



# Revival of Khadi Industry in Assam: Adversities and Challenges - A Study

Sukamal Deb<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** Gandhiji in his article published in the Young India, entitled Lovely Assam said, “Every woman of Assam is a born weaver. No Assamese girl who does not weave can expect to become a wife. And she weaves fairy tales in cloth. Some of the old patterns were of matchless beauty. And as I saw these beautiful patterns, I could not help shedding a silent tear over India’s past glory and her lost work”. Although Assam is our Universe of Study, Khadi is made all over India and beyond like Bangladesh and Pakistan, which signifies a common thread of unity in these countries. In the post independent era, Government intervened to develop Khadi. But in course of seven decades this household industry in Assam has gone through many ups and downs. Yet, it sustained itself because of its inherent strength. Khadi is an activity with women monopoly. Although every house of Assam has weavers there are only 7415 registered Khadi artisans who are working with NGOs, called Khadi Institutions that receive Government of India supports. The industry has been finding it hard to absorb the jerk of Direct Benefit Transfer regime. The paper makes an attempt to analyse the situation mostly based on primary data sources. It appears the production vis-à-vis wages that artisans earn are poor which do not help much to their social mobility still these women for decades working on old primitive looms and tools. Yet Khadi, the hand-spun and hand-woven natural fabric, can outlive commercially with supportive policies.

**Introduction:** Assam is hub of amazing rural artisans. Women artisans are engaged in hand spinning and hand weaving. A textile hand spun and hand woven are termed Khadi. Plight of these artisans are untold stories. Hardly any scientific research has been done on this issue so far. One of the most crushing challenges to them is enabling them to scale from livelihood to entrepreneurship. They are largely into livelihood or income generating activities. Very few amongst them are trying to move towards entrepreneurship and enterprise building. In this transformation process, the women entrepreneurs are seeking to move towards greater formalism and compliances, enterprise building, skills and capacities, access to mainstream resources and opportunities to build and sustain their enterprises and businesses catering to more

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. Sukamal Deb, PhD, worked with Govt of Arunachal Pradesh as CEO in State Khadi & Village Industries Board till 2017. From 2018 I have been working with Govt of India in KVIC, Ministry of MSME as Deputy CEO and looking after the works in entire North East Region, India comprising of 8 States. Email ID : [sukamal05@gmail.com](mailto:sukamal05@gmail.com)



demand and markets. This has become more critical in emergence of stringent norms and compliances for resilience building and increasing.

Female Labour Force Participation Rate (FLFPR) in the State of Assam is as low as 23.69 % of national average. Further, the ratio of female employed in MSMEs is low at 9% of the national average in the State. Only 0.54% of MSMEs are owned by women in Assam. Despite all efforts in strengthening and promoting rural women entrepreneurship in the State, still much more needs to be done in this entrepreneurship building of especially the rural women businesses and enterprises. This is true for the Khadi artisans.

Yet, Khadi, the indigenous fabric, once synonymous with the Indian freedom struggle, is now becoming an all-inclusive fashion statement. This hand-spun and hand-woven fabric can be found in India, Bangladesh and Pakistan. In a tropical country like India Khadi offers comfort and it can be moulded into any style from every day wear to formal evening wear (Anita Dongre, Designer). Top designers are highly ambitious about the future of this natural fabric. Designer like Ritu Beri created ceremonial Khadi. Over time, Khadi has become more versatile, while youth today relate it to the spirit of patriotism at home; it has made its niche globally for its natural environmental friendliness. Recently it came in the Economic Times that American clothing brand Patagonia Inc. has ordered 30,000 metres of Khadi denim fabric to use in its ethical clothing line. US apparel maker Patagonia sourced Khadi Denim worth INR 1.08 Cr from Arvind Mills through KVIC tie-up. Udyog Bharati, a KI, Gondal, Rajkot had this deal.

For Gandhiji Khadi was symbol of self-reliance, sustainability and hard work. For decades it has silently contributed to the rural economy of Assam in a meaningful way. But contributions of these traditional artisans are yet to get recognised appropriately. History of Khadi in Assam is fascinating. Gandhiji in his article Lovely Assam said, “Every woman of Assam is a born weaver. No Assamese girl who does not weave can expect to become a wife. And she weaves fairy tales in cloth. Some of the old patterns were of matchless beauty. And as I saw these beautiful patterns, I could not help shedding a silent tear over India’s past glory and her lost work” (Young India). In other parts of India Khadi was initiated by Gandhiji as a weapon to fight the British, for rural self-sufficiency, as an ethical skill, but in Assam meaning of Khadi ran much deeper than that and beyond the stretch of time. It is an activity with women monopoly.

In the post independent era, Government intervened to develop Khadi. But in last seven decades this household industry in Assam has gone through many ups and downs. Yet, Khadi sustained itself absorbing shocks because of its inherent strength. The much euphoria about the Khadi is far from the reality. News that is heard, Khadi, a brand, with global presence is hyperbolic, made it a slogan to earn creditability which is not truthful to the case of Assam.



**Objectives:** 1.To assess the status of Khadi in Assam; 2. To investigate the socio-economic status of the artisans; 3. To examine if this craft is relevant in the present era of changes and 4.To investigate into the steps taken to strengthen Khadi in Assam;

**Literature Review:** Khadi an environment friendly pursued in decentralised mode is an apt tool of development. This textile represents India's self-reliance, legacy, tradition and pride of rural productivity. Khadi is skin friendly fabrics that breaths. It has a long history. Dating back to the 12 Century A.D. Marco Polo described Khadi of the Bengal region as finer than a spider's web. The Romans were also great admirers of the Bengal Khadi Muslin and used to import great amounts of fabrics. During the Mughal period, the weavers of Comilla, Bangladesh were known for their distinctive skill and were reported by the Tripura Gazetteer in 1890s. Down the lane, the masterly expertise in Khadi got relegated, yet efforts are on in Bangladesh to keep alive the legacy of one of the finest traditions.

**Khadi in Assam:** Gandhiji said "Maidens of lovely Assam weave poems on their looms". In Assam it contributes significantly in restoring the age-old rich tradition, her culture and the deep-rooted social fabric. Assam is a land where tea is an industry, handicrafts a major occupation. People in rural areas are mainly engaged in primary sector and sometimes all the family members. As a result marginal productivity of labour is almost zero or even negative. Although there is hardly any Assamese home where traditional weaving is not connecting their lives officially there are only 7083 registered artisans who are engaged in Khadi activities. They work through NGO called Khadi Institutions (KI) that receives Government of India supports through Khadi & Village Industries Commission (KVIC).

Though our study focused on Khadi, we quickly update the status of Handloom in Assam which unlike Khadi uses mill span yarn to weave textiles. As per Handloom Census more than 14.01 Lakh weavers and 11.11 Lakh looms are available in Assam. Besides more than 16.43 Lakh weavers and allied workers work in Handloom sector. Thus there are about 30.44 Lakh persons involved in Handloom. Assam has the monopoly in the world in respect of Muga, the Golden Silk, production as more than 97 percent of it is produced in Assam. The State has also achieved the right of Geographical Indicator for Muga thread. The State produces about 56 per cent of Eri Silk in the country. This woolly vegan silk is also known as *Ahimsa* (Peace) silk as processed without harming the silkworm inside. The staple fibre, coarse, fine and dense in texture makes it durable and strong. It has thermal property which is warm in winter and cool in summer. It is organic, natural and eco-friendly. This silk is found mainly in North East India and some parts of Japan, China and Thailand. The name derives from Assamese word "era" which means "castor" as silkworm feed on castor plant.

