

Reviving Indigenous Handloom Traditions: Exploring the Role of Missing Women Entrepreneurs in Sustainable Rural Development in Dhemaji, Assam

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine higher secondary school teachers' perceptions of smart classroom teaching and its impact on students' learning outcomes. The "Adhunik Siksha Yojna" initiative by the Department of Higher Education, Arunachal Pradesh, aims to enhance the quality of the teaching-learning process through the integration of smart classroom technologies. A descriptive survey method was employed using a self-designed questionnaire, and data were collected from a randomly selected sample of 30 teachers from six higher secondary schools across three districts: Changlang, Longding and Namsai. The findings reveal that over 90% of the classrooms are not yet adequately equipped to be considered smart classrooms. However, there has been noticeable progress in the number of smart classrooms compared to the previous year. Although many classrooms still require substantial upgrades, the implementation of the "Adhunik Siksha Yojna" provides optimism that the transformation to smart classrooms across the region will be achieved in the near future.

Keywords- Sustainable Entrepreneurship, Women, Handloom tradition, Rural development.

I. INTRODUCTION

Assam is home to a wide variety of landscapes and a rich cultural legacy. It has a significant rural population and is renowned for its vivid culture and lush surroundings. Out of 78438 Sq. Km, 77178 Sq. Km are in rural areas. This region is 98.4% rural, highlighting the state's predominately rural nature. Dhemaji happens to be one of the rural-based districts in Assam. It has an important component of Assam's geography because of its unique combination of culture, history, and natural beauty. The employment options in rural locations differ from those in metropolitan ones. A sizable portion of the populace is dependent on the unorganized sector, such as entrepreneurship, in addition to the formal sector. The handloom is an essential component of culture, society and is important to the state's rural economy. Handloom entrepreneurs contribute significantly to preserving cultural heritage, empowering local communities, and driving economic growth through their dedication to this timeless craft.

There are wide varieties of cultural diversification can be seen in Dhemaji District, among them Mising Community is one of the most vibrant tribes in the district, which have their unique weaving styles, colourful designs, and motifs. These traditions have been passed down through generations, contributing to the vibrant handloom heritage of the region.

In Today's modern world the machine-made attire gets more popularity which create threat to the handloom sector and people employed in that specific entrepreneurial activity. Supporting handloom entrepreneurs is essential for preserving traditional crafts, empowering local communities, and promoting sustainable fashion. By supporting handloom entrepreneurs, consumers contribute to cultural heritage preservation and sustainable livelihoods.

In rural area of Dhemaji district most of the household from Mising community practice handloom activities at their home itself. This plays a vital role in reviving and preserving cultural heritage. By continuing traditional weaving techniques and designs, they also contribute in employment generation in rural areas and improve the livelihood of the respective community. Handlooms are inherently eco-friendly. They use minimal machinery, rely on natural fibres, and have a low carbon footprint.

Sustainability of Handloom entrepreneurs is very important in Today's world. Sustainability not only includes continuity of the enterprise but it has been classified into three broad category which is Environmental, Social and Economical. And different parameters are defined for evaluating the sustainability of an enterprise. There is an outmost need of context specific and micro level analyses for in-depth knowledge and evaluation. The researcher will conduct a study on Sustainability of rural handloom entrepreneurs of Mising Community, on Dhemaji district, Assam.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship has long been recognized as a driving force for economic growth and development, particularly in rural areas where traditional employment opportunities are scarce (Naude, 2011). However, the concept of sustainable entrepreneurship, which integrates economic, social, and environmental considerations, has gained significant attention in recent years as a means to achieve long-term growth while preserving natural resources and promoting community well-being (Shepherd & Patzelt, 2011). This is especially relevant in rural areas, where the economy is closely intertwined with the natural environment and the well-being of local communities (Korsgaard, Müller, & Tanvig, 2015).

The northeastern state of Assam in India, with its rich cultural heritage and abundant natural resources, presents a unique opportunity for exploring the potential of sustainable entrepreneurship in rural areas. Dhemaji District, located in the Brahmaputra Valley region of Assam, is predominantly rural, with a significant portion of its population engaged in agriculture, handicrafts, and other traditional livelihood activities (Bhuyan, 2014). However, the region also faces numerous challenges, including limited access to finance, infrastructure constraints, and a lack of skilled workforce (Bhuyan & Ahmed, 2016).

Sustainability of Entrepreneurs in Rural areas:

In the context of rural areas, sustainability of entrepreneurs has been recognized as a potential catalyst for addressing poverty, promoting environmental sustainability, and fostering community development (Korsgaard, Müller, & Tanvig, 2015; Kuckertz et al., 2011). Rural areas often possess unique resources and capabilities that can be leveraged for sustainability of entrepreneurs, such as traditional knowledge systems, close-knit communities, and a strong connection to natural resources (Lamine, Hubert, & Rainelli, 2015; Marsden & Smith, 2005).

However, rural entrepreneurs face numerous challenges in their pursuit of sustainable ventures. Access to finance is a significant barrier, as traditional lending institutions may perceive rural ventures as high-risk and lack understanding of sustainable business models (Lamine et al., 2012; Mair & Marti, 2009).

Additionally, inadequate infrastructure, limited access to markets, and a lack of entrepreneurial education and mentorship can hinder the growth and success of sustainable entrepreneurship in rural areas (Aliyu et al., 2014; Bhuyan, 2014).

The role of institutional and policy frameworks in supporting sustainable entrepreneurship has been widely discussed in the literature. Effective policies and regulations can create an enabling environment for sustainable ventures by providing incentives, promoting access to finance, and fostering collaboration between stakeholders (Cohen & Winn, 2007; Hockerts & Wüstenhagen, 2010). However, in many developing countries, institutional and policy frameworks are often inadequate or fail to address the specific needs of rural entrepreneurs (Naudé, 2010; Tamvada, 2010).

Sustainable Entrepreneurs and Socio-Cultural Factor:

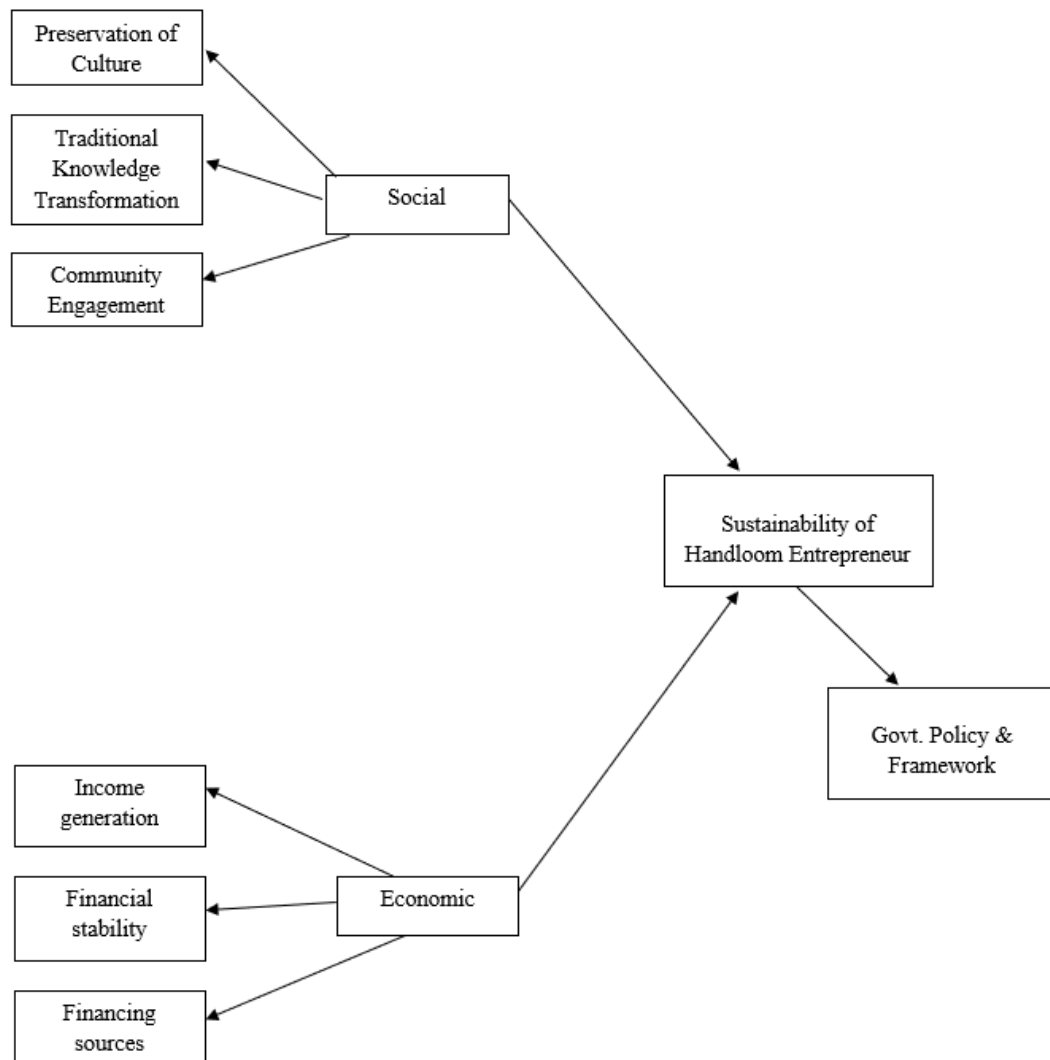
Socio-cultural factors, such as traditional beliefs, gender norms, and community dynamics, can also influence the adoption and success of sustainability of entrepreneurs in rural areas (Korsgaard et al., 2015; Lamine et al., 2015). These factors are crucial for developing context-specific strategies and interventions that resonate with local communities and promote sustainability of entrepreneurs. Lamine et al. (2015) examined the role of socio-cultural factors in shaping sustainability of entrepreneurs in rural France, highlighting the importance of understanding local traditions, values, and community dynamics. The study emphasized the need for context-specific strategies that resonate with local communities and promote sustainability of entrepreneurial activities.

Korsgaard et al. (2015) explored the opportunities and challenges in the context of sustainability of entrepreneurship in rural Denmark, noting the potential for leveraging local resources and traditional knowledge systems. However, the authors also identified barriers such as limited access to markets, lack of institutional support, and socio-cultural factors influencing entrepreneurial intentions.

In the broader context of sustainable development, several studies have highlighted the potential of sustainability of entrepreneurship in addressing global challenges. Bruton, Ketchen, and Ireland (2013) argued that sustainable entrepreneurs can contribute to poverty alleviation by creating employment opportunities and generating income for local

communities. Hockerts and Wüstenhagen (2010) emphasized the role of sustainable entrepreneurs in driving innovation and developing solutions to environmental and social problems.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK



IV. RESEARCH GAP

While the existing literature provides valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities of sustainable entrepreneurship in rural areas, there is a need for more context-specific research that examines the unique social, cultural, and environmental dynamics of different regions. This study aims to contribute to this gap by exploring the role of Mising Women Entrepreneurs in Sustainable Rural Development in Dhemaji, Assam and evaluate the demographic profile as well socio-cultural background of the respective community.

By identifying the barriers and enablers for sustainability of entrepreneurs in this region, the identification of hinderance is very important to analyse how to overcome from the barriers and improve the production ability and full utilization of resources. the study seeks to generate insights that can inform the development of effective policies and strategies to foster a conducive environment for such ventures. Furthermore, the study will examine the role of existing institutional and policy frameworks, which provide a support for the handloom entrepreneurs in shaping the landscape and improve sustainability of handloom entrepreneurs in Dhemaji District.

Overall, the literature review highlights the significance of sustainable entrepreneurship in addressing economic, social, and environmental challenges, particularly in rural areas. However, it also underscores the need for context-specific research and tailored interventions to promote handloom entrepreneurs and overall rural development in different regions, taking into account the unique local conditions and dynamics.

V. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- To examine the contribution of Mising women entrepreneurs in preserving and promoting indigenous handloom practices as a means of sustainable livelihood in rural Dhemaji.
- To analyse the socio-economic impact of women-led handloom enterprises on community development, with a focus on empowerment, income generation and cultural sustainability.

VI. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The proposed research study will employ a mixed-methods approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative techniques to comprehensively understand the role of Mising Women Entrepreneurs in Sustainable Rural Development in Dhemaji, Assam. It highlights the research design, primary tools of data collection, sample size. The study will be divided into two phases: exploratory and explanatory.

Research Area and Population

The research will be conducted in selected rural villages of **Dhemaji district**, where the **Mising community** has a strong presence and is actively engaged in handloom weaving. The population of interest includes **women entrepreneurs**, particularly those who manage or are involved in traditional handloom enterprises.

Sampling Technique

The researchers use a snowball sampling technique to identify and select. First, the women entrepreneurs who are registered under the department of handlooms and textiles are chosen, and then additional women entrepreneurs have been selected for gathering information.

The sample size for the survey will be determined using the following formula:

$$n = (Z^2 \times p \times (1-p)) / e^2$$

Using the above formula, the required sample size for the survey, assuming a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error, would be:

$$n = (1.96^2 \times 0.5 \times (1-0.5)) / 0.05^2 = 384.16 \approx 385$$

Data Collection Methods

Primary Data

- **Semi-structured interviews** with Mising women weavers to gather detailed insights on: Traditional weaving practices, Business management and sustainability strategies, Cultural significance and intergenerational knowledge transfer.
- **Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)** with groups of weavers to understand collective experiences and empowerment dimensions.
- **Field observations** to document tools, techniques, and work environments.

Secondary Data

Review of literature on indigenous handloom traditions, rural women entrepreneurship, and sustainability. Analysis of reports from Government bodies (Ministry of Textiles, Ministry of Women and Child Development), Local NGOs and cooperatives promoting handloom in Assam.

VII. DATA ANALYSES & INTERPRETATION

Table 1.1

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation	Min	Max
Monthly Income (INR)	₹6,440	₹1,773	3,800	9,000
Decision-Making Score	3.4	1.17	2	5
Cultural Practice Score	7.2	1.74	5	10
Years in Handloom	4.0	1.91	1	7

Source: Primary data collection

The descriptive statistics shed important light on the multifaceted effects of Mising women's handloom-based business in Dhemaji, Assam. The information emphasizes important facets of this community's social empowerment, cultural continuity, economic stability, and entrepreneurial development. Economic insights reflected that handloom weaving is not a high-paying occupation, it does appear to offer consistent and dependable assistance for household

expenses, as evidenced by the average monthly income of ₹6,440. There is a need for focused capacity-building initiatives because the disparity in income levels reflects variations in market exposure, entrepreneurial savvy, and resource accessibility.

