

CHAPTER – VI

TRADITIONAL TEXTILES AND WEAVING PRACTICE OF ASSAM

6.1 Evolution of Weaving in Assam

Clothing is one of the most important primary needs of human being. This relation of mankind with clothing is the relation with his body and soul. To know human culture clothing plays a very vital role. It is due to the fact that clothing not only covers our body but also covers the vast arena of human culture. It is clothing that expressed the tastes and choices of people. As mentioned earlier during the stone age people used to wear bark and dry skin of animals to protect them from heat and cold. With the progress of human civilization this place has been occupied by handloom weaving. With the passage of time people have learnt to apply different colours in wearing. This resulted in coming out of multicoloured and beautiful clothes. Thus it has been noticed that with the change of motives of the people there has been a great deal of changes in taste of choices. Likewise there has been changes in culture also. Side by side the pattern of day to day life of people has gone under great changes. Culture has become dynamic. This human culture nicely reflects human thoughts, tastes – temperament, beauty, the tradition and so innovative thinking. This evaluation of many weaving cultures has tremendous effect on culture and life.

It is known that Chinese queen Lingchi discovered the silk clothing five thousand years ago. From China this weaving of silk cloth transported to Rome. It is also known that some prince of Kashmir married a Chinese princess and the prince is said to have brought silk cocoons to India. The tradition of silk and *Muga* cocoon has been old culture of every Assamese household. (Manirupa Mishra Article *Asomiya Janajibanat Tat shal*, Souvenir, 2011)

The costume is one of the basic needs of mankind which may lead men to weave textile. Today, costume is a marked characteristic of any culture. The fashion in dress is as interesting as any other fact of human self expression. The

taste and tendencies of an age are clearly indicated by the type of costumes of that period. When spinning and weaving culture entered in Assam is still a mystery. From historic evidence, it may be assumed that the textile culture came into the Brahmaputra valley from western and Eastern side. The allusion of Assamese textile in different sculpture, inscriptions, manuscript, folk song, ancient literature like the Ramayana, Mahabharata, *Harshacharita*, *Kalikapurana*, *Yoginitantra* proves that the craft has been prevalent in this region from very past. The sculpture gives an idea of dresses before 14th century. In that period, the Assamese male wore *dhuti* as a lower garment and *Uttariya* used to cover upper part of the body. They did not use *chola* (shirt) and only kept a *paribiyasa* an waist. (Ref - Bibliography)

According to *Kalikapurana*, written in 19th/10th century, the textile materials of this provinces can be divided into four groups eg –

- a) *Kapaha* – It was made from cotton yarn.
- b) *Kambal* – It was prepared by wool yarn or animal hair.
- c) *Balka* – It was made by bark and fibre of trees.
- d) *Koshaj* – It was made by silk yarn obtained from cocoons.

The *purana* also stated the use of linen of Flex (*tichi* or machine) and Hemp (*shansuta*) yarn. The Hemp cloths were in deep red colour and known as ‘*shanak*’. (Ancient Assamese costumes & Designs (HRDC) Ed. Dr Jayanta Deva Sarma, 2015, p13)

The Tripura Buranji provides information about the variety of the textiles used in Ahom period. The Assamese costumes were determined in the Ahom era. During the reign of Rudra Singha (1696-1714) A.D. the royal attire for men was the *churia* (a kind of *Dhuti* made of *muga* worn such a way that the part of the cloth hung in folds in front of the monarch), *chola* (shirt), *Jama-chapkan chola* (Frock type coat made of cotton or *muga*), *Paguri* (Turban) *Buku chola* (Tunic) and *Cheleng chaddar* while the women wore two pieces of cloth i.e. the *mekhela* (lower garment) and *riha* (upper garment). Rudra Singha first introduced Mughal

dress – *pag, jamaand ijar* in Assam and faced severe criticism from his ministers. The Ahom attire influenced the people associated with the *satras* (a devotional place of Vaishnavism) of Assam. The Assamese ‘*Satradhikar*’ (Vaishnav Priest) wear dresses like that of the Ahom ministerial or kings. Initially, the Ahom people used black coloured dresses. But after they entered Assam, they opted for white coloured *dhuti-chola*. (Saikia, 2004, p.19) The Ahom soldier wore *Kalia kapor* (black dresses) in war. The black colour is prominently seen in the costumes of the *Khamti, Turung, Nara* and *phakiyal* that belong to the Tai group. (Mazumder Labanya, 2013) The turban and *cheleng-chadar* expresses the social status of Ahom. From high rank official to low categories all used turban in Ahom kingdom. Majority tied a piece of cloth called ‘*Fachou*’ on their head. The style of dresses like *Basawl* (waist cover), *Tangali* (a cloth girdle) and *Hashati* (hand towel) changed when Ahom came into contact with Chutiya and Bhuyan. These three items were adopted initially by the Ahom king Dihingia Raja from the Barabhuysans of North bank after shifting them to the South bank in 1505 AD. Long shirts were generally used by king and members of their ministerial. But the size, style and colour of the shirt varied according to their status. Though Assamese women wove all sorts of cotton and silk cloths, the Ahom king did not allow complete freedom to all sections of the people to use dresses and ornaments as they liked. The costumes made of *muga* and silk were not allowed to be worn by common people. The Bhaga Raja allies Churampha prohibited the use of gold ornaments and gold embroidered clothes by the ordinary people. The ordinary male used *bhumi* or *dhuti* as their lower garment and ‘*pacra*’ or *cheleng* (light wrappers) as upper wear. Moreover, the common man, i.e. the *paik* was not allowed to wear *dhuti* reaching below his knees. It was the privilege of officers, *Satriyagosains* and such other aristocratic people to have the favour of putting on *dhuties* wide enough to cover the knees. The common people also wore *Mirza chola* or *Fatowa* (a chest open T shirt cover up to waist) which was not allowed for *Karhi-paik*. At the time of war, Ahom soldier wore *Athur* (a kind of *churia*), *chola* (comfortably made for war), *turban, tangaali* and *Kabash* cloth. (Sarma 2003, p.38) It is also worth mentioning that, the Ahom frequently battled with the Mughal. During the reign of Rudra Singha many Mughal elements came into the

Assamese textiles. It is believed that the most exquisite brocade work known as '*Kingkhabs*' were executed here from that period. The '*Kingkhab*' is actually a inter weaving of coloured silk and gold threads to form an attractive floral motifs.

6.2 Various kinds of Textiles in Assam

The Assamese costumes may be classified into three divisions –

1. Textile of Ancient Age
2. Textile of Middle Age and
3. Textile of Present or modern Age. (ibid)

6.2.1 Textile of Ancient Age

In ancient age cloth was known as '*Achwadan*' (a cover). In this period male wore '*Aka-bastra*' (one cloth) an unstitched cloth, which was called as '*Adhobastra*' (lower apparel). It was tied tightly round the waist. The higher class people, used '*Uttariya bastra*' (upper apparel) in addition to '*aka-bastra*'. They also used paguri (turban).

The female wore both '*adho-bastra*' and '*Uttariya bastra*'. The '*adhobastra*' was worn round the waist and covering down up to heel. On the other hand, the '*Uttariya bastra*' worn coiled round the upper part of the body from breast to loin of women. (HRDC 2015)

6.2.2 Textile of middle or medieval age

In medieval period, the stitched cloth-shirt first began to be used by different kings, officials and other aristocratic and high ranking people. (Choudhury 1959, p.133) The dresses were made of cotton, *eri*, *muga*, mulberry silk, *tassar* and wool. Sufficient quantity of woollen clothes were imported every year to Assam from the neighbouring hill states particularly from Bhutan.

6.2.3 Textile of present or modern age

The costumes used in medieval age like *Mekhela*, *chaddar*, *riha*, *cheleng*, *dhuti*, *gamocha* are still in use in day to day life of the people. The fashion style and aesthetic test of modern man gives completely a new shape of the old traditional costumes. The traditional costumes are regular used in rural but in urban it is used only in different festivals and rituals. (Sarma 2006, p.148) Textile production is essentially a feminine craft among the Assamese plains except in the Hajo circle where men also undertake weaving commercially. Cotton textile is commonly produced by the weavers in the area under study. *Eri* silk yarn is used occasionally to weave *showls* for use in winter, *Muga* silk yarn are not within the rich of the common weavers. Silk weaving is less common as a household craft in the area. It is in this region that silk weaving is undertaken on extensive scale. But in recent days varieties of polyester yarns are gaining popularity in recent days in the area under study.

6.3 Brief explanation of the Textiles

The traditional costumes used in the plains of Assam and in Kamrup and Hajo are presented in Table and described below as a whole within a common framework –

Table – 6.1 Major Textile Items produced Traditionally by the plain Assamese and weavers in the study region

Sl. No.	Name of Textile Item	Approx. size in meter	Use
1	<i>Dhuti or churia</i>	3.60x1.15	To cover the lower part of the body. Worn commonly by Hindus
2	<i>Mekhela</i> item of female dress for lower part of the body	1.35x0.90	To cover the lower part of the body from waist down to the ankles
3	<i>Cheleng kapor</i>	2.75x1.25	Shoulder cloth. Generally worn by bridegroom as part of the wedding dress.
4	<i>Chadar/Upreni</i> (The wrapper)	2.75x1.25	To wrap over <i>mekhela</i> alone, or <i>riha</i> and <i>mekhela</i>

Contd... Table-6.1

5	<i>Eri chadar (Eri shawl)</i>	2.75x1.35 for men 2.00x1.00 for women	It is a traditional winter garment
6	<i>Riha/Angron (Breast cloth)</i>	3.25x0.70	To use on top of the <i>mekhela</i> , covering the breasts and upper portion of the body. An important item of married women's dress on ceremonial occasions
7	<i>Khania kapor (large cloth of fine arn)</i>	5.50x1.50	A cloth with socio-religious significance. Not for general use.
8	<i>Barkapor (large cloth of Eri yarn)</i>	5.50x1.50	As shawl/blanket in winter
9	<i>Gamocha/Mukhcha (Towel type cloth)</i>	1.50x0.80	As towel. An indispensable part of Assamese life and culture
10	<i>Anakata (ceremonial and sacred cloth)</i>	Variable according to the nature of item	Different items for use as <i>dhuti</i> , <i>chadar</i> , <i>saree</i> , <i>gamocha</i> for wearing in specific socio-rituals occasions
11	<i>Lungi (an item of men's dress)</i>	1.25x0.90	To cover the lower part of the body from waist down to the ankles. Now-a-days extinct
12	<i>Fata-kani-kapor/Talpara or Kani katha (cloth made partly of discarded cotton cloth)</i>	2.40x1.35	As bed cloth and also as a substitute for a blanket in poor families
13	<i>Paguri</i>	0.40x3.00	Used as head gear by the men in ancient time
14	<i>Tangali (Girdle)</i>	0.70x1.50	Young boys tied red <i>tangali</i> on their waist when they performed <i>bihu huchori</i>
15	<i>Hachati</i>	0.35x1.00	Old person use it for holding betel nuts
16	Shawl	1.25x2.75 and 1.00x2.25	Used to cover the upper part of the body by both men and women

Data collected during field survey and Data collected from some published books.