Assam is blessed with rich fauna and flora suitable for producing all three varieties of silks, viz., Eri, Mulberry and Muga. It is said that the art of Eri silkworms rearing,



spinning and weaving was introduced by Bodo indigenous people, a tribe in Assam. Eri sericulture is a land based labour intensive activity with potential for generation of productive employment on a large scale especially for tribal women. The total area under Silkworm Food Plants recorded increased to 33790 hectare in 2013-14 from 26826.5 hectare during 2012-13. The production of Silk in the State was 2700 MT and production of Eri raw Silk was 2545.6 MT during the year 2013-14. As per a report the State Department of Handloom and Textiles covers 13576 villages (total villages 26393) under its 209 Handloom Demonstration Circles with 1316163 weavers for its Handloom activities. The 98 Weavers Extension units and 20 Production Centres produced 65.3 thousand metres of Handloom fabrics during 2013-14 (Economic Survey of Assam 2014-15).

The Muga culture, though, has been thought to have migrated along with the Tai Ahoms in 1228 AD from the “Punj Kong” village of Northern Burma belonging to the Shan state of Mungur from where the name Muga has been derived (Phukan, 1998). However, nothing is known about the status of Muga culture there today. Muga culture was patronised in Assam by Tai Dynasty (Ahom). The Muga culture is as old as 700 years and has become indigenous practice in Assam and NER over the years. The Muga silk is the costliest silk variety with unique characteristics such as natural golden yellow colour resistant to acid, the durability of more than 50 years and high UV rays absorption and strength. The following table indicates Raw Silk production in five districts of Assam (Kokrajhar, Chirang, Baksa, Tamulpur and Udalguri, together called Bodoland Territorial Council)

| <i>[Production in MT]</i> |         |       |          |
|---------------------------|---------|-------|----------|
| Year                      | Eri     | Muga  | Mulberry |
| 2011-12                   | 369.00  | 4.20  | 1.40     |
| 2012-13                   | 400.00  | 4.50  | 2.00     |
| 2013-14                   | 588.00  | 8.00  | 3.60     |
| 2014-15                   | 707.00  | 12.00 | 6.00     |
| 2015-16                   | 746.65  | 14.14 | 9.25     |
| 2016-17                   | 914.34  | 24.55 | 12.45    |
| 2017-18                   | 1090.00 | 35.80 | 17.00    |
| 2018-19                   | 1200.00 | 36.00 | 17.40    |
| 2019-20                   | 1369.00 | 38.00 | 10.95    |
| 2020-21                   | 1413.99 | 38.00 | 7.65     |

Source: Director of Sericulture, Bodoland Territorial Council, Kokrajhar, Assam, 2022



The Government's intervention to promote Khadi in the State rests with KVIC and Assam Khadi & Village Industries Board (AKVIB), two statutory organisations. KVIC was established through an Act of Parliament in 1956, and the AKVIB was through an Act of the State Legislature in 1955. These organisations primarily work through KIs, registered under Society's Registration Act, 1860 and certified by the KVIC.

From the performances of last decade we find the status remained more or less static. The findings of Pesala Busenna and A. Amarendra Reddy in "Khadi & Village Industry: A Case Study of KI in India" said, "KI in West and North Eastern Region (NER) are financially weak, and their annual turnover is mostly less than INR30 Lakh. Most of the KI suffer from the shortage of working capital" the report said.

History witnesses that the NER's isolation began earlier due to British imperialism, when the Region was cut off from its traditional trading partners (Bhutan, Myanmar & Indo-China). Still, throughout its history, the NER is known to have been an important physical and cultural bridge between India and South East Asia. Although this isolation imposed on NER has spread deeply adverse effects on this Region's development pace, her trade routes were snatched without serious thought to her prosperity. Defeating these compulsions, Khadi is widely accepted in the South East Asian markets.

**Methodology:** The study aims at understanding the status of Khadi in Assam. Social science research is an enquiry or investigation with clearly defined parameters. The study is based on primary as well as secondary data. Information from the artisans and organisations was collected about core indicators. Structured questionnaires were applied. Secondary data was cross-verified wherever possible between various statistics.

**Universe of Study:** Although Assam is our Universe to study Khadi, this textile is not weaved in India alone but also in Bangladesh and Pakistan. This may remind us that once these nations were single. Khadi could be a common thread that binds us emotionally with deepening attachments if unity motivates us. Bangladesh and Assam are geographically contiguous, with deep cultural and socio-economic identities among the people.

