival) etc.

c. Kashan(women lungi): Size

(42 breath x 64 lengths) it is a traditional garment worn around the waist by the Tangkhul Naga women only. Kashan is worn in different cultural activities, ranging from normal daily life to elaborate wedding ceremonies. Acrylic 1/32s, 1/34s with different colors and design woven by loom. Tangkhul kashan is famous for is a unique design where each kashan has its own story attached to it. Many women weavers in Ukhrul dedicated new design associated with the current social activities. Ancestors have woven many unique designs which have a rich cultural history and emotion connection. Types of lungi are Phila Kashan (Queen Lungi)

Rose Kachan (dedicated to women name rose who was raped by the army and later committed suicide), Seichang Kashan (dedicated to Mithun), Luingamla Kashan (shot death by an army), Zingtaimansingla Kachan (dedicated to the daughter of the goddess Zingtai), Kongra Kashan (dedicated to stream as life giver), Khaora kashan, Ruth kashan(women name Ruth introduce the design), Thangkang Kashan, Zingkangla kashan (dedicated to Suisa wife, Suisa is a charismatic leaders of Tangkhul Naga tribe).

d. Malao(Man Lunge): Size (65cm x 240 cm²) red and black traditional beauty and finesse worn by the male of the family during the festival. It is a small waist wrapper tight around the waistline. It is worn during the phanit (festival) ‘pheichak’. Pheichak occupies an important place in the life of Tangkhul, there are many forms of pheichak like Raiyot pheichak (war

dance), Luivatyot pheichak (agriculture dance), Samkhapyot pheichak (farming dance), Luirayot pheichak (cultivating dance) Kathi Mahon (dance for the death), Mahat pheichak (harvesting dance), laa Kanganui (virgin dance) etc. There many more but is all associated with agriculture life of the tribal Tangkhul people. During this special festival, dance are performed to praise the Almighty by both female and male wearing malao and Kashan.

e. Waist Coat (common wear):

This is called the modern twisted in traditional wear with simple and elegant. Waistcoat with a unique design with a colour mixture of the red, black and white stripe. It has the design of animals and insect-like mafa (elephant) silui kui (buffalo head), kazei (spears), shangkha (tiger), harva (roaster), sira (star) dao (knife), sea shell, hangkhokla (hornbill), kazingkha (lion). It is worn during local festival and

celebration. Material required Nylon and furnished bamboo.

- f. Purse/ Bags (common):** Bags and Purse with traditional design to restore the culture with the identity of Tangkhul Naga. This is introduced to the younger generation to maintain the rich beauty through modern design in bags and lady purse. It required 250 grams of Yarn, embroidery, winding bobbin, heald shalf, winding drum and Tailoring.

- g. Kongsang (common):** Khongang and Huishon (necklace in mother tongue) are traditional ornaments of Tangkhul made from the sea shells, cowries and conch shells. This has a great association that Tangkhul forefathers are from the seashore. The Tangkhul Naga Necklace (kongsang) has 10-18 strings of cowries beads and precious stone Khorum (White Color), Mahara (thin $\frac{3}{4}$ rectangle conch plate), Chamthei (light cloudy orange), Chapung (weaved with white thread)

Khaying (turquoise), Chaminao (small yellow and white beads) and mainly Khaireophei (light brownish color) together made a grand kongsang. It is usually very costly and essential for a wedding. Kongsang is worn by the reach bride in her wedding. Kongsang is passed down from generation to generation from mother to her daughter or to their loved ones. Originally it has three types called the Ngachan Cha – the necklace is made by combining the best cowries beads and precious stones, Lumlao Cha – the necklace is used during the celebration of traditional phanit (festival) and Nagala Cha – the necklace is referred to the smallest traditional necklace.

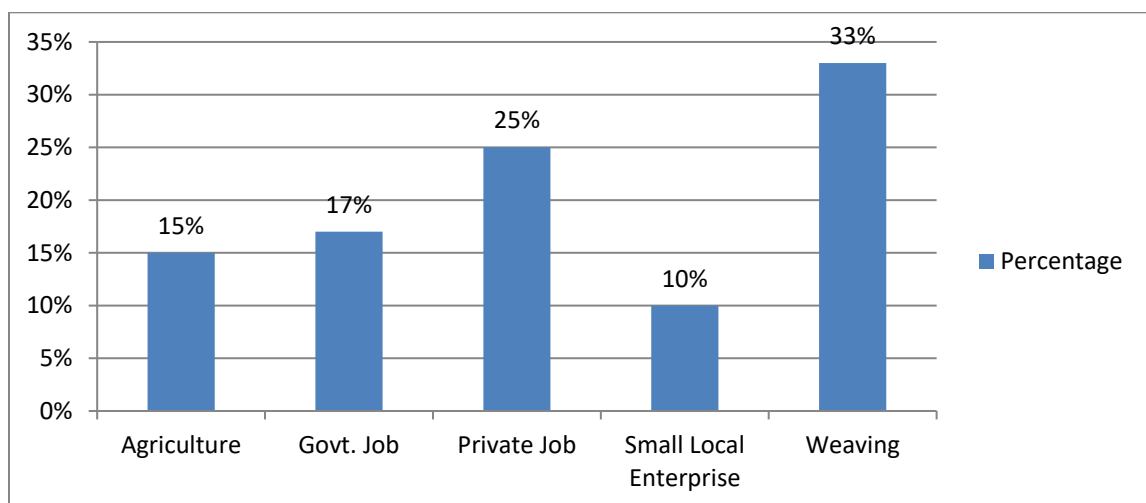
- h. Lokha (man wear):** Lokha wear is a traditional half pant lungi worn mainly at home and during agriculture. It gives relief to the hot weather for the skin to breath. It is worn double twist knot where the one point of the edge is pull in the middle of the leg and

tuck in the back of the waist making it look like half pant lungi. This may not be a traditional attire but commonly worn for the comfort during the hot weather.