All the costumes has been woven in the study region and a brief disruption has been given below-

Churia or Dhuti

It was an unstitched main male dress in medieval age. It was 8 to 16 cubits long and from 2 to 2.25 cubits wide. It was plain and free from any decoration. A few ethnic groups were woven *endi-dhuti* for cold season. The cloth was worn round the waist and hanging down to the knee or below it. At the beginning, this 'churia' or 'dhuti' was held tight round the waist with a sort of girdle called 'parivesa', which was also known as 'Komarbandh' (like modern belt). In this period, the higher officials, the head of the satras and Brahmin used silk and *muga churia*, which extended below the knee. In religious function or to worship of God, red coloured silk *dhuties* were mostly preferred by priest. According to the *Guru-charit*, the 'churia' was called as 'Bhuni' (Chandra Kanta Abhidhan, 1932, p.801). The size and wearing style of *dhuti* vary with the social status of man.

Mekhela

In medieval age it was the main female dress. It was worn round the waist and covering down to the ankle-joints with giving 2-3 plaits in the front. It was worn in combination with chaddar. When it was worn round the breast and covers down to knee then the style was called 'methoni mara' which followed by different ethnic groups of Assam. The idea of 'mekhela' originates from the Vedic word 'Mekhola' (Neog, 1965, p.26-27). Though the two ends of this piece were stitched but initially it was an unstitched cloth with 1.35 x 0.90 meters in size. It entered Assam by the Tibbeto Barma (Kachari) and Ahom. (Saikia 2006, p.25) Different traditional motifs like *Kalka*, *mogar*, flower, creeper, tree and butterfly were found in *mekhola*. Generally, *mekhelas* were woven with cotton, *muga*, *eri* and silk yarn and called as *Kapahi* (cotton) *mekhela*, *Pat* or *muga ba Mugar Uka* (palin mulberry silk or muga) *mekhela*, *pat-muga* or *kapahi phulam* (mulberry silk, *muga* or cotton floral) *mekhela*, *gunakata mekhela* (adorned with golden or silver threads) *mezangkari mekhela* (woven with *mezangkari* silk), *gomcheng mekhela* (woven with a kind of fine Chinese silk), *Khing-khap mekhela* etc. (Mazumder Labanya, 2013, pp.83)

Ghagra, Ghuri and Ijjar

Like other part of India, the *ghagra* was a waist cloth used in different theatrical performance i.e. *bhaona* and band singers. *Ghuri* was a skirt like lower garment. Material used for *ghuri* is pat silk yarn. The *sutradhara* of *Bhaona* and *Gayon Bayan* or *Yoja* (the members of the band of singers and dancers) wore *Ghuri*. The dancer was called 'Natua' in the satras. The ordinary dancers who take participate in Bihu dance also used *Ghuri*. It is adorned with a border of floral design at the lower.

Alongwith *ghuri* the *Satriya* dancer used *Kanchi* a waist gear. It is an accessory of the waist. It is made of three U-shaped pieces joined together by a band at the waist which is stitched to it. It is adorned with borders of floral designs.

Cheleng

It was a white plain longitudinally woven sheet of cloth. The cloth was six cubits in length and 3 cubits in breadth having the two ends embroidered with *muga* yarn or golden thread or other coloured thread or sometimes without any decorative work. The one end of these costumes was hung to the front over the left shoulder taking it across the back under the right arm and hung over the left shoulder to the back. In medieval age it was a popular costume amongst the male. The silk *cheleng* (*patar-cheleng*) was worn by bridegroom as part of the wedding dress.

Chadar/Upreni

The *chadar* (popularly called *upreni* in Lower Assam) is an unseen item of Assamese women's dress. It is worn in such a fashion that one part wraps the upper part of the body while the other part is draped over the *mekhela*. Married women use the free end of the upper part as a veil over the head. Wearing of *chadar* (along with *mekhela* and *riha*) has distinct connotation of decency and modesty in plains Assamese culture.

The *chadar* traditionally of the size 2.75 x 1.25 metres is generally woven out of fine cotton yarn, occasionally blended with rayon and acrylic yarn in present days. *Muga* and *pat* silk *chadars* were also woven by the Assamese weavers till very recent years. These days such *chadars* are not produced much in the home looms. Like silk *mekhela*, the production of silk *chadars* now is largely a commercial affair in silk producing centres at Sualkuchi and other production centres. The design used in *mekhela* is woven in the *chadar* to make a complete set. But *chadars* are also woven as separate pieces to go with any *mekhela chadar*.

Eri-chadar (Eri shawl)

Eri-chadar is woven out of *eri* silk in the size 2.75 x 1.35 meters for men and 2.00 x 1.00 metres for women. It is used as a shawl in winter. *Eri-chadar* is an important item of textile among the plain Assamese as well as many other neighbouring communities. It is very much in demand in the entire Northeastern region. The hill tribals of the neighbouring region covet *eri-chadar* very much. This way, it may be regarded as an element of inter-cultural unity.

Riha / Augron

It is a fairly thin cloth of approximately 3.25 x 0.70 metres size. *Riha* is a typical and traditional item of women attire. It is worn as a wrap around the upper part of the body usually beneath the *chadar* to cover the breast region. A part of the *riha* is tightly passed over the loin region and tied around the waist. Worn this way, the *riha* is supposed to tend to the shapeliness and agility of the frame. In the olden days Assamese women did not use blouse and hence, *riha* was the formal breast cover. For most of the women *riha* is not part of everyday wear these days. *Riha* with its distinctive mode of wearing, makes the dress of an Assamese woman graceful. It is an important item of bridal attire. It is also much valued as an item of dress of married women on ceremonial occasions.

Riha is woven out of cotton, *muga* and *pat*. Rayon is also used occasionally with cotton. *Riha* is popularly called *augron* in Lower Assam. The latter is generally made of cotton. Geometric arrangement of lines and bars with

different colours in ribbed pattern (called *Kech*) are the traditional ornamentations used in *Riha*. Floral paisley and geometrical designs worked with dyed cotton yarn) or gold threads are also used as ornamentation.

Khania

It was a double folded wrapper having flowered border or golden thread (*guna shutar phull*) at the end of one fold, instead of cotton yarn. It was altogether 12 cubits in length and 3 cubits in breadth. The decorative works had been seen at the two ends of *Khania* cloth with *muga* and golden thread. Sometimes *eri* yarn was also used in making of this cloth. Designs with geometrical motifs, flowers, trees, creepers were woven with *muga* or golden thread as cross-borders. Small motifs also used as *butis* for additional ornamentations. In medieval age, the higher officials or high-ranking people, both male and female used *Khania* woven with silk yarn. The *Khania* used by female is called as “*Pakhila Ura Kapor*”, which used over *riha* instead of *chadar* at the time of social and religious occasion, (Barua Bhuyan 2003, p.24) it was a costume that the married Hindu women present one *Khania bastra* to the *satra* to her ‘*Guru*’ or God. This is required as a mark of respect for the *Guru*’s or God. Such offerings are made on other occasions also. It is moreover, a piece of fabrics with distinctive status connotation. Traditionally it is considered most appropriate for a newly married girl to present a *Khania-barkapor* to her in-laws as a token of respect. It is pertinent to mention that *Khania-Kapor* and *barkapor* are typical textiles of the Upper Assam region. These are not commonly woven in Lower Assam homes. (Ancient Assamese costumes & designs (HRDC Ambari, 2015, Ghy-781001)

Barkapor

It is a large coarse cloth, woven out of course cotton, *eri* or *muga* measuring 5.50 x 1.50 meters. It is used in winter as a shawl or blanket being folded in two layers by men as well as women. Based on the raw material used, it is named *Kapahi-Barkapor* (when woven out of cotton yarn), *eri-barkapor* (when woven out of *eri* silk) and the *Jutha-barkapor* (when woven out of *muga* silk

waste). *Barkapor* is generally not ornamented. Occasionally cotton specimens are decorated with bold cross, borders. Where so decorated it is called *phulam-barkapor*. Reference to this cloth in Assamese folk songs indicate that it has an important culture significance. Though the costume was not ornamented but occasionally design worked at one end of the cloth. The weaving of such a large piece of cloth is regarded as an achievement and the weaver is appreciated for her feat.

Gamocha

Gamocha is basically a textile item which is used to wipe the body and face. But it is a piece of cloth, having multiple uses and meanings. *Gamocha* is an indispensable part of Assamese life and culture, intricately and intimately woven into the social fabric of Assam. It is not merely an item of multipurpose physical convenience. Its services extend far beyond the body into the sphere of mind and soul (Das N.D). It has come to acquire distinctive symbolic significance in the non-tribal plains Assamese socio cultural life. In many rural Assamese homes, weaving of *gamocha* is a must even if the loom is not used for other textiles. The women also lavish considerable care and attention in weaving intricate designs along the cross borders of *gamocha*.

Gamocha is woven out of mostly 40s, 60s cotton. Occasionally 2/80, or 2/100s Cotton are also used. It is woven invariably in white with red as side and cross borders. Floral designs are woven as cross border at one end. The other end is finished with a plain border of the same colour. Use of colours other than red in the boarders is often noted in lower Assam. The cultural importance of *gamocha* can easily be appreciated from the different names it has, one for each of its varied utilities.

Gamocha of the size 1.50 x 0.70 meters is used as a towel. It is called *gamocha* (popularly called *mukhcha* in lower Assam) in general. The small piece of *gamocha*, generally the last piece to come off the loom is called *hachati*. It is used as handkerchief or napkin. It is very handy for carrying betel leaf and areca

nut by men and women when they travel or go for work out of the house. The *gamocha* of the size 2.00 x 0.90 meters is used as an item of men's casual dress to cover the lower part of the body as a loin cloth. *Gamocha* is also used as a girdle named *tangali* and turban called *murbandha* (in lower Assam) on ceremonial occasions. It is woven generally in the size 2.00 x 0.50 meters.

The *bihuwan* and *tangali gamocha's* position is highest among the *indigenous* fabrics of Assam. As the name implies *bihuwan* derives its importance from its association with *Bohag-Bihu* (also called *Rongali bihu*), the most focal and lively of the festivals of Assam. It is the festival in which the onset of the Assamese New year, beginning in the month of *Bohag* (mid-April) is celebrated. On such occasion, respect for elders, affection for the young, love between young men and women blossom into ceremonial expression. That expression takes the form of a presentation of the *bihuwan*, however poor a family may be usually *gamocha* is woven at home by the womenfolk. Weaving of *gamocha* before the celebration of *Bohag-bihu* is special feature of Assamese culture. It is still a distinctive practice prevalent in the rural people of Assam.

In the original concept, *tangali* represents the love of the mother for her warrior son and the wife for her husband going to the battle field. It was believed that this piece of cloth, where every thread is charged with potent love of a mother or a wife, would protect the son or the husband from dangers in the battlefield. At present *tangali* has acquired a new significance as another type of *bihuwan* (*bihu* gift). It graces the waist of the *bihu* dancer as a girdle. *Gamocha* is used as a turban cloth by men on such festive occasions with the flaps flaunting at the side. The *gamocha* now-a-day has become an additional item of dress. On festive or ceremonial occasions, it is neatly folded and worn around the neck. Further, it is customary to offer the *gamocha* to distinguished guests invited to the socio-cultural and religious functions. The *gamocha* is widely being used as an item of cultural identity of the plains Assamese. It would not be wrong to say that *gamocha* has become a visible symbol of Assamese ethnic identity.