Assam is in the NER, bordering seven Indian States and countries like Bangladesh and Bhutan. The population of Assam is heterogeneous with socio-cultural and ethnic diversity, which stands at 312.06 Lakh. It is 2.6 per cent of the population in India (Census, 2011). The State's geographical area is 78,438 sq. km or 2.4 per cent of the country's area, of which 98.4 per cent is rural and 86 per cent live in rural areas. Assam is potentially one of the richest geographical units of the country, where the mighty river Brahmaputra slashes a central path between its north and south,

The population dynamics of Assam have two basic components, dynamics through natural processes and dynamics through induced processes. Individual State focussed



researchers testify to the above statement (Panda, 1988, Rai and Goel, 1984). Regarding the natural growth rate of population during 1971 - 81, all the states in the NER registered higher growth rates than the rate for the whole country (Butola, undated P.32). The same trend continued during the period 1981-91. The increasing population pressure led to linkages between the quality of life, population dynamics and environmental degradation. During this period, the average annual exponential growth rate was 2.12 per cent against the national rate of only 2.11 per cent. It is believed that the influx of people from neighbouring countries has a bearing in it which has contributed to altering Assam's demographic characteristics.

**Data analysis:** 7083 registered artisans in Khadi production A of Federation of KI was established in 1981 to serve common needs. The following KI are functioning in Assam.

| Sr. No. | Name of Khadi Institutions / Year of establishment                 | Artisans |
|---------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|
| 1.      | Assam Khadi & Village Industries Board, Guwahati / 1955            | 1196     |
| 3.      | Dakshin Kamrup Samagra Bikash Parishad, Bijayn agar, Kamrup / 1978 | 753      |
| 4.      | Gram Swaraj Parishad, Rangia, Kamrup/ 1975                         | 630      |
| 5.      | Gram Lok Seva Sangh, Dhamdhama, Nalbari /1976                      | 877      |
| 7.      | Mouman Seva Ashram, Boko, Kamrup / 1944                            | 210      |
| 8.      | Balijana Anchalik Jana Seva Samity Agia, Goalpara /1976            | 156      |
| 10.     | Barkhola Gramodyog Society, Borkhola, Cachar/1990                  | 40       |
| 11.     | Sarbhu Gram Seva Sangh, Machkhowa, Dhemaji/1996                    | 80       |
| 13.     | Anchalik Gram Unnayan Parisad, Jania, Barpeta /1986                | 70       |
| 14.     | Beeneez A Social Development Society, Sibsagar / 2008              | 130      |
| 16.     | Bogidol Khadi & V.I. Development Society, Sibsagar/1981            | 145      |
| 17.     | Kasturba Seva Mandir, Tezpur, Sonitpur /1963                       | 57       |
| 18.     | East India Rural Development Association, Nalbari / 1984           | 83       |
| 19.     | Fulguri Ansolic Khadi Gram Udyog Trust, Fulguri / New              | 166      |
| 18      | Brindabani Gramin Bikash Trust , Satpakahli, Kamrup / New          | 33       |
| 19.     | Human Resource & Development Society, Rupahihat, Nagaon / New      | 622      |
| 20.     | Horizon Welfare Society, Guwahati / New                            | 73       |
|         | Total                                                              | 7083     |

Out of the above, around 600 artisans reportedly have shifted to other menial works. These KIs receive Government funds. To enable them to receive funds and to ensure the Khadi they produce are genuine, the KIs are guided by the KVIC's Regulations like Khadi Certification and Khadi Mark Certification. This mechanism checks the sale of spurious Khadi. The Government supports artisans through Market Development Assistance (MDA) to keep the price under control. From 2017-18 Direct Benefit



Transfer (DBT) scheme was introduced to regulate MDA. However, the DBT regime is not affable to the artisans. They complain that DBT is not handy for rural and illiterate women for its stringent norm complexity of online banking. There were no social security schemes for the Khadi artisans. In Oct. 2017, KVIC introduced Group Insurance Scheme called “*Aam Admi Bima Yojana*” for the artisans. This provides insurance coverage against natural deaths up to INR 30,000 and INR 75,000 on accidental deaths and disablements. During 2019-20, a total of 4444 artisans got covered.

Out of 4744 KIs in India, Assam has 19 (0.4 per cent), of which only a few are performers. Most of these KI were founded in the sixties at the pioneering initiatives of a few committed persons inspired by the Gandhian ideology. These institutions have silently contributed to the cause of rural reconstruction over the decades. However, these grass root organisations have been underestimated with the change of time and outlook importance.

#### **Field visits and interactions with artisans:**

**Barkhetri Unnayan Samity:** Visited on 23-09-2018. It was founded to rehabilitate the villagers after the river Brahmaputra washed away around twenty villages. Founder Secretary Umesh Medhi and President Sisher Paul Medhi initiated the rural reconstruction works. Their efforts carried forward the legacy. Today it has an artisan base of 710, almost all women. Four artisans, Renu Baishya, Golap Jan Bibi, Sahane Bibi and Monirisha Bibi of this KI, received national awards in the year 2007, 2013 and 2016.

#### **Interactions with artisans of the Mukulmua area on 23-9-2018:**

Village Narua - I - The village has around 1000 families. Borkhetri Unnayan Samity has an artisan base of 250 in this village, weavers 51 and spinners 199. The improved looms available only in a few weavers’ families were distributed in 2007- 08, designed by IIT, Guwahati requires immediate replacements. The spinners mostly use traditional spinning using *Takli*, dropping spindle, which fetches marginal income. The village has a high school, LP and ME schools, and a Health Centre found not functioning. The MLA is Narayan Deka.

Parul Das (40) is a weaver who works 4 to 5 hours daily on a loom, earning INR 3000 a month. Tillotoma Das (42) is a weaver who works on a loom for 5 to 6 hours a day, earning INR 4000 a month. Jamuna Das (46) is a weaver earning around 3000 a month. Khiroda Das (40), a weaver, works 7 to 8 hours daily on a loom, earning INR 4000 monthly. Her husband is a Mason who earns INR 7000 a month; their 2 daughters got married, the eldest son studied BA, and the other is a class - X dropout. These artisans were supported by KVIC, providing work sheds, each worth 25000 grants, 8 years back.





Monumati Das (35) is a *Takli* spinner earning INR 1000 monthly. Her husband is a day labourer having three daughters and a son, the eldest one reads in class - IX.

Village Mukulmua:

Gita Das (40) is a weaver who works 5 to 6 hours daily on a loom, earning INR 4000 a month. Her husband works in Home Guard Department; her daughter reads in class - X, and her son in class - VIII. KVIC gave her a work-shed worth INR 25000 around 8 years back. Komola Das (53) is a widow, a spinner earning INR 800 monthly. She is the mother of three sons and one daughter, the eldest son is a Mason, and the daughter is a cow herder. Radhika Das (40) is a spinner earning INR 700 monthly. She was sad about not receiving assistance under the work-shed Scheme. She lamented for not possessing a loom, else also could have enhanced her income.

Village Tegheriattary has 300 families, including 50 Spinners who still cling to Khadi productions but said in common that many families in the village are quietly deserting their age-old spinning as it fetches only marginal remuneration. They said those who opted for other livelihoods had attained better economic conditions. Minoti Deka (30), a spinner, tries her hand on an old ramshackle spinning wheel set designed by the Central Silk Board. Her husband is a farmer, her son reads in class - III and her daughter is three years old. She earns 900 a month. KVIC gave her work- a shed worth INR 45000 grants four years back. Mina Deka (50), a spinner, tries her hand on an old spinning wheel set designed by the Central Silk Board. Her husband is a driver. She has three sons: one works in a private shop and is a car mechanic. She earns INR 800 a month. KVIC gave her a work-shed worth INR45000 five years back.

Met Niru Kalita (44), a spinner for three generations, struggled due to soil erosion of River Brahmaputra. After 14 times moving around for lasting settlements, they have settled at village Tapabori, Nalbari district, and built a work shed with KVIC's assistance.

