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**Rural women weavers' of Assam: Artistic skills and entrepreneurial issues**

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**ABSTRACT**

Rural women are endowed with invaluable talent of weaving masterpieces on textiles. They effortlessly infuse their creativity into weaving colorful pieces for near and dear ones. In spite of this abundant creativity, entrepreneurship among rural women seems to be very limited. Except for a few, majority of the village women take home-weaving as a way of life and never wish to take up this latent talent as a full time occupation for making economic gains. Different researchers from time to time have made multitudinous studies on problems faced by rural women during entrepreneurial activity. Realizing the criticality of the issue related to weaving ability and entrepreneurship, this study aims to discuss the implicit issues related to women entrepreneurship among women weavers in village settings of Assam. The paper utilizes empirical as well as interpretive investigation at Balisiha Kachari, Bahbari Bagicha and Ghatua Chuburi villages in Sonitpur district of Assam. Secondary background information related to the problems faced by women entrepreneurs is conducted through literature survey. Beside the information availed through different research work on demotivating factors for entrepreneurial ventures among women, an attempt is also being made to identify artistic skills among women as one of the factor to understand their level of confidence in their creative ability and thus their inclination to create a living out of it. Findings of this study reveal that confidence on designing and weaving skills and desire to start a weaving venture is related.

**Key words:** Entrepreneurship, women weavers, artistic skills, Assam, rural women

**1. Introduction**

Woman on earthly plane as per Hindu philosophy is the embodiment of 'Shakti' which personifies divine feminine creative power (Robinson and DeFazio), The representation of this embodiment reflects in infinite forms. One such power gifted to women of Assam<sup>1</sup> is the artistry of weaving intricate and mesmerizing designs on her looms. Mahatma Gandhi once on his visit to Assam said that women of Assam can weave dreams on their looms (Kashyap, 2013),

The village woman of Assam devotedly rationalizes her available time, labor and skills to create some aesthetically brilliant garment pieces especially for her family besides undertaking her usual household responsibility. Sometimes she does custom weaving for her relatives and neighbors', while sometimes she exchanges her artistic creations for some paltry sum of money within the community or among the people where she resides hardly realizing the market potential of her creation thereby making home weaving mostly a spare time activity. But if she intends to, she possesses the capability to create a position for herself in

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<sup>1</sup> Assam is one of the seven north eastern states of India.

the textile market with her artistic skills. Every woman possesses a deep desire to become financially independent, whether it is the urban free thinking woman or the meek and reserved village woman. But studies often highlight list of problematic factors that demotivate women to take up entrepreneurship for realizing her dreams. While only a few may form groups and may venture outside their preferred area; the rest remain confined to their place and stay weaving for the restricted market.

A retrospective study of research works show many problems faced by women entrepreneurs. Mwobobia through his desktop research on women entrepreneurship in Kenya found that women face financial difficulties due to lack of property to acquire loan, limited loan amount from microfinance institutions as start-up finance and gender discrimination due to patriarchal social structure. Other impediments included problems while dealing with city councils, poor access to justice, multiple responsibilities, lack of education and vulnerability to competition due to lack of adequate resources, advanced technologies and market competition. Pitoska and Charitoudi's case study conducted in Northern Greece presented that the most important reasons why women do not decide to start their own enterprise are the lack of funds and the lack of the specialized knowledge and experience (2011), Women also seem to be conservative in risking beyond their capacities and unwilling to lend money in order to expand their professional future. Chea in one of her objectives on women entrepreneurs in Ghana examined the influence of government policy or law that serves as a barrier to women's entrepreneurship development (2008),

Siddiqui investigated the problems and challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in India (2012), He observed that the major problems faced by women are family obligations, finance woes, low risk taking attitude, and the male-female competition. He considers lack of self confidence as the greatest deterrent for women.

Gender also influences the decision and precision in entrepreneurship. Gender differences were found as a major construct barrier in any latent, nascent and infant ventures (Alsos, Bruyneel, and Sara, 2007), Though economic pressure is the most striking factor that leads women towards entrepreneurship (Kaushik, 2013), it is comparatively lower than men's (General Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) report as cited in Mahmood, Sohail, Khalid and Babak, 2012), Strikingly, GEM report also highlights that women entrepreneurship is high where per capita income of a country is low. Women in rural areas basically take up entrepreneurship to improve their standard of living (Chakravarty 2013) and independence (Kirkwood, 2009), Chakravarty's findings also highlight that majority of the women respondents see inequality in rights, financial limitations, education, marketing and communication as barriers to new ventures (2013),

Vijayakumar and Jayachitra discuss financial problems like complicated bank loan procedures, difficulty to obtain requisite working capital, dependence on family and friends for loans, marketing problems related to exploitation by middlemen, difficulty in gaining trust of customers and popularizing products, difficulty in procuring quality and quantity raw materials and equipment due to fluctuating and high cost, competition oriented problems like stiff competition from organized firms and male entrepreneur, etc (2013), Other issues discussed were limited managerial ability, lack of entrepreneurial aptitude, low risk taking ability, travelling constraints, family conflicts, etc. According to Kaur and Singh, the specific problems associated with women entrepreneurship in India are finance arrangement difficulties, limited mobility factor, family responsibilities, lack of education and prevalence of illiteracy, scarcity of raw materials required for productive capacities and lesser risk and

uncertainty bearing attitude (2013), Jyoti Bahl also found problems such as access to finance, access to markets, access to training, access to networks, access to policy makers, traditional views on women's role and statistical invisibility of women entrepreneurs in government records as major impediments to women entrepreneurship in rural India (2012), The general problems include lack of self-confidence (Javadian and Singh, 2012) and optimism, absence of family support, old and outdated social outlook, etc. (Kaur and Singh 2013),

According to Bernardi, 'femininity associates with relationship and caring' (2006) and possesses as cultural and structural construct Chitsike (2000) and hence, a constraint in women entrepreneurship. Kaushik's study related to challenges faced by women entrepreneurs revealed that in Hisar<sup>2</sup>, women entrepreneurs faced problems related to finance, marketing, health and family. He observed that educational qualification does not affect women entrepreneurship and maximum interest is shown by married women having children. Pharm and Sritharan also opine that marriage is an important factor to determine women's involvement in businesses as young children living at home becomes a major concern for women to take up new challenges. Fear's study in rural Pennsylvania revealed that maximum number of women entrepreneurs (i.e. 48%) had no children living at home (2007), Behara and Niranjan's (2012) case study also showed that women entrepreneur in Andhra Pradesh start their business once the children are little grown up enough not to be cared at home.

Nalawade and Ingale's research finding shows that majority of women venturing into business are married and are middle aged and educational level has not such significant role to play as it was seen that good percentage of illiterate women also took up entrepreneurial activity (2013), Sable's research conducted in Osmanabad district of Maharashtra identified that social challenge constituting of traditional role prescription, social behavioral constraints, gender role ideology, psychological constraints, de-limiting the outside movement, old social attitude of rural society and caste consciousness were the major constraint identified by eighty nine percent of women. Lack of mobility was a problem bothering the least percentage (10%) of women (2012),

In a study conducted at coastal Karnataka, lack of accessibility to good location and problem of distrust on employees by women entrepreneurs pose as two of the major challenges during the growth of the firm (Rao, Venakatachalam and Joshi, 2012), Reddy's research in Chittoor district of Andhra Pradesh revealed that lack of technical knowhow, lack of encouragement by Government by way of special incentives, lack of specialized training, inferiority complex, etc. are barriers to women entrepreneurship (2012), But Gurusamy, Umamaheswari and Rajasekar's research particularly focus on the various motivational factors in the form of government's special awareness program, schemes and subsidies for women entrepreneurs basically from the rural and semi urban areas in order to bring their participation in textile sector (2012),

With respect to weaving as entrepreneurial activity, Ashalata and Acharya's research showed innovation in motifs and products kept the women weavers of Manipur afloat but were lagging behind in the competition with mechanized products (2009), In conclusion they mentioned that women weavers were conscious about expanding their enterprise but their traditional lifestyle was a major hindrance in their growth. In general, almost every rural woman possesses the artistic talent of weaving but opportunity identification (DeTienne and Chandler, 2007) becomes a primary issue with women. A study by Punitha et al. (1999)

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<sup>2</sup> Hisar is a region in the state of Haryana in India.

revealed that self employed women faced problems related to competition from better quality products (as cited in Senthilkumar, Vasantha and Varadharajