

# Handloom Market in Assam: Issues and Factors of Sustainability

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**Abstract:** *This paper analyzes the position and factors of handloom market of Assam in India. The commercial, economic and social aspects of handloom market have been highlighted. Sustainability encompasses the effective and fair allocation of resources both within and across generations while conducting economic activities within the constraints of a finite environment. Socially, handloom weaving provides stable employment opportunities, especially for women in rural areas, enhancing their economic independence and social standing. Environmentally, the industry showcases eco friendly practices like natural dyes and minimal resource reliance, making it a sustainable choice. Economically, handloom weaving contributes to rural household income, entrepreneurship, and community development.*

**Keywords:** Handloom market, Women employment, Sustainability

## 1. Introduction

The handloom industry symbolizes an enduring connection to human civilization, intricately entwining tradition, culture, and craftsmanship throughout the chronicles of history. In contemporary society, this sector has showcased remarkable adaptability, especially in response to the burgeoning global demand for sustainable products

Dissanayake, Perera & Wanniarachchi, (2017). This study explores the crucial role women play in fostering sustainability within the handloom industry, shedding light on their significant contributions and empowerment. Handloom textiles stand as a representation of culture, history, and heritage, embodying a comprehensive method of creation utilizing traditional craft techniques that prioritize minimal environmental impact.



These handcrafted items signify the abundant cultural heritage of artisan communities and exemplify the skills passed down through successive generations. In the contemporary discourse on sustainability, the handloom

industry emerges as a shining example of how social, environmental, and economic considerations can harmoniously intersect to create a model of balanced development Annapoorani, (2021). With its roots deeply

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entrenched in tradition, the handloom sector not only sustains cultural heritage but also embodies sustainable practices crucial for the well-being of communities and the preservation of resources for future generations Singh & Srivastava, (2018). This study not only examines Assam's handloom industry but also accentuates women's status

within the sector. Utilizing data from the 3rd (2009 - 10) and 4th All India Handloom Census (2019 - 20), the study offers a comprehensive understanding of women's contributions and standing in the handloom industry, emphasizing their indispensable role in preserving heritage and propelling economic growth.



**Shital Pati of Kaliganj**

### Objectives

The objectives of the research study provide clear aims and goals for the investigation, focusing on sustainability, socio-economic development, and cultural preservation within Assam's handloom sector. By examining these objectives comprehensively, the study aims to identify challenges and opportunities in the handloom industry, offering actionable recommendations for its sustainable growth.

- To understand the role of women in the handloom industry of Assam
- To access the Sustainability Impacts of the Handloom Industry

### 2. Methodology

This paper utilizes secondary data extensively, drawing from published research papers, reputable websites, and the 3rd

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and 4th All India Handloom Census. Secondary data offers advantages such as accessibility, cost - effectiveness, and a wide range of information. The All - India Handloom Census serves as a vital data source, providing insights into production, employment, distribution, and challenges in the handloom sector. By integrating data from various sources, the paper aims to explore a specific research area within the handloom industry

### Major Fabrics

The handloom sector is characterized by a rich diversity of fabric compositions, yielding various products that cater to a wide range of consumer preferences. In this context, it is essential to explore the significant contribution of Assam to the overall production of these major fabric categories, alongside its unique fabric productions, particularly when juxtaposed with the top five states in the country. This examination offers valuable insights into Assam's role and prominence within the national handloom landscape, shedding light on its distinctiveness, strengths, and comparative standing in the diverse tapestry of India's textile heritage.

Major Fabric	Production Share	Ranking
Saree	7.8	4 <sup>th</sup>
Shawls, Mekhla Chadder, Loi, stole, scarf, muffler	77.4	1 <sup>st</sup>
Angabastram, dhoti, sarang, lungi	42.6	1 <sup>st</sup>
Towel, napkin, duster, Gamocha	72.4	1 <sup>st</sup>
Durries, rugs, mats	12.7	2 <sup>nd</sup>
Dress material, suiting, shirting, long cloth	23.6	1 <sup>st</sup>
Bedsheet, furnishings, blankets	26.8	1 <sup>st</sup>
All others including masks, gloves etc	27.5	1 <sup>st</sup>

Source: Fourth All India Handloom Census 2019 – 20

Overall, Assam's substantial production across these major fabric categories underscores its status as a powerhouse in the handloom sector. From traditional shawls to contemporary dress materials, Assam's handloom industry not only enriches India's textile heritage but also contributes significantly to its socioeconomic development.

### Handloom workforce

The latest enumeration of handloom weavers in India reveals a substantial presence, totaling 2, 673, 891 individuals engaged in this traditional craft. Notably, a significant portion of this population is concentrated in four key states, collectively comprising 18 lakh weaver households. These states, including Assam, West Bengal, Manipur, and Tamil Nadu, play a pivotal role in driving the national handloom industry forward. Specifically, Assam stands out with 10.9 lakh households, followed by West Bengal with 3.4 lakh, Manipur with 2.1 lakh, and Tamil Nadu with 1.7 lakh households. Delving into the distribution of weaver households, a striking pattern emerges, showcasing the ruralurban divide. However, this proportion is significantly more pronounced in Assam, where an astonishing 92% of handloom workers are female. This gender disparity underscores the pivotal role women play in propelling Assam's handloom sector, rooted in deeply ingrained cultural traditions where weaving has traditionally been associated with women. This dominance not only reflects

their economic contribution but also signifies empowerment through traditional occupations. Furthermore, the high prevalence of women in Assam's handloom industry mirrors broader socioeconomic dynamics within the state, including limited opportunities for women in other sectors, cultural norms, and the inherent skills possessed by women in handloom weaving.

### Aspects of sustainability

Sustainability encompasses the effective and fair allocation of resources both within and across generations while conducting economic activities within the constraints of a finite environment. It integrates environmental health, social equity, and economic vitality to foster thriving, healthy, diverse, and resilient communities for present and future generations. The practice of sustainability acknowledges the interconnectedness of these issues and demands a systemic approach that embraces complexity (Mensah & Casadevall, 2019). Sustainability is characterized by its focus on three fundamental pillars: social, environmental, and economic aspects. These pillars form the foundation for fostering balance and harmony between human activities and the natural world. By addressing social equity, environmental stewardship, and economic prosperity, sustainability endeavors to create a future where communities thrive while respecting the limits of our planet's resources (Alhaddi, 2015).

### Social

The social aspect of sustainability involves implementing public strategies to address societal issues such as healthcare, housing, education, and employment. It aims to ensure equal access to essential services without discrimination. This includes providing employment opportunities and affordable livelihoods (Mamidipudi & Bijker, 2012). Following agriculture, the handloom industry plays a crucial role as the second - largest sector in providing substantial employment opportunities. Unlike agriculture, which often experiences seasonal fluctuations, the handloom sector offers a more stable source of employment (Raju, 2014). This stability helps to mitigate the challenges posed by the seasonal nature of agricultural work, ensuring a consistent livelihood for workers throughout the year (Mishra & Mohapatra, 2020). Data indicates that a majority of the handloom workforce, particularly in rural areas, comprises women. This demographic trend is significant as it directly addresses pressing social issues such as unemployment and contributes to the socio - economic development of rural and disadvantaged regions. By providing employment opportunities to women, especially in areas where alternative sources of income are limited, the handloom industry catalyzes economic empowerment and social progress.

### Environment

Environmental sustainability focuses on preserving the health and resilience of the natural environment to sustain human life. It involves maintaining ecosystem integrity and ensuring that the environment can sustainably provide resources. By safeguarding essential raw materials and preventing the overloading of environmental waste sinks, environmental sustainability contributes to human well - being and prevents harm. This approach acknowledges the



finite limits of environmental systems, promoting equilibrium and balance for long - term sustainability.

### Natural Dyes

The extensive utilization of natural dyes in the handloom industry effectively minimizes the introduction of chemicals into the weaving process. Assam serves as a significant hub for silk production, contributing approximately 90% of the nation's raw muga silk supply, which is extensively utilized in handloom manufacturing (Kalita, 2022). Muga silk is renowned for its superior quality and versatility, making it a preferred material for various applications in the textile and garment industry.

### 3. Findings

The handloom industry in Assam has historically been driven by women, who play integral roles in various stages of production, including spinning yarn, weaving intricate designs, dyeing, yarn preparation, and marketing. Their involvement, often conducted from home, allows them to balance household duties while contributing to family income. Women represent 92% of handloom workers in Assam, reflecting cultural traditions, and despite demographic shifts, female dominance persists, highlighting the need for gender equality in sustainability efforts. Women's traditional artisanal skills preserve Assam's handloom heritage and significantly contribute to the state's economy. The text delves into sustainability across social, environmental, and economic dimensions, with a particular focus on the handloom industry. Socially, the handloom sector provides significant employment opportunities, particularly for women in rural areas, enhancing their economic well - being and social standing. Environmentally, it promotes sustainable practices such as using natural dyes and materials, resulting in lower environmental impact compared to conventional textile production methods. Economically, handloom weaving contributes to financial stability in rural households, empowering women and fostering inclusive development. Overall, the handloom industry exemplifies how sustainability can be achieved by addressing social, environmental, and economic factors, especially in rural and disadvantaged regions.

### 4. Conclusion

In conclusion, sustainability in the handloom industry encompasses social, environmental, and economic dimensions, crucial for fostering balanced communities and preserving resources for future generations. Socially, handloom weaving provides stable employment opportunities, especially for women in rural areas, enhancing their economic independence and social standing. Environmentally, the industry showcases ecofriendly practices like natural dyes and minimal resource reliance, making it a sustainable choice. Economically, handloom weaving contributes to rural household income, entrepreneurship, and community development. Overall, the handloom industry serves as a sustainability model, integrating these dimensions to foster inclusive development and preserve cultural heritage. Supporting and preserving this sector is vital for ensuring a sustainable future.

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