There is also a sacred side of the *gamocha*. It is woven with all purity for the purpose of using on the *thapona* (altar) in the *namghar* (prayer hosue) of the Assamese *Vaishnavites*. In such cases it is called *Gosain-Kapor* Gods cloth). It is decorated with designs, rationally meant only for this cloth. These clothes are either red with ornamentation in white with designs in red. The *thoga* (wooden book rest), on which the *Kirtana* and the *Bhagawata*, the sacred books are placed, must be covered with highly decorated *gosain-kapor*. Not only in *Namghar*, in Assamese Hindu homes also, *gosain-kapor* is used at the household altar. It is customary to offer a new *gosain-kapor* to the God in the Assamese New year's day during *Bohag Bihu* festival.

In the recent years, *Rongali-bihu* celebration, with which *gamocha* is closely associated, has changed its rural character. From the village green, the festival has reached towns and cities. But in such environments also the *gamocha* has its place secured. It is used as a flag, hoisted in community *bihutolis*. The *gamocha* culture is very much a part and parcel of urban Assamese life too and *Bihuwan* is very much in vogue in urban homes.

Anakata

Anakata literally means 'un-cut'. In the loom, the standards of yarn at both ends of the woven fabric are not cut when the weaving is over. Instead the woven fabric is freed from the loom by loosening the knots from the reed and other accessories of the loom. Only one piece of *auakata* cloth is woven at a time in a loom. *Anakata* cloth may be a *chadar*, *dhuti*, *saree*, *gamocha* or a *bihuwan* each having its cultural significance in different socio-ritual occasions among the Assamese-Hindu people of Assam and in Hajo.

A lot of hard work goes into weaving this cloth. Further, this has to be woven very smoothly, evenly and without causing any damage. It has its significance as ceremonially pure cloth called *yatrar-Kapor* and is prescribed with care.

Traditionally, a new born baby is first wrapped in an *anakata* woven for the purpose. *Anakata dhoti, chadar, gamocha* are required on ceremonial occasions such as *chura-karan* (the ceremony of tonsure) and *Upanayan* (the ceremony of investiture with sacred thread) among the Brahmins and at wedding among all castes. There is a genuine need for preserving the tradition of weaving such culturally valuable textile items that can never become commercially available.

Chola (shirt)

In medieval period, men used different kind of shirts. But, the women-folk when began to use blouse or other jacket type cloth, it has, no any definite records. However, in the book- '*Puraani Asamar Silpa*' (Handique, 1959: 57) stated the use of a kind of blouse with long hand and ornamented with flowers off golden threads. Generally, aged women worn long sleeves blouse. (Ahmed 2006, p.65) Instead of that the women also used a round-necked and half sleeved blouse where the ends of the sleeve adorned with a border of floral motifs. The history reveals that the Ahom king Rudra Singha first brought to Assam the specimen of shorts of different colour and design from different provinces of India. Probably, Muslim women first introduced stitching cloth, amongst the Assamese people. They prepared '*Anchali chola*' (a shirt for a region), male shirt and *Oronikani* (a veil cloth for women). (Phukan 1987, p.30) The king, ministers and other high officials began use shirt which known as '*chauga*' and '*chapkan*' in the style of the Moghals. Different types of male shirt used in medieval period were – *Enga-chola* (it is a tunic type vestment, reaching to the knee). This type of long Robe generally made by *muga* cloth. *Buku-chola* (it reaching to the waist and the sleeve were extended up to the elbow, *Mijai-chola* (a sort of coat or jacket like the *buku-chola*), *chapkan* (a kind of *surcoat* (over coat) or robe reaching to the knee, used by the officials only. The Ahom king also used *chapkan* made by *kingkhab, majankari* and *gomseng* silk yarn which decorated with golden thread), *chauga* (it is a cassock like drapery, worn over the *chapkan*), *Rupar-beridia-chola* (a kind of costly shirt bordered with silver worn by kings), *Jama-chola* (an ornamental shirt used by bride groom), *Phatuwai* (an ordinary type of shirt popular among the

common people), *Gom-chengchola* (this type of shirt was made with fine Chinese silk having designs of followers like those on the body of the snake called *Gom*), *Jali chola* (net type garment) *khara chola*' (this garment impregnated with alkali), *Hallow chola* (the grandmother of Assamese family generally used this type of sleeveless *hallow chola* (a maxi type short) under *riha*, *chadar* and *mekhela* to cover her whole body. (Ancient Assamese Costumes & Designs, HRDC, 2015, pp.18)

***Tangali* (Girdle)**

The *tangali* was a piece of cloth about 4 to 5 cubits in length and about 2 (two) cubits in width. The ends of cloth extremely ornamented with coloured threads. It was a waist wrapper worn by males or used as belt to gird the waist and the two decorated ends suspended on the front. It was made from varieties of silk such as mulberry silk, *muga* and *endi*. Sometimes cotton yarn also used in *tangali* (west band). The two ends of *tangali* trimmed with fringes besides having floral motifs. The young boys tied red *tangali* on their waist when they performed *bihu huchori*. The white *tangali* was one of the special value added clothes used in satriya dances. The front of the *tangali* beautified by *dohi* knitting. Some people called *tangali* as '*Anna kapor*'.

Hachati

The *hachati* was a small narrow cloth having 1 x 1.5 foot size. Man used it for holding betel nuts. The lining of *hachati* was called a *pakharutang* prepared by joining of different pieces of coloured cloth to keep the betel nuts.

Lungi

It is a sewn men's dress worn commonly by Assamese Muslims in Sarong fashion. Weaving of *lungi* is a common feature among Muslims in the rural areas of Assam. The cloth out of which the *lungi* (1.25 x 0.90 meters) is sewn is woven out of dyed (mainly green) cotton yarn in 1.80 x 1.25 meters size.

***Fata-Kani-Kapor/Talpara* or *Kani Katha* (cloth made partly of discarded cotton cloth)**

It is thick cloth of the size 2.40 x 1.35 meters approximately. It is woven out of coarse cotton yarn in warp and fine strips of old discarded *dhuti*, *chadar*, etc. as weft. It is called *fata-kani-kapor* in Upper Assam, while in Lower Assam is named as *talpara* or *kani katha* cloth beneath the bed sheet, but it also serves as a blanket in poor homes. This practice of utilizing even discarded material for producing such an economically important item is a traditional feature in rural Assam. It is still widely prevalent in rural homes.

***Swal* or Scarf**

It is an upper garment used by both male and female during winter. One end of the shawl is kept on the left shoulder and the other end covering the back and the chest finally kept on the left shoulder. It may be of various kinds. Some have adorned with a border of floral design woven on all the four sides of the garment. Some *endi* shawl used by males is devoid of any ornamentation. Some shawl are adorned with a boarder of intricate floral design on both ends. The size of the shawl worned by female is length 2.16 m and Breadth 0.89 m. shawl worned by male is 2.75 m length and 1.25 m breadth.

In addition to the traditional textile item stated above the weavers in the region areas even used to produce in their looms the bed sheets, the mosquito net cloth, pillow covers and *aar-kapor* etc. The practice has since been on the verge of disappearance. Presently the weavers mostly weve vabrics which are of great commercial viability i.e *Mekhela chadar*, *Riha*, *Shwal*, *Gamocho* etc.

6.4 Looms and Accessories

The Loin loom and throw-shuttle loom (also called country loom) constitute the traditional type of loom in Assam. These looms have very simple devices, but each type possesses certain special features. In ancient times the fly-

shuttle loom is not widely used in rural homes of Assam. A brief description of the looms used traditionally in Assam is presented below –

Loin-Loom

The loin-loom is the common loom used in the hill areas of Assam. This loom is very simple, portable and convenient to erect and dismantle. The concept texture of the cloth woven in a loin loom and its intricate designs are the most important factors for which the loin-loom has still not lost its popularity. It would be mentioned that the loin-loom is widely used by the hill tribes all over northeast India. In fact it is a part and parcel of the tribal textile tradition. In the plains, it is still retained to some extent, by groups which migrated from the hills in the past i.e. *Tai-Phakes*. The loom has no frame or super structure, but it consists of two vertical bamboo poles between which another bamboo pole is kept horizontally. Few pieces of stout bamboo and wooden rods of varying thickness with a wooden beating sword are used as the accessories of the loom. Such types of looms are not available in the study region.

Throw-shuttle Loom

The throw shuttle loom is the most common and traditional loom used by all communities in the plains of Assam. The accessories required for the existing throw-shuttle loom are very simple and can easily be made out of indigenous materials, mostly bamboo and wood. As such it is easily accessible to the rural folk of Assam. The frame on which, the loom is suspended consists of stout posts which are driven into the ground forming a rectangle. The posts are joined at the top by cross beams. The other parts of the loom are the warp and cloth beams, reed, slay, pulleys treadles, temples, shuttle etc. Unfortunately such types of looms also extinct from the region due to the commercialization of the industry.

Fly Shuttle Loom

As the traditional weaving practices has been converted into commercial weaving the fly shuttle loom has entered the homes in the rural areas of Assam.

The ordinary throw-shuttle loom fitted with the fly-shuttle slay has however become popular among the weavers in the region.

It has been marked that use of fly-shuttle loom is more popular among the weavers in the region. Factors like easy availability of fly-shuttle loom and the awareness of the rural people about the merits of weaving in this loom have contributed towards its popularity in the villages. Besides, the loom itself the major accessories traditionally used in weaving in the region are –

1. *Letai*: A small cone-shaped device to wind yarn while sizing prior to warping.
2. *Chereki*: A truncated cone-shaped bamboo frame, used as a device to place the hanks.
3. *Ugha*: A small bamboo frame, shaped like an elongated barrel. It is an indigenous device to wind the warp yarns.
4. *Chiri, Sali*: A few bamboo splited sticks flat and round used for different purposes during the process of warping, weaving and for ornamentation.
5. *Rachbhara*: An awl to pass the yarn through the reed.
6. *Bao-chunga*: Bamboo pipe approximately about 35 to 40 cm in length and 8 cm in diameter. It is used for drafting the healds in the indigenous process.
7. *Yatar (Charkha)*: The winder mostly used to wind the bobbins for weaving.
8. *Maku*: The shuttle to pass the pick across the warp-shed.