5. Tribal Women in Ukhrul Town occupation

Graph-2 shows that different occupation of women in Ukhrul town for their survival. Agriculture with 15% as women in Ukhrul town come from different village to have a better life, agriculture seem much burden and lack of manpower leading to disappearing in farming,

Graph-2



Source: Field data

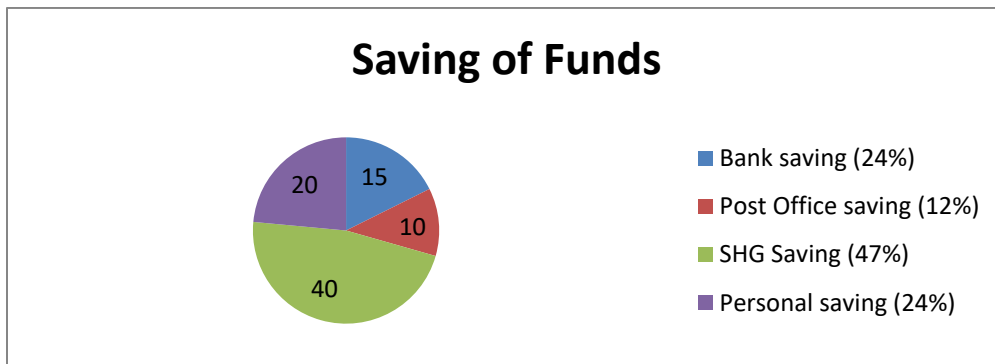
which is followed by government employee with 17% but due to lack of education and facilities women seems to be opting for private job with 25%. Then the rest of 10% are working in the small local enterprises like the vegetable market, small petty shop and local branded handicrafts. The majority 33% of the women in Ukhrul is well equipped with weaving whether it is a traditional or handloom sectors. This has briefly highlighted that tribal women of Ukhrul socially maintain a rich culture of ancestors through weaving and also economically generated income.

Saving of funds.

From the Graph-3 its shows the clear picture of the women saving income from the handloom sectors. A total of 40(47%) women weavers saved their earning through self help group with member of 20 to 30 small group form in the community, local name 'Marup' where leaders are selected with full responsibility and entrusting their money and it is followed by 20(24%) personal saving, than 15(18%) bank savings account and the rest of the 10 (12%)

respondents saved their money in post office. Although it is positive trend to followed and saved money in locally form group **Marup** (friends), many have also faced betrayal from the leaders where money are not returned according to the fixed time duration. The respondents of the women weavers have said no matter where they saved their funds theirs is always a positive outcome.

Graph 3



Sources: Field data

6. Finding

- Majority of the women weaver respondents are of the age of 30-50 with

good experience and high level of potential capabilities.

- Education has no effect on the performance of the weavers, it just mere of hard work and experience (swift and smooth hands).
- 33% of the women respondents are weavers are well paid with a good amount of respect from the society as well economically independent.
- There are varieties of traditional design shawls, lungi, and motifs etc which highly demand throughout the Northeast region as well to preserve one's own culture.
- It has highlighted the brief finding of the history of Tangkhul Naga as well as their culture garments, accessories, art and utensils which are attached with tremendous forefather stories and woven with pride for their love and dear ones.
- Majority of 47% women respondents saved their income fund in S.H.G as they claim that bank or post office saving consume a lot of time and too many paperwork which seem quite difficult for poorly educated weavers so they prefer locally to form a group with 10-20 trusted people called 'Marup' (friends).
- Agriculture seems to be disappearing for the people in Ukhrul town claiming it consumes a lot of manpower with less profit.

7. Suggestion

- Government departments, Ngo's and communities should coordinate to restore the rich culture and maintain the value of ancestor history.
- Women weavers should be trained from time to time to cop up with the new

technologies and adjust with the working environment.

- Women weavers should be made aware of all the program and policies initiated for the development of handloom and welfare of women weaver.
- The work shed environment should be free of pollution, no harassment, free of stress and human suitable place.
- The new design should be motivated to women weaver with target oriented and well-paid incentive.
- Tangkhul Naga traditional attire is bestowed upon by their ancestor so it should be respected and well educated about the past history mainly for the younger generation.

8. Conclusion

Handloom has played a major role in the life of the Tangkhul Naga women weavers, she takes pride in weaving excellent distinctive design and carry forward as a dowry in her husband house. Every Tangkhul women know

how to weave and it is a symbol of feminism with smooth and swift talent hand. It has become a part of the socio-cultural tradition since age and it is still practiced today and well appreciated and has also become another way of earning a livelihood. Northeast region of India enjoys own specific design and motifs where the craft is woven with spiritual belief connected to the forefathers. Handloom and handicrafts are important to home and cottage industry for the Tribal women in relation with the socio-religious function and imbued with their philosophy of life.

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