**Mouman Seva Ashram, Boko, Kamrup (Rural):** This KI was founded by Subhas Chandra Das (who died in 1983). His wife, Praffula Bala Das (who died in 2020) carried forward the activities. Paran Jyoti Das, BSc, now carries forward the institution's mandate. The institution possesses 150 bigha land (1 bigha is 2508.38 sq. m) after donating 50 bighas to Vinoba's Bhudan programme. There are 210 artisans, all women, from nine villages like Chamaria, Bhalukata, Monmar, Jarapara, Chatabari, Choygaon, Kurhala, Paneri and Virpara. They mostly belong to the SC community; a spinner earns INR 600 and weavers INR 1200 a month on average by working 3 to 4 hours daily.

**Dakshin Kamrup Samagra Bikash Parishad, Bijaynagar, Kamrup:** Visited on 18-08-2018. It operates in two villages, Borihat and Sikarhati. Artisans work on Eri Muga, and spinners work on *Takli*. Some families earn as high as INR 4000 a month. Khushalaya Das (55) of village Sarpara, Vijoyanagar, said her monthly earnings is just





200; she produces yarn from the wastage of Muga cocoon. It is disheartening to see the condition of their looms. The looms are made of the battle-nut trunk as they cannot afford to buy a wooden one, which costs around INR18, 000. The conditions of the loom are so decrepit, and weaving on these looms is miserable, they said. We found conditions of the looms of most of the weavers are the same. Also, the spinning wheels and other toolkits narrate the plight of the artisans.

**Fulguri Ansolic Khadi Gram Udyog Trust, Fulguri Sikarhati, Kamrup:** A young girl (20), class - XII pass, Padma Thakuria, initiated this KI in 2017. Kundan Rajak is the President. It started with an artisan base of 49 weavers and 196 spinners.

**Jaiprakash Narayan inaugurated Tamulpur Anchalik Gramdan Sangh (TAGS), Kumarikata, Baska,** in 1964. Founder was Rabindra Nath Upadhyay. TAGS is the biggest KI in NER. KVIC granted a training centre to TAGS on Khadi weaving. There were 300 Gramdan villages, and pieces of training were imparted to the women of these villages.

(all rupees are in Indian currency, INR)

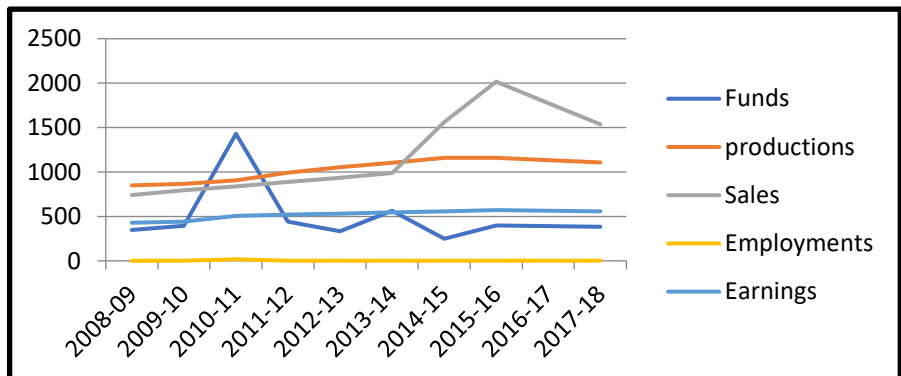
| Year    | No. of KI | Funds   | Productions | Sales   | Employment | Earnings |
|---------|-----------|---------|-------------|---------|------------|----------|
| 2008-09 | 19        | 346.64  | 849.41      | 740.09  | 0.15       | 429.05   |
| 2009-10 | 19        | 393.64  | 866.74      | 793.68  | 0.17       | 441.31   |
| 2010-11 | 36        | 1429.30 | 907.55      | 838.51  | 0.17       | 504.50   |
| 2011-12 | 37        | 441.17  | 992.83      | 886.31  | 0.18       | 519.48   |
| 2012-13 | 39        | 334.19  | 1055.08     | 935.51  | 0.19       | 532.42   |
| 2013-14 | 31        | 563.98  | 1105.90     | 988.09  | 0.19       | 544.45   |
| 2014-15 | 32        | 248.42  | 1159.77     | 1563.00 | 0.19       | 555.48   |
| 2015-16 | 32        | 399.14  | 1159.77     | 2016.43 | 0.19       | 571.15   |
| 2016-17 | 32        | 391.77  | 1132.89     | 1775.72 | 0.19       | 564.08   |
| 2017-18 | 34        | 384.40  | 1106.00     | 1535.00 | 0.49       | 557.00   |

Source: Annual Reports, KVIC, Ministry of MSME, GOI for 2008-09 to 2015-16 & 2017-18

**Kawli Area:** The village Paschim Chandra Nagar received the fury of the Bodo movement in 1989. The Khadi Production Centre got damaged. The KI received funds from BFW and OXFAM in 1980. At least four units were working, which had been



abandoned for a long. We interacted with artisans to understand the plight of their suffering and joblessness. They are Rita Mandal Sarkar (50), Renuka Das (57), Nirola Bagchi, Astina Sil, Sadhana Chakraborty, Kokila Biswas (30), Mukuti Mitra, Buran Chakraborty, Shanti Bala Das, Minati Sarkar, Kalpana Sarkar, Aruna Bala, Maya Rani Das, Sumitra Das, Sweata Mandal, Sakuntala Mandal, Pramita Hazda Saha. Their jobs need to be given back. The status of funding vis-à-vis output of KI of Assam, including AKVIB for the last ten, are as above.



The above graph explains the status of Khadi for the last decade. Earnings, employment and production have been stagnant. Moreover, barring 2010-11, funds received from KVIC have not shown a progressive increase.

**Interactions with Research Scholar:** I Interacted with Ms Haimanti Sarkar, Textile Designer, Bolpur, Santiniketan, West Bengal. She has completed her under-graduation in Textile Design from the Visva-Bharati, Silpa Sadana, and pursuing a post-graduation in Soft Material Design from the Indian Institute of Craft and Design. As a part of their curriculum, she did a two-month internship with KIs in Assam in October 2022. During this internship, she noticed that handling a bulk quantity of natural dyeing is difficult. To address this issue, she recommended introducing a dyeing machine familiar with the Amber Charkha concept. The machine can enhance work efficiency and quality of dyeing. She said a semi-automatic multipurpose machine is already designed and developed. Her area of interest is weaving on unconventional fibre, natural dye, craft and sustainability. Her findings remain important.

The handloom sector works mostly on small quantities, i.e., 1 kilogram to a maximum of 5 kg for a particular shade. Therefore, no batches are also increased to achieve a particular target that takes more time than usual. For fabric, it works on 11-13 meters as a batch for fabric running meters. Maintaining the proper dyeing condition (Temperature, chemical concentration, material circulation) while dyeing by hand is



very difficult. Due to the small quantity, purchasing, installation, and operating cost of the commercially available hank dyeing machines (traditional Hussong hank dyeing machine, Clauder-Weldon machine, Mezzera MTB, Venus hank dyeing machine) are very costly for these tiny units. Purchasing and installation cost INR 6 to 8 lakh, with fuel consumption per day for 8 hours shift of 50 to 90-litre diesel to operate a maximum of 150-kilogram material dyeing (minimum INR 350 per shift). Boiler cost for the entire steam heating and boiler is also non-sustainable. For winding, a separate machine arrange is required and similar for dyeing, though both machines consume more floor space for the total operation.

**Findings and Recommendations:** Khadi has its deep rooted connection in Assam, this is an inherent strength. Khadi artisans, mostly women, work with decrepit tools and equipment, and their wages are low. So they cannot have better looms etc., of their own. The role of KI in supplementing the rural economy, preserving culture and creating livelihood for the vulnerable at their place in an eco-friendly way deserves appreciation. There are KI that was founded before independence and silently contributed meaningfully over the decades, but for lack of adequate support, they are quickly becoming sick.

The industry has been finding it hard to absorb the jerk of the DBT regime. They were not given time to prepare them. We captured the words heard from their mouths. A separate set of rules at the side-line of the DBT regime need to be put in place for them for at least five years as neither there is an adequate banking network nor are these artisans trained on online banking operations. It appears the production vis-à-vis wages that artisans earn are poor, still these women have been for decades working. Their earnings need to be enhanced by providing improved tools, and creating a working ambience like a work-shed, electricity, water, sanitation, hygiene, road, connectivity etc. The demands of their products are high. In our consistent investigations, we never heard about a dearth of the market. So, Khadi can outlive it commercially if supported.

We have encountered, taking advantage of very nominal institutional support to the artisans, intermediaries, who do not adhere to ethical business standard, has already made entries to these areas, luring the poor artisans by offering wages in advance, sometimes supplying spurious raw materials, are succeeding to weave a net of exploitations in the form of a debt trap. In fact, public fund investment to promote Khadi has remained very scarce and complex to avail. This is not a threat to rural economy alone but to Assam's rich culture and heritage.

**Conclusions:** Khadi has the strength to become a meaningful economic activity for the rural people, especially women, who else would remain unemployed. The number of registered artisans is just 7083 for many years. This explains that there has been something wrong with the support system, especially when compared with the number of handloom sector artisans. When the demand of Khadi textiles has been increasing



consistently, there is an urgent need to comprehend how these amazing artisans can be supported the way they deserve. The State Government need to display wisdom by augmenting the efforts of the Central Government. The concern is to bring their wages to a significant level and, on the other hand, to let them scale to entrepreneurship.

The existing monitoring mechanism is weak and does not help generate a realistic picture of employment, production, number of functioning units and utilisation of government assistance. The existing KIs should be strengthened and more such institutions should be created. Their needs have to be felt, we need to act accordingly.

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## Project Photographs:



ISSN (Print Version) 0975-3931  
ISSN (On Line Version) 2278-1277



Khadi production at Kawli Area deserted after 1989, Photo on 12-07-2018



Khadi weaving loom of poor artisan need immediate replacement Photo on 10-07-2018



Khadi spinning implements reflecting the poor state affairs Photo on 10-07-2018



Gramdan Sangha, UNICEF project once Khadi production unit need revival Photo 28-10-2018





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ISSN (On Line Version) 2278-1277



Poor artisan managed to make her loom from battle nut trunk as a wooden one can't afford  
Photo 10-07-2018



Inside weaver's house with paddy husking equipment & spinning wheel depleted economic condition 10-07-2018



Khadi unit at Kawli Area can be revived with Govt. support , deserted after 1989, Photo on 12-07-2018



The long used traditional decrepit spinning wheel & other implements needs replacement,  
Photo 10-7-2018



ISSN (Print Version) 0975-3931  
ISSN (On Line Version) 2278-1277



A traditional artisan in Khadi spinning on improved loom, Rangia, Assam Photo on 04-08-2018



KVIC introduced improved tools and equipment needs to put in optimum use, Photo on 07-09-2018



KVIC established Yarn Testing laboratory at the premises of TAGS, Kumarikata Photo on 12-07-2018



Khadi Mark Certificate to TAGS in 2015, KVIC steps towards building brand image Photo on 12-07-2018





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Improved warping drum for Khadi Weaving in Khadi Institution at Rangia, Assam, Photo on 04-08-2018



Improved New Model Charka provide by KVIC to Khadi Institution need optimum use Photo 07-09-2018



With artisans of minority community at Pragatisil Khadi Samity, Kalitakuchi, Kamrup on 12-08-2018



Signboard of Fulguri Ansolic Khadi Gram Udyog Trust, Fulguri founded by a 20 years old girl



ISSN (Print Version) 0975-3931  
ISSN (On Line Version) 2278-1277



Mrs. Niru Kalita, artisan victim of repeated soil erosions, KVIC provided work-shed photo 12-11-2020



Oneday interaction Program on promotion of Khadi in Guwahati in Feb, 2022, organised by KVIC