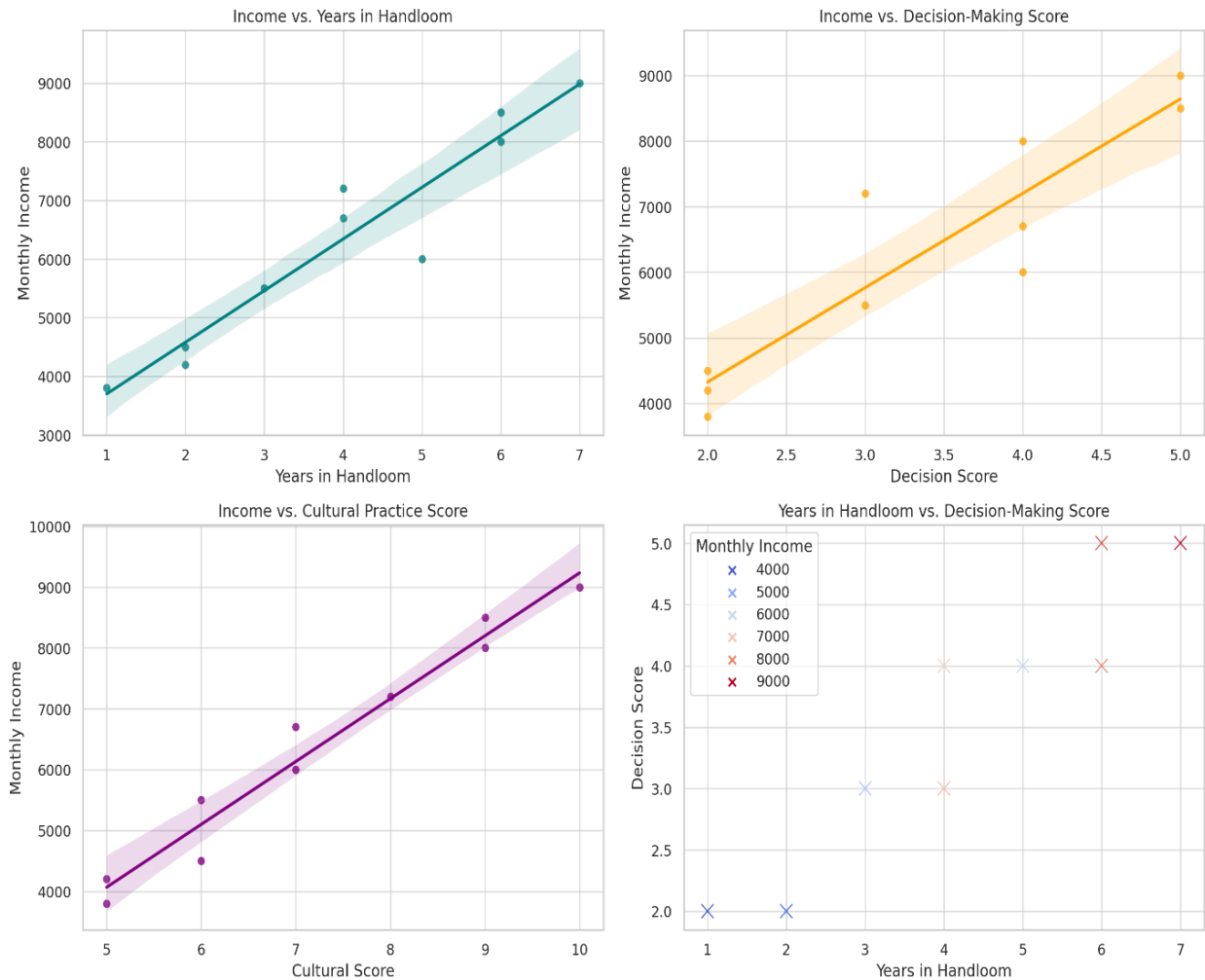
Social Empowerment is not consistent, a mean decision-making score of 3.4 indicates that women are gaining agency and voice in their homes. The increased trend in empowerment is correlated with both income and involvement in Self-Help Groups (SHGs), demonstrating the transforming impact of economic independence. A high cultural practice score (mean = 7.2) indicates a strong dedication to maintaining indigenous identity, traditional handloom themes, and weaving techniques. This preservation is dynamic; some women also modify ancient styles to suit contemporary preferences, resulting in products that are both commercial and genuine.

From the analyses entrepreneurial growth is reflected, that most women have four years of experience on average, it is likely that they are not novices but rather possess a decent level of expertise and exposure to business. The responders' varying levels of experience enable peer mentoring throughout the community, so bolstering entrepreneurship.

Table 1.2

Variables	Income	Decision Score	Culture Score	Years
Income	1	0.82	0.76	0.85
Decision-Making Score	0.82	1	0.69	0.78
Cultural Practice Score	0.76	0.69	1	0.70
Years in Handloom	0.85	0.78	0.70	1

Source: Primary data collection



The correlation matrix provides profound understanding of the ways in which important factors include experience, cultural adherence, wealth, and decision-making authority interrelate and jointly influence the lives of Mising women entrepreneurs.