The old looms their constituents parts and accessories were often decorated by carving the different sections into animal and floral shapes and were lavishly painted with indigenous colours. The loom and the accessories still have their socio-cultural significance. It has been found that the status of a family in the society is often judged by how old are the looms and accessories that the family possesses. An old loom continuing in a family is regarded as an heirloom. Use of ivory shuttle in the olden days as mentioned by Baruah (1963: 132) indicates the glorious past of the textile tradition in Assam. (Labanya Mazumder 2003, p.106)

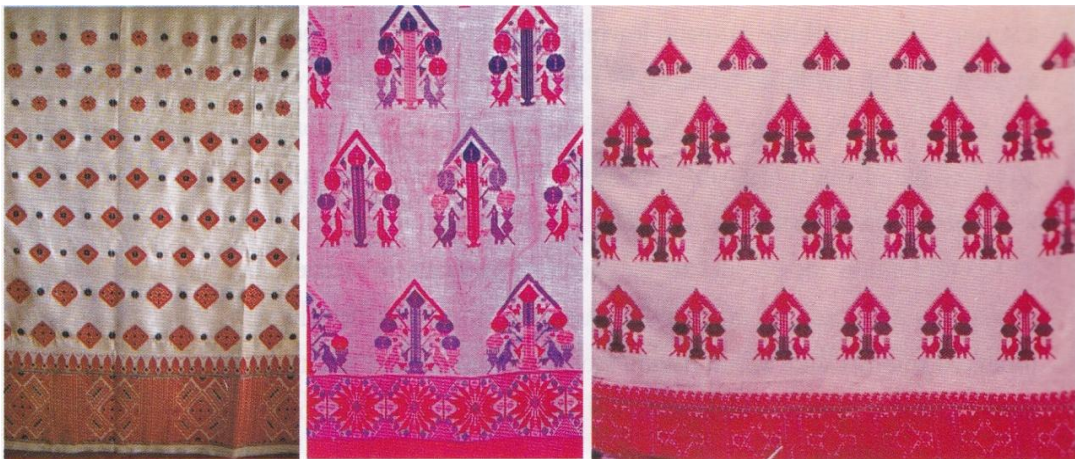
Photo Plate No. 6. 1 : Traditional Textiles



Dhuti



Kingkhap Mekhela



Decorated Mekhela



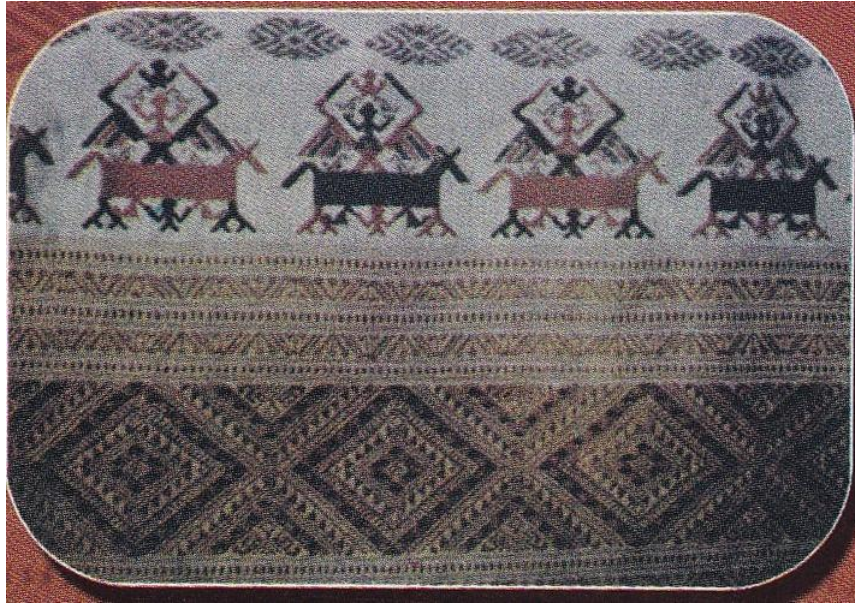
Pat Cheleng



Pat Chadar



Cotton Chadar



Kania Kapor



Plate 71 Gosain-kapor with traditional design

Gosain Kapor



Bar Kapor



Anakata



Gutmali



Angur



Parijat lata



Mokardama Phul



Parijat Mala



Krishna Yasoda



Gulanha Lata



Aparajita



Sankha Chakra Lata



Bahari



Mokardama Phul



Nayantara



Lungi



Tangali



Hasati



Ghuri



Gosain Tapana

Photo Plate No. 6.2: Different Types of Shawls

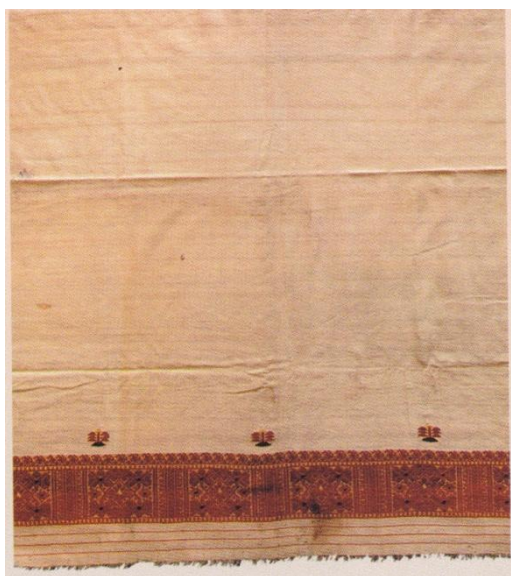


Photo Plate No. 6.3: Modern Textiles







Khasi Dhara



Karbi Pecoek







Modern Strive Design

6.5 Designs and Motifs

The term design is used to convey different meanings. In a broad sense the term implies a composition produced by integration of different elements for some specific purpose or intention. Design in a general way is divided into five broad categories, viz, naturalistic, stylized, geometric, abstract and structural.

Naturalistic designs are those that are drawn from flowers, leaves, plants, animals, landscapes etc. The motifs are kept realistic to provide an authentic image of nature. In stylized designs the motifs do not exactly maintain the image of the natural object. Usually, the lines are simplified and conventionalized. At Sometime the lines are also distorted.

Geometric designs are based on the true forms of circle, square, triangle, rectangle, diamond shaped etc. Endless variations and combinations of these basic geometric forms are used. Although many geometric designs are derived from nature, these cannot be easily related to their respective natural sources of inspiration. The term symbolic is applied to such arrangements. The use of symbols to express ideas thoughts or wishes is termed as symbolism.

Abstract designs are mostly based on geometric forms, yet the abstract implies an element of impressionism and a greater freedom as compared to most geometric designs. The designs are called structural when the structure of an object forms the design. Simplicity is the main feature of structural design.

Ornamentation of handloom fabrics in the region is done in the loom itself and embroidery as a mode of ornamentation is not commonly found. However it is evident from historical records that embroidery with the needle was introduced in the Assamese textiles with the advent of Muhammadans. This particular type of needle embroidery, once famous and practiced till recent past, is called Karchip work. It is done with flat silver thread and generally on fine cotton cloth (traditional Assamese textiles in which ornamentation is done on the loom itself and with Karchip work respectively Picture)

Not only decorative motifs or designs, colour too plays a vital role in the textile tradition of Assam. But indigenous weavers produce attractive designs of various shades in different textile items. The emphasis on weaving attractive designs has always been a characteristic of this craft in the region. The creative urge of the women and their eye for beauty found expression in embellishing even such a simple, functional piece of textile like *gamocha* as discussed earlier with captivating motifs and designs. The talent of the Assamese weaver to be able to reproduce on fabric even the design that appeared in a dream is thus, the theme of an Assamese folk song:

“Moromor dighadi senehar bani loi

Hepahar achure boa

Swaponar phulere, phulam mor bihuwan

Mondi ebeli loa.”

Which literary means “oh my beloved, do take the *bihuwan* with all your heart; have woven it with the warp of my love and weft of my affection. It is bordered with my lender desire and adorned with dreamy flowers.”

The term traditional is often applied to motifs and designs which have been handed down from generation to generation without losing their original characteristics. These designs are mostly geometric and symbolic in nature. So far as ornamentation of textile is concerned, the designs refers to the arrangement of motifs or units either as border, *buti*, *butia*, all over pattern or other regular or irregular plans. This chapter deals with the motifs and designs used by the indigenous weavers in Assam for ornamentation of textiles. An attempt is also made to give an illustrative presentation of traditional motifs and designs.

The handloom fabrics of Assam are known for their various indigenous artistic designs. The designs are brought out by means of employing an additional layer of dyed yarn or gold and silver threads depending on the base material. These extra yarns for design normally float over the main interlocking of warp and weft. This traditional technique is called the extra-weft technique.

The motifs and designs in the traditional textiles of the region are unique and distinctive in many ways. These are found to be indigenous in their source of inspiration and carry specific meaning and significance in the socio-cultural life of the people of Assam. No professional designers is found there. The traditional weavers imagined the designs and motifs and are adopted by themselves in their looms. Motifs and designs of distinctive characteristics emanated from different sources and cultural backgrounds have also played a significant role in shaping the character of motifs and designs among Assamese weavers.

Objects of nature constitute the main source of inspiration for motifs and designs used in the ornamentation of textiles in the region. To embellish these objects in weaving, these are simplified conventionalized and to some extent distorted. Thus, the textile motifs in the region are more stylized than naturalistic. The very large number of motifs and designs found in different textile items, old scraps of design and in old design catalogues in the course of field investigation are grouped in four categories viz., Floral and plant motifs, Animal motifs, structural motifs and geometric motifs. The cognatic perception of the diverse elements of physical environment is clearly manifested in these motifs. It is not merely a matter of cognition, but also a reflection of the ability of the weavers to select those items that can be rendered artistically in textile through weaving. Some of these motifs and designs are plotted on graph.

6.5.1 Floral and plant motifs

The floral and plant motifs offer unlimited scope for the adornment of textiles. Flowers from the simplest and smallest configuration to those with well-defined petals are found in the textiles of Assam. The simplest floral motif found is a small circle or dot with short radiating lines on all sides. This seems to be most popular in the region. Some of the common flowers such as *Champa* (*Michelia chamnaca*), *Gutimali*, *Nahar* (*Mesua ferrea*) etc. are mentioned clearly in Assamese folk songs which is related with traditional weaving. *Aou-phul* (flower of *Dillenia indica*) is found to occupy a vital place in the textile design in the study area.

Big bold flowers in stylized and geometric forms, which used singly as buta or as a unit in the design, are often found in the textiles in the region. Some of them are categorized as wild flowers without any specific name. It is regarded as a symbol of success. It is still used in the *Golaban* (presently called aronai) which has the distinct cultural significance. *Padum* (lotus) and *golap* (rose) are two flowers commonly found in the textiles produced traditionally in the region. These two flower motifs are however never used in *mekhela* traditionally since these are generally used in fabrics of religious importance.

A design consisting of many flowers combined in a large spray, (Labanya Mazumder), is the most common traditional design in the region and are used even in present days also. Similarly *gach* (plant) and *lata* (creeper) are abundantly used in the textiles in the area. Varieties of *gach* designs from simplest configuration to the most intricate ones, are suitably used as *butas* (motifs) in the textile items produced in different areas under study. These plants are so stylized that no specific name can be given to them. The *gach* design combined with the bird motifs is often termed as *Miri* design (the design of the Miris, now called Mising). But it is interesting to note that on the contrary this design is not at all popular among the Misings.

The leaves of castor (*era*) plant and wood apple (*bel*) also occupy an important place in the textile design of Assam. Rearing of *eri* silk cocoon is a common feature in the rural and tribal areas of the state. As such patches of *era* plants (leaves of which are fed to the *eri* silk worms) are invariably seen in the compounds of rural households. Looking at the attractive shape of the *era* leaves, the indigenous weavers must have been inspired and adopted the leaf in their textile design. The design is named *era-patia*. *Bel* is a sacred plant for the Hindus and its leaves are highly sanctified. Leaves of *bel* constitute an important item in *shakta* mode of worship among the Hindus. The trifoliate arrangement of *bel* leaves has thus, found its way into weaving as a motif in fabrics used in religious occasions in the plains of Assam and in the area under study.

The running motifs called *lata* (creeper) is used as textile design either singly or along with other motifs. The simplest form of *lata* found traditionally is named according to the number of Kathi (the picks of the design). *Chata Kathir lata*, *rata kathir*, *lata egharo kathir* *lata* having six, nine and eleven picks respectively are examples of such *lata*. Besides these, *latas* named after their leaves and flowers are also found. *Dhekia* (ferm), *lengeci* (wood sorrel) and many other varieties of annual weeds and herbs grow commonly around the rural domiciles. Even these have captured the imagination of the women and they have suitably adopted such items as designs on their looms. The power of observation and tremendous capability of the indigenous weavers to render objects of nature

into textile motifs has contributed towards the enrichments of the textile tradition of the area.

Arrangement of floral motifs in a creeper resembling flowers like *babori* (Annual chrysanthemum), *golap* (rose), *padum* (lotus) and similar other flowers without any specific name are also common. These designs are named *babori*, *lata*, *golap lata*, *padum lata*, *chira khao phul* (creeper with flowers and pods) etc. provided example of such motifs arrangements. Creeper having bold leaves and flowers which cannot be specifically identified are also seen in the old textile pieces. These are called *lata phul* in general. The creeper with the fruits like *dalim* (pomegranate), *anaras* (pineapple) and *angur* (grapes) and even a vegetables like *Kerela* (bitter gourd) are arranged to form designs named as *dalim lata*, *anaras lata*, *angur lata*, *Kerela lata* etc.

Kalka (Paisley), the most common and traditional design in Indian textiles is also used extensively in the textiles of Assam and also in the land of Hajo. It is a mango shaped motif with curved ornate top. The popular name of this mango shaped motif is known as *magor*. The spaces within the *Kalkas* of large size are embellished generally with plant motifs, mainly creepers.

The *kalka* designs was probably adopted from the old *Gomcheng* and *Kingkhap* which were often lavishly adorned with *kalka*. In the textile tradition of Assam, *Kalka* suits best the corners of *chadar*, *khania-kapor* etc. However *Kalkas* of various sizes are used singly as *buta* or as a unit in the border designs in the area under study.

Pankata and *Kasari* or *basani* are two other terms often used to denote certain textile designs in the study area. In *Pankata* the leaves, flowers and *kalkas* in stylized form are arranged systematically in the manner of an individual betel leaf (*pan*) to form a border. There is no separate design named *Kasari*. The *pankata* and fine creeper, used on one or both the sides of a major design, are often called *Kasari*.

6.5.2 Animal Motifs

A variety of animal motifs like butterfly, peacocks, elephant, tiger, fish etc. cleverly adopted in stylized form with a minimum of lines occupy an important place in the textile design of Assam and particularly in the area under study.

Charai (birds) in general, *mora-charai* (peacock), *hanh* (ducks and swan) are common motifs in the textile design the region. Peacock, duck and swan are regarded as sacred motifs by the Assamese Hindus. The border design of cloth used in places of worship often has the peacock motif in combination with other motifs. The swan, in combination with lotus motif is also used on similar sacred cloth by the Assamese) people in the region. Such clothes are referred to as *gosain-kapor* (cloth meant for God). The two *moras* (peacock) facing each other forming an interesting design is named *juria-mora*. Uses of bird motifs symbolizing *vimra* (a species of the bird of paradise) among the karbis and *mach-ruka* (kingfisher) among the Rabhas have deep socio-cultural significance. These are regarded as sacred birds connected with the myths regarding origin of the tribes.

Fish, lion, tiger, elephant, deer, goat etc are other animal motifs in highly stylized form found in the textiles in the area. Fish, lion and tiger are rarely seen in the textiles of the area under study. The old designs catalogues depict the lion simply or in combination with the peacock .

Some of the animal motifs found in the textiles of Assam. Although the cat and bear are not seen as motifs in textiles yet such motifs are weaved in the loom hanging in the drawing room and reflects so much beauty in the motifs.

The human figure like *bihuwaty* (dancing *bihu* dance), some women sitting in her loom or as a man riding a horse or elephant appears frequently in the textiles in the area in the old design catalogues.

6.5.3 Structural Motifs

A great influence of material culture is often marked in the textile tradition of Assam. Artifacts and material objects used in the socio-cultural life of the people are adopted for ornamenting the textiles. Such designs are classified under structural design. It is revealed from the field investigation that *brick*, *awl*, *sarai*, *ghati* and *aeroplane* etc are appear as motifs in the area under study. There also appear *latai-chereki* (weaving implements), *chaki* (lamp), *dhupdani* (incense stick holder), *Bhagawata* (holy book of the Hindus) etc are some of the motifs incorporated in the textile designs.

6.5.4 Geometrical Motifs

Diverse elements of nature seem to be the main source of inspiration so far as ornamentation of textile is concerned. It is believed that the wonderful unity, orderliness, harmony of line and curve, the symmetry of form and shape which are all intrinsic characteristics of nature have inspired the geometrical designs (Mazumder 2013:133). Geometrical forms have been used for fabric ornamentation for a very long time in various cultural settings. In the textiles of Sualkuchi also geometric designs, individually or in combination with stylized motifs have been used widely since the olden times. When old pieces of textiles in the different study groups are examined, these are frequently found to be richly ornamented with various types of geometric designs. Such lavish and frequent use of geometric forms is a clear indication of their popularity.

The small diamond motif with a dot in the centre is very commonly found in textiles in the region. It is called *gunaphutuki* by the plain Assamese. The term literally means ‘*gold dots*’. Another design having a diamond within a diamond with a dot in the centre is named *daothogodo* by the Bodo-Kacharis. It symbolizes the pattern made by feathers in the neck of a dove.

The *dharphul* a simple geometric design, denotes river current. *Golpata* (a type of necklace) and *gamkharu* (a type of bracelet), the indigeneous ornaments of Assam, have occupied a vital place in the textile design. *Mokardama phul* a

traditional design, where the geometrical forms are conceived intricately is a symbol to wish success. It is believed that having a cloth with such a design will bring success to the person in a law suit (*mokardama*).

Another traditional design with triangles, lines, diamonds etc represents a butterfly (*pakhila phul*). *Aou-phul* (the flower of *Dillenia indica*) is an important motif among the weavers in the region.

The stylized flower, plant and birds are often arranged in combination with geometric motifs symbolizing lotus and other flowers. These designs are highly valued by the older generation of women who look down upon the recently adopted innovative designs. Few such designs as used in *gosain-kapor* only meant to cover the *thapona* (altar) and thus the name *thapona phul*. A close observation of geometrical designs reveals that these are essentially symbolic in nature. Use of geometric designs in traditional weaving may be regarded as an achievement in symbolic communication.

Pahar-agar (ridges of hills) is the only topographic motif found in use among the weavers as shown in plate 89. Small flowers resembling stars are found in all the study areas, though the motifs bear different names in different communities. It is mostly used as *butis* in diverse colour combinations. Use of star motifs named *Kania-phul* occurs as small *butas* on a black background resembling bright stars on a dark night. It is a unique type of ornamentation in women's dress. The design is popular as Miri design which are traditionally woven by the Mising women. Designs denoting the meandering course of a river named *dhar-phul* and *radipak* are seen among the plain Assamese and also among the weavers in the study region.

Kech is another mode of ornamentation indigenous to Assam. The colored compact plain cross border (on ribbed effect) is called plain cross border whereas the bands of geometric arrangements of lines, bars in contrasting colour along with *dobua* is called *kech*. The *dobua* and *kech* as indigenous modes of ornamentation are probably adopted from tribal designs done on the loin loom. At

present as a means of commercialization this design is spread all over Assam and specially in the clothes woven in Sualkuchi. While discussing symbols and designs in the textiles in the region, that with the gradual break-up of tribal authority and tradition some of the designs are becoming a little fussy. Their simplicity has been disturbed by addition of flowers, animals and other ornaments. It is also revealed that with the external influences on the traditional geometric designs and also due to the improvement of weaving technique because of commercialization of the industry contemporary designs have become non-symbolic and more vivid. These are becoming more and more innovative or a mixture of tradition and innovation.

Further analysis of designs found in the course of field investigation showed that a few of the indigenous designs are named after important persons or innovators of the designs or places where the particular designs originated.

6.6 Mode of Preservation of Design

The design are worked by the weavers in the region from the old scraps of design or from a separate design catalogue. Instances of working out the design etched in memory were also found during field investigation. Most of the weavers have a good collection of designs of their own. Among the weavers in the region, the preservation of design itself is an art which evolved through different stages. Information collected from the traditional bearers in this regard revealed that in the olden days the simple design worked on a banana leaf (*Kalpat*) was given to the young girls for learning the technique of incorporating the design in weaving. Since banana leaf was not durable, the design was subsequently worked on the thick sheath of leaf of areca palm tree (*dhakua*) shows the preservation of design in the above mentioned methods.

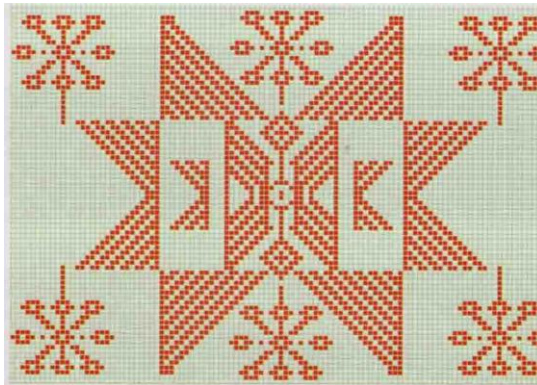
With the limitation of preserving design even on the leaf of areca palm tree, the indigenous weavers have developed yet another method. In this, the design are woven on a warp of coarse yarn with fine bamboo sticks or thatching grass as the pick of the design. It is called *ghai* or *kathi-chaneki*. The design are

generally woven in a narrow width about 40 to 50 cm, while the length varies according to the availability of designs and material. This sort of design catalogue can be preserved comparatively for a longer period. The indigenous weavers consider these catalogues as valuable articles and would never part with them. Such design catalogues are not generally made nowadays. The weavers collect the designs on net like cloth where the designs are worked with middle . Use of graph paper to draw the design is also adopted and gaining popularity in the present days.

The mode of preservation of design followed by indigenous weavers makes it clear that scraps of designs and old *ghais* are the main store-house of traditional designs in rural areas. In this context, the danger of disappearance of these traditional designs is looming large. Once the steps of design and catalogues disintegrate and experts are no longer there to properly identify and explain, the designs. The old designs too will face the natural death. This indicates the need for immediate salvage work in the sphere of motifs and designs of Assam alongwith Hajo circle. Revival and scientific preservation of traditional designs is therefore considered essential. Some new designs have found to be evolved from these traditional designs without disturbing its identity and these designs may suitably be used in a range of products for commercial viability and products for different end uses.

But in the village Sualkuchi the designs were preserved in card from a very earlier days as it is now also. The cause is that the weaving tradition at Sualkuchi is performed with *pat* silk and *Muga* (golden thread). They designed their fabric with the help of card fitted in a Machine called '*dobua*'. At present also the designs are preserved in the same mode. As the wave of Sualkuchi is spread in the entire Hajo circle the traditional weavers in the region has also been converted their industry to commercialization with *Muga* and *Pat* silk and the mode of preservation of design catalogues is also followed as like as Sualkuchi.

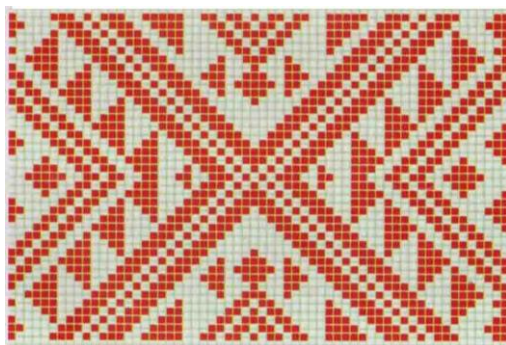
Photo Plate No. 6.4: Traditional Motifs and designs



Aou phul (Flower of dillenia Indica)



Varieties of traditional geometric designs with symbolic and stylized motifs



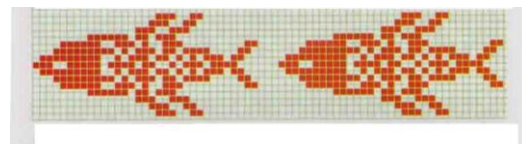
Ghai-yamik (Traditional yamik design of Misings)



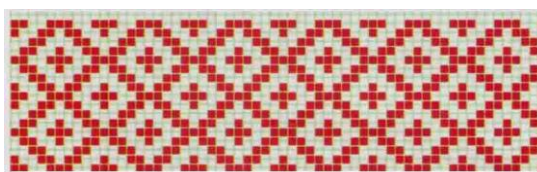
Letai chereki (weaving implements)



Traditional Geometric design



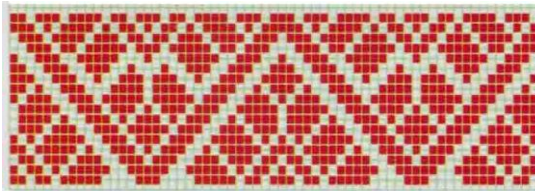
Motifs with a shape of an aeroplane



Small diamond with a dot denotes an eye, gold dots



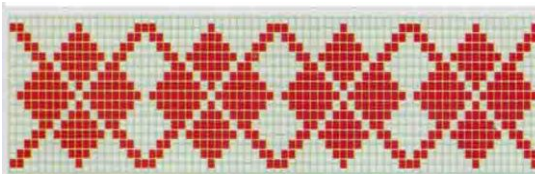
Mekuri Khujia (pug marks of cat)



Dhar-phul symbolises river current



Hanh-padum phul (swau with lotus)



Golpala (A type of necklace)



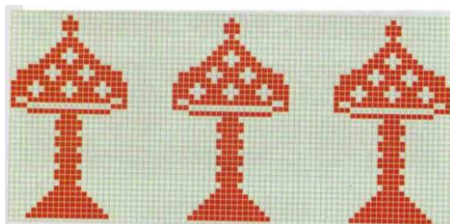
Singha-mora phul (Lion with peacock)



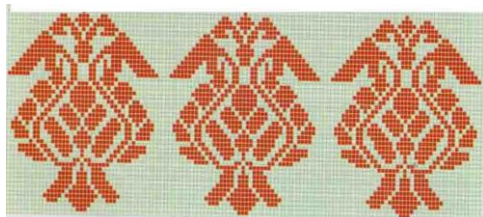
Traditional structural motifs in a Gosain kapur



Kalka (Paisley design)



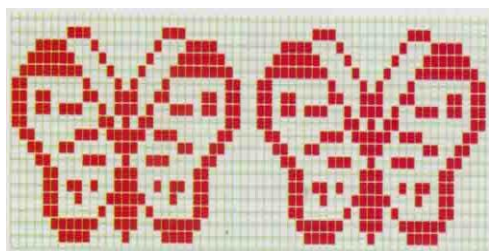
Sarai (Metal dish with raised border mounted on a decorated pedestal)



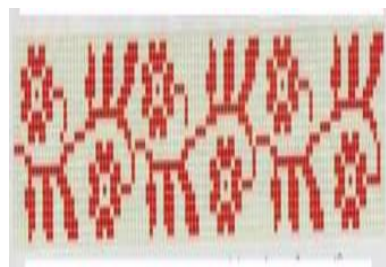
Ghoti (water pot)



Tengeci lata (wood sorrel creeper)



Pakhila (butterfly)



Babari lata (creeper having annual chrysanthemum flower motif)



Juria mora (Two peacock facing each other)



Golap lata (creeper with rose)



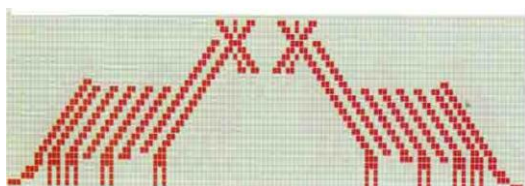
Hati Elephant



Padum lata (creeper with lotus)



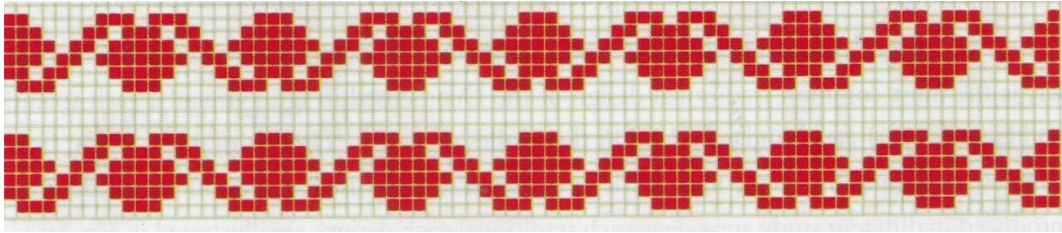
Singha (Lion)



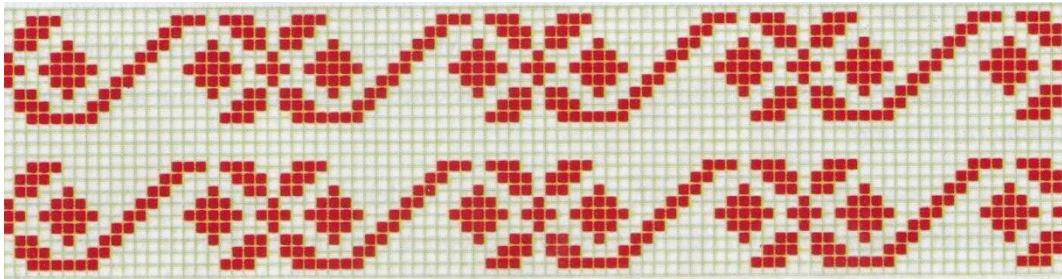
Harina (Deer)



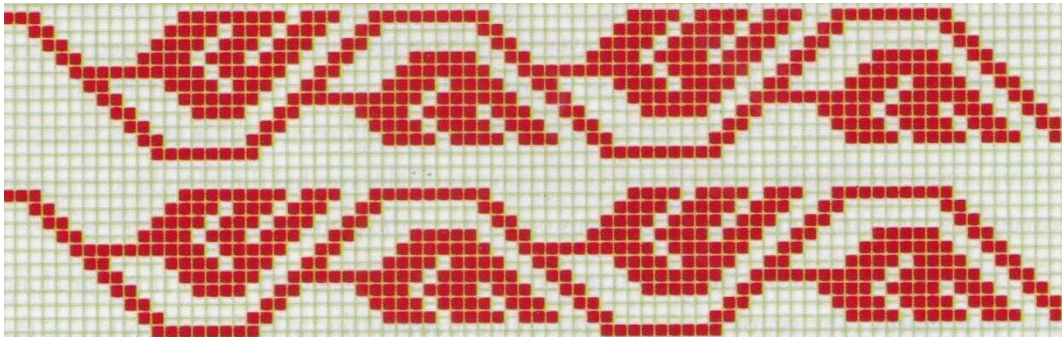
Varieties of Pankata Border design with arrangement of motifs like leaves, flower and kalkas in the manner of an individual betel vine (pan)



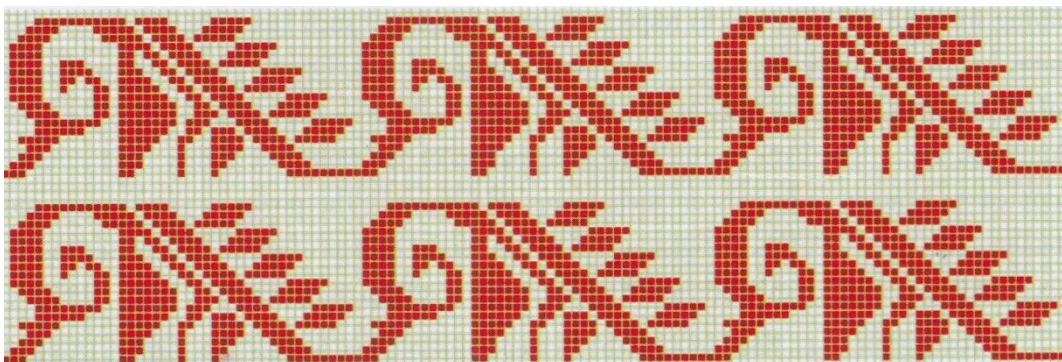
Chata-kathir lata (Creeper design having six picks)



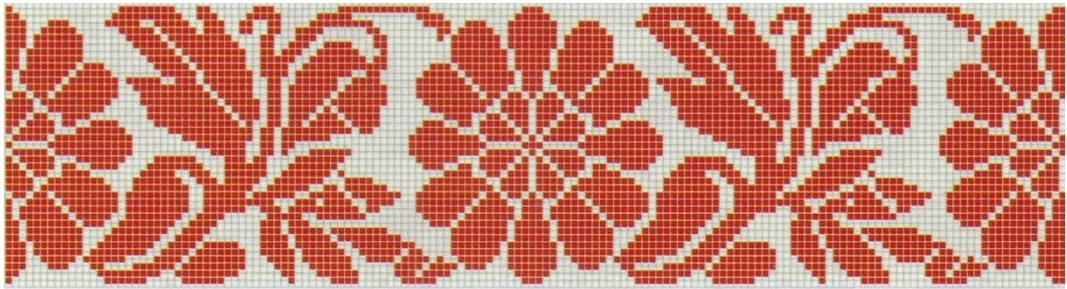
Nata-kathir lata (creeper design having nine picks)



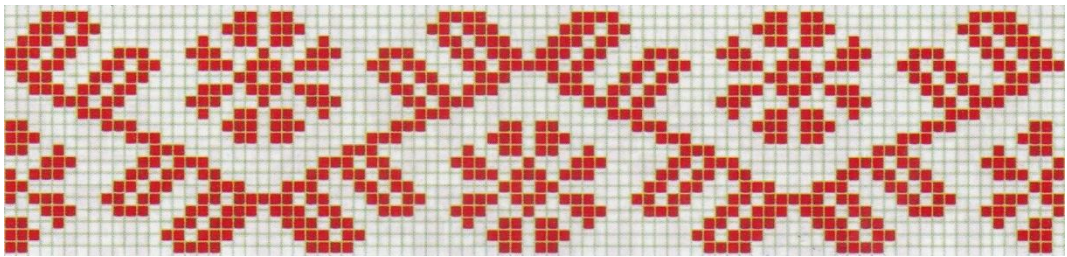
Egharo-kathir lata (creeper design having eleven picks)



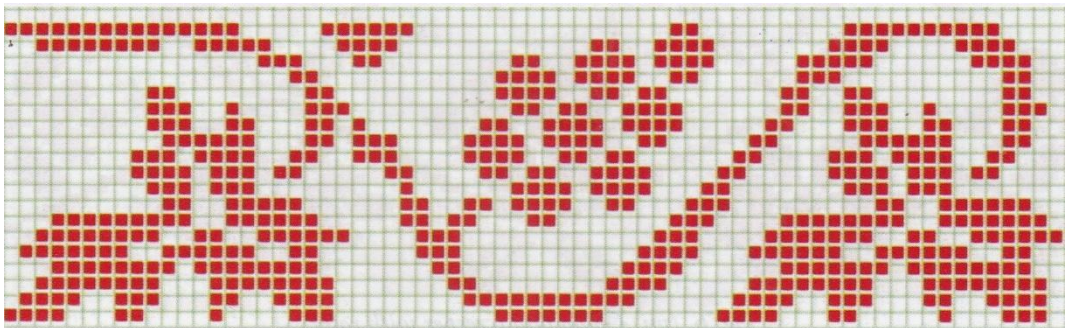
Dhekia lata (Fern creeper)



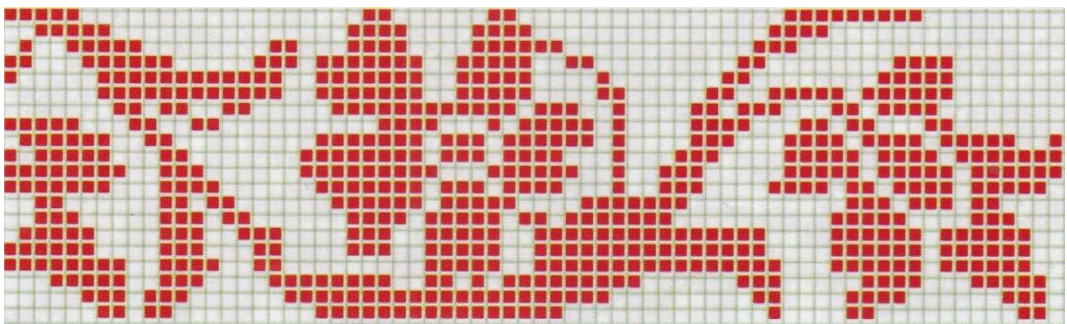
Chira khoa phul (creeper with flowers and pods)



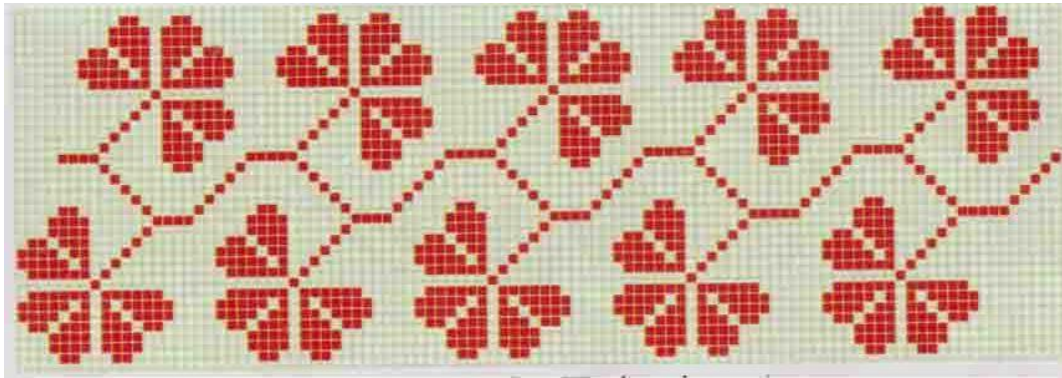
Lata phul (creeper having unidentified bold leaves and flowers)



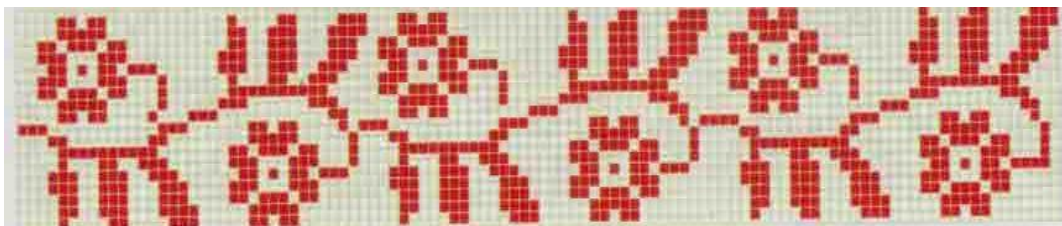
Angur lata (Grape vine)



Kerela lata (Bitter-gourd creeper)



Tengeci lata (Wood sorrel creeper)



Babari lata (creeper having annual chrysanthemum flower motif)



Golap lata (creeper with rose)



Padum lata (creeper with lotus)

6.7 Traditional Textile Technology of weaving

The need for costume originated with mankind's needs for coverage and protection from elements of nature. Later it becomes a means of adornment to help enhance beauty and reflect social factors such as religious symbol, personal identity and status.

For fulfilling our basic needs to cover and protect our body i.e. cloth which is technically known as Fabric. For preparing this fabric the raw materials is yarn. Yarn is manufactured from different types of fibres. These fibres may be mainly originating from nature or it may be manmade. Among the natural fibres cotton is the king of fibers and silk is the queen of fibres. After passing various stages the yarn is prepared from the fibres. To become a textile fibre, the fibres should have some definite properties. From that fibres only the yarn can be prepared.

Generally fabric manufactured by weaving techniques basically we require two series of threads, one is longitudinal series, another is transverse series. The longitudinal series is known as warp and the transverse series is known as weft. When this both of series interlaced then the cloth is woven. But before going to weave the fabric in loom mainly the longitudinal threads i.e. warp should gone through some preparatory process. That means the warp thread should be preferred properly when it is to be used in loom. It is well known to us that the yarn supplied to Handloom Industry generally in hank form. This hank form of yarn is not at all suitable to be used as warp bobbins to get a convenient form which can be used in warping process. The preparatory process of weaving are sizing, winding, warping, beaming, looming and getting up.

Sizing – Sizing is carried out in that types of yarn which are single weak and ununiform in nature. Sizing is a coating of size mixture which is overlap on the surface of the yarn and it makes the yarn strength, rounder in shape and uniform in diameter. In case of twisted yarn which may be used as preparing the warpsheet sometimes sizing process is done. But generally in case of single yarn only, sizing process is carried out.

Rice starch is most commonly used in sizing the yarns. In this process, required quantity of water, broken rice and yarns to be starched (by hank) are put together and boiled till the rice is cooked properly. A few drops of coconut oil are often added to make the yarn pliable.

While preparing *eri* or *muga* yarn for warping, the yarn is soaked for sometime in a light starch solution, but never boiled. Various indigenous substances are added to make the yarn pliable and strong. After being wrung out, the yarns are dressed with indigenous device hank by hank. This is absolutely necessary in case of fine yarns. These are dried and wound generally on bobbin for warping. Now-a-days readymade yarn for *pat* or *muga* fabric has been supplied from outside.

Winding – Already it is mentioned that the yarns are supplied to Handloom Industry in hank form. This hank should be transferred to bobbin to make it suitable for warping. At first the supplied hank is mounted on swift and bobbin (i.e. warp bobbin) is fitted on the spindles of winding charkha. By transferring the motion to winding charkha hank is wound on the bobbins. According to our requirement no of bobbins are wound by means of charkha in a simple procedure. This process is known as winding.

Warping – When required numbers of bobbins or Ugha are made then it is ready for warping process. The bobbins are fitted on creel stand for carrying out the warping process. After fitting the bobbins in creel the ends of the bobbins are passed through the hank frame to maintain the lease. Lease means to divide the warp threads into 1:1 ratio or 2:2 ratio. When the lease is prepared the ends are passed through the dent of the reed according to the denting order. After that the ends are knotted together and put it on the nails of the drum. The length of the warp is depend on the circumference of the drum and section is depend on the count of reed and number of bobbins fitted on creel. When required length and width of warpsheet is prepared then this sheet is ready for beaming.

Denting – In denting the warp threads are drawn through the dents of the reed by two in general and more or less according to the character of a pattern the indigenous process of denting. It is done with the help of a hook and the yarns are placed on a round bamboo stick.

Beaming – The transferring of warp sheet up to the warp beam is known as beaming. Every section of warp is mounted in a stick (the stick may be made of bamboo, iron or wood). Then in the place of lease one pair of lease rods are inserted. Now this warp sheet is warped on beam. Now the beam is ready for next process.

Drafting or heald knitting – The strong cotton thread available for the purpose is traditionally used as heald. The twisted cotton threads made out of left over yarns from the looming are also used by the weavers in the areas. The beam, so prepared is then placed just on the floor level against two posts and held tight by fixing it also with two temporary posts. This helps to keep the yarns in uniform tension which is essential in heald knitting. The flat bamboo sticks in the wrap used as lease-rods are kept upward causing a slight opening on it. One end of the heald is then passed through this opening from right to left and the knitting is done with a round bamboo pipe.

Looming and Weaving – The warp-beam is placed in the appropriate position of the loom. Warp ends are placed on a round step of bamboo and then tied to the cloth-beam. The reed is fixed in the slay. Typing up of healds is the next important operation in looming. The healds are tied by cords over pulley on top, while at the bottom, the healds are connected to the balanced rods first and then to the treadles. As one of the treadles is depressed, the healds connected with it go down, and those connected with another treadle will go up forming an opening in the warp known as warp-shed. The shuttle with the pick is passed across the shed. Then the treadles are left free and the pick is beaten up with the slay towards the cloth-beam.

Raw materials

Cotton is the major raw materials used in the indigeneous handloom weaving for production of different textile items. In the olden days cotton was grown as a household crop and spun into yarn. But in the recent years, easy availability of mill-made yarns of different counts and varieties even in rural shops and bazaars has lessened the importance of cotton growing and spinning. Silk weaving is a special feature of Assam. It plays an important part on the socio-economic life of the people in specialized weavers' villages of Assam. The following are the three types of silk used in Assam traditionally. *Eri* silk worm is reared all over Assam. Spinning and weaving are also undertaken by the rearers generally for their own use. Spinning of eri in spindles by the rural womenfolk, including young girls, even while they are on the move is marked as an interesting and unique feature in Assam. *Eri* silk is used mainly to weave shawls, used in winter. It is also used to weave a few items of dress for occasional wear among the tribal communities. But the age old tradition of producing eri silk yarn at home is slowly on the wane. The gradual disappearance of spinning among the rearers seems to be an important factor affecting the textile tradition and socio-economic life of Assam.

Sualkuchi is the prominent *muga* reeling and weaving centre in Assam. *Muga* production in Assam appears to have gone down considerably in the recent years. This, together with the procurement of cocoons from faraway places to Sualkuchi and the use of a traditional crude process of reeling, account for the high price of *muga* yarn. *Muga* is now the most expensive among the indigenous skills of Assam. As a result, it is no longer within the reach of common weavers.

The production of *pat* silk in Assam is not sufficient to meet the demand of the indigenous weavers. Moreover the rural weavers are unable to purchase the silk yarn brought from outside the state by the traders because of high price. As a result the weavers of *pat* silk in the study region is suffering in yarn constraints in running the loom.

6.8 Textile Dye

It is believed that the dyeing was first introduced in India. The dyed cotton fabrics recovered from the Indus valley excavation is proved that the art of dyeing was practiced first in India. On the other hand, in Indian History at about 2500 BC, the coloured silk and gold brocade are used by Rajas Maharajas and it was transmitted gradually to different countries like China, Persia, Egypt etc. In that time earliest dyes were invented. The earliest dyes were discovered accidentally from available berries, fruits and nuts which are generally use for fooding purpose. Later blossoms, leaves, stems and roots of shrubs or barks and twigs of tree all are used as main ingredients of Natural or vegetable dyes. (Jayanta Deva Sarma, 2000-2001)

Assam is located on the eastern part of the Indian sub-continent. It is characterized by the presence of innumerable ethnic groups and textiles are of their main craft, symbolizes the cultural identity of each group. The ethno cultural groups wear their own traditional costumes and they always show prediction towards a certain designs and colours. These designs are indigenous and intrinsic with harmonious colour schemes prepared mainly from Natural dyes. The North east India is full of natural resources and colouring matter are produced here locally from herbs and trees. Weaving in this region is an age old tradition, ascending from generation to generation through the pathway of century old history. Like weaving, the natural dyeing has been practiced in this area traditionally by some skill craft persons from prior to the invention of synthetic dyes. Although the invention of synthetic dyes adversely affected in the activity of natural dyes the popularity of natural dyes are not reduce till today, because of their wide range of colour, cheapness, non polluted value and protected from affect of human skill. (Jayanta Deva Sarma)

History reveals that there has never been any class of people among the indigenous groups, who engaged themselves solely to the practice of dyeing as a source of livelihood. The yarns were dyed by the weavers with the indigenous dye till the recent past. It has been observed that details of dye-stuffs and the process

of dyeing are often guarded as secrets and are not disclosed to outsiders. This seems to be one of the factors for which the present generation is not aware about their indigenous dyes and the methods of dyeing. However information on some of the revealed indigenous dyes of Assam used till the very recent past collected from old and knowledgeable individuals in the study areas are stated below –

(i) Achugach

As an indigenous substance for red dye, *Achugach* (*Morinda augustifolia*) was very commonly used by the people of Assam and occasionally planted around the house. The roots of these plants were cut into very small bits and boiled in water to extract the colour. The yarn to be dyed were soaked in the dye solution for dyeing. Chips of the bark of *leteku* (*Baccaurea sapida*) and leaves of *bhoomlati* (*symplocos spicata*) were boiled with the roots of *achugach* as a mordant to make the colour fast.

(ii) Lac (*coccus lacca*)

A red dye was obtained by evaporation method from the liquid in which stick lac had been washed. Dyeing of eri silk in lac dye was very common, especially among the Karbis till very recent years. Leaves of an indigenous plant called *tamchir* were boiled in the dye solution as mordant.

(iii) Jack-fruit tree (*Artocarpns integrifolia*)

A yellow dye solution is obtained when the wood of jack-fruit an evergreen middle sized tree is sliced and its saw dust is boiled in water.

(iv) Turmeric (*Cursuma longa*)

It is small herbaceous annual plant with radical leaves that arise from the underground rhizome. The rhizome, a common product locally known as haladhi yields a rich, yellow dye.

(v) Rum (*Strobilanthes flaccidifollns*)

Rum (*strobilanthes flaccidifollus*), the rural Assamese substitute for indigo is commonly used as an indigenous dye where the name varies from place to place. The leaves and the tender stalks are pounded and soaked in water for three to four days. Gradually the water turns black in which the yarn or the cloth to be dyed is either steeped or boiled. If the lac dye is added to this dye bath a bright purple hue is produced, whilst if mixed with chips of the bark of *tepor* (*Garcinia xanthochymus*) and the leaves of *bhoomlati* (*symplocos spicata*) a green colour is formed.

(vi) Bark of Silikha (*Terminalia Chebula*)

The bark of *silikha* (*Terminalia chebula*) tree alone or along with the bark of *jamu* (*Engenia Tambolana*) *amlakhi* (*phyllanibns emblica*) were also used to obtain the black dye. The barks are pounded together and boiled in water. The yarn or the cloth to be dyed is steeped into the dye bath when cold. The dyed articles are immersed in the same solution several times rising and drying in between till the required black shade is obtained.

(vii) Modar (*Rubia cordifolia*)

Modar (*Rubia cordifolia*) locally called *majathi* is a creeper growth all over the state, both hills and plains, and is greatly used for dyeing purposes. The root of the creeper is sliced or pounded and boiled to get the dye solution for reddies-orange colour.

(viii) Sewali phool (*Nyctanthes arbor-tristic*)

Sewali (*Nyctanthes arbor-tristic*) a large shrub or a small delicious tree with rough leaves gives fragrant white flowers with deep orange corolla tubes. An orange colour dye prepared from the flowers mainly from the tubes is used for dyeing silk and cotton.

(ix) Jorot (Bixa orellana)

The shrub cultivated all over the region for the sake of golden yellow dye. The dye obtained from the seeds was most commonly used for *muga* besides the dyeing of cotton. The seeds were boiled in water along with ash obtained from burning of banana plant. The yarn and cloth was immersed in the dye bath and allowed to boil for five to ten minutes. The vessel was then removed with the dyed article still the dye solution and allowed to cool. The dyed articles were properly rinsed and then dried.

Due to the easy availability of factory dyed yarn in the market, a tendency has been marked among the present days weavers to shirk the trouble of preparing the dye-stuff even with chemical dyes. Though the indigenous system of dyeing is a laborious process and of little importance today, it has certain socio-cultural significance in the life of the people of Assam. The weavers often complained about the poor colour quality of shop bought dyed yarns. Further, it is not possible to get the yarn of required count having the desired shades. The weavers frequently are inhibited from achieving an intricate design of traditionally sanctioned colours, simply because shop-bought yarns do not satisfy the requirements. Again the effect of embellishment is lost after a single wash of the fabric. This is found to be an important factor directly or indirectly affecting the textile tradition of Assam.

It is evident that the art of dyeing with indigenous dyes was an important aspect of traditional handloom weaving which is no more in vogue in present days. Nevertheless, some of the indigenous dye substances are still found available in the villages under study. It is apprehended that the last persons in the villages may be the last generation who can identify these substances and know how to prepare the indigenous dyes. The efforts presently undertaken by some institution/organizations for identification of natural dye sources, optimization of dyeing process, documentation etc. are encouraging. In view of the present global demand for eco-friendly dyes such efforts should be further systematized and gear up, in right direction.

6.9 Investment, Employment and Income in Weaving

In this section an attempt is made to present the capital structure of the industry as well as to study the investment pattern and prospect for generating employment and income. It is common place to mention that for setting up an industry some land and building are necessary which may be acquired by investment or hired/leased in for certain years. Besides land and building the industrial unit needs machineries and other equipments or simple tools depending upon the type of the enterprise. Investment in capital goods varies as per the quality of the instruments as well as their market values. The study region is dominated mainly by the traditional handloom i.e. flyshuttle looms. As mentioned earlier through shuttle loom has been extinct totally from the region.

Fixed capital

For setting up handlooms one needs a house and a plot of land. While most of the commercial looms are fitted in separate houses (some are found in parts of residential houses also), most of the semi commercial and domestic looms are found established in a shed like verandah attached to the residential house or in the open space of the court yard. While the value of land differs from village to village and location to location within a village the value of houses for looms also differs according to their types. While most of the looms in the villages of the region are found housed in thatched roofs, in Sualkuchi proper they are found in C.I. sheet roofed pacca houses and some are even housed in RCC buildings. Recently most of the loom owners in Ramdia, Bamundi and Bongsor also build housed in RCC buildings for setting up their looms. Hence it is difficult to estimate the value of land and buildings. While the historic value of building depreciated the book value of land rises year after year, as also the book value of buildings. Probably because of such difficulties in imputing the value of land and building, the Development Commissioner (Small Scale Industries) as well as the Ministry of Small Scale Industries, Government of India had been referring since long to investment in plant and machinery only for defining Small Scale Industries

(Rs. 10 Lakh to Rs. 100 Lakhs), Medium Scale Units (Rs. 1 crore to Rs. 10 crores) and tiny units (upto Rs. 10 lakhs).

In the handloom industry fixed capital investment apart from that in land and building consists of the cost of the handloom. A handloom is made up of a frame beams, sley reed, shuttle and healds. A handloom unit also needs other accessories grooves, wheels, bobbins, spindles charkha etc. The cost of all these accessories for a *flyshuttle* handloom or pit loom comes to around Rs. 7000 while for a throw shuttle loom it comes to about Rs. 3000. In the context of different types of handlooms it may be noted that in silk weaving as well as commercial and semi commercial cotton weaving the *flyshuttle* loom is used. For design works on the fabrics, particularly mulberry, *Muga* and *Tasar* fabrics most of the looms used Dobbys and the cost of a Dobby including its wooden frame comes to about Rs. 2000. Thus total fixed capital investment per silk loom comes to about Rs. 9000.

Working capital investment

Besides fixed capital a workshop also needs working capital for running the looms. Working capital consists, mainly of the market prices of yarn for warp and weft, art threads of various colours for flowering the fabrics. The entrepreneur is also required to maintain an inventory of raw materials, finished and semi-finished products besides cash for weekly payments to the hired weavers. A loom generally weaves two warps in a year consisting of yarn for one warp and 6 kg wool yarn for weaver. Thus a loom weaver generally uses 18 kg of mulberry or *Tasar* yarn in a year. The proprietor is to buy at least 3 kg *paat* or *Tasar* yarn for a warp. Weft yarn can be purchased at a price of one/two kg for a loom. The cost of 3 kg *paat* yarn in 2017 is about Rs. 12870/-. The price of *Tasar* yarn is Rs. 8200 per kg while that of golden yarn is Rs. 5200 per kg while that of golden thread for a set of *Mekhela Chaddar* is Rs. 1250. Since most of the looms are engaged in mulberry yarn weaving, we take *paat* looms as the model. Thus investment in yarn comes to Rs. 50,000 plus. The employer is also to make weekly payment of Rs. 2000 to the hired weavers. Therefore, total working capital

for running a loom is around Rs. 16120. And this amount may be multiplied by the number of looms per unit. We have taken the cost of one warp as against two warps woven in a year for the reason that the second warp may be financed by selling the products of the first warp.

Income in the Industry

The looms by providing employment to a huge portion of the population, have also generated income among the self employment, contract wage employed and master weavers besides generating some income among the indirectly employed persons like yarn winders and Muga reelers. The income of the self-employed, wage weavers and proprietors of workshops depend on the production of fabrics of different qualities. Production of fabrics given the quality depends mainly on the regularity and labour of the weavers; the more a weaver is regular in attending the loom and the more he/she is hard working, the more is the quantity of fabric woven and hence the more is the income of the weaver as well as of the entrepreneurs. Generally one pair off Mekhela chadar gives a income of Rs. 24000 to the weaver.

Photo Plate No. 6.5: Traditional Weaving Implements



Kamini Das in the process of sizing



Village women in heald knitting



Second step of sizing



Modern method of wrapping



Traditional stick Warping



Modern method of warping with cage-creel



Indigenous process of beaming



Indigenous process of denting



Ugha



Cherki



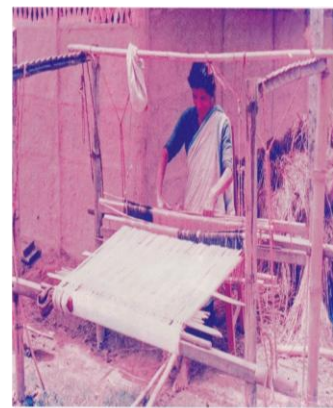
Maku



Some Tools



Winding Pillar



Through shuttle Loom

Modern Implements

Photo Plate No. 6.6: Modern Weaving Implements



Polyster Yarns