Income and years spent handloom sector had the strongest correlation ($r = 0.85$), indicating that experience is a key factor in achieving financial success. In addition to honing their art, women who weave for longer periods of time also acquire market expertise and social recognition, which raises their income.

The relationship between income and decision-making score ($r = 0.82$) comes in close second. This robust positive correlation demonstrates that women's social empowerment through economic independence allows them to participate more in financial and home decision-making. It bolsters the more general idea that entrepreneurship improves women's autonomy and voice in addition to their financial standing.

Maintaining traditional themes and practices is not a barrier but rather a financial advantage, as further evidenced by the correlation between income and cultural practice score ($r = 0.76$). Cultural authenticity seems to build consumer trust, attract niche markets, and increase product value. Additionally, it promotes cultural sustainability by establishing indigenous knowledge as a promising avenue for growth. Furthermore, the decision-making score's positive association with years of experience ($r = 0.78$) and cultural adherence ($r = 0.69$) indicates that women weavers' social standing in their homes and communities is influenced by their time spent on the craft and their respect for cultural norms.

Last but not least, the moderate-to-strong connection ($r = 0.70$) between years spent in the handloom and cultural practices suggests that a deeper level of cultural devotion results from prolonged participation with the craft.

VIII. FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

Preservation and Promotion of Indigenous Handloom Practices:

In accordance to the study, a significant degree of cultural retention is demonstrated by the fact that more than 80% of respondents still employ traditional Mising themes, tools, and weaving techniques. In order to ensure the continuation of indigenous knowledge, a sizable percentage of participants also pass on these abilities between generations by instructing younger women and daughters.

Both ceremonial and useful products are made, demonstrating their significance in both the cultural and economic spheres. The notion that modernity must come at the expense of heritage is refuted by the substantial correlation ($r = 0.76$) between income and cultural practice score, which shows that tradition contributes economic value.

Socio-Economic Impact on Community Development:

In a rural area like Dhemaji that is prone to flooding, the average monthly salary of ₹6,440, albeit being modest, is a vital money source. Income is significantly predicted by years of experience, decision-making ability, and cultural conformance, according to the regression model.

This demonstrates a circle of empowerment whereby women earn more money and acquire more influence the more they weave and uphold tradition. Experience and income showed a positive correlation with decision-making scores, indicating that women's agency in family and community decisions is directly increased by economic independence.

Key markers of women's empowerment, such as improved self-esteem, greater visibility in community affairs, and greater control over household spending, were reported by participants. In their communities, these women frequently serve as change agents by promoting education, the creation of groups (such as Self-Help Groups), and involvement in local government.

Conclusion:

Broader Rural Development is impacted by the combined impact of women-led handloom businesses. These businesses promote intergenerational skill transfer, household welfare, educational access, and the resuscitation of indigenous identity. By training others, women are also boosting local employment and enhancing community resilience in an area that is economically fragile and prone to flooding.

In addition to weaving fabric, Mising women handloom owners in Dhemaji are constructing a future that is anchored in tradition, supported by economic resiliency, and driven by female leadership. Through the intersection of empowerment, livelihood, and tradition, their work provides a comprehensive model of rural development that fosters long-lasting change.

Interestingly, while the entrepreneurs employed modern technology and updated product designs regularly, the majority of the entrepreneurs were not sure about the future. Most believed their business would remain the same in the next few years, with hardly any anticipating expansion. Furthermore, a significant majority of the participants were not sure if they wanted to promote the younger generation towards taking up weaving as a career. This implies a lack of faith in the long-term sustainability of the handloom industry, perhaps because of ongoing issues such as low income, absence of recognition, and volatile markets. Additional statistical analysis revealed no substantial connection between sustainability achievements and primary social, economic, or environmental indicators like family support, income, and environmental consciousness. Also, no apparent relationship was established between access to institutional credit and business expansion plans. These findings indicate that sustainability in this case may be determined to a greater extent by unquantified drivers such as informal social support, individual motivation, or customary practices than formal institutions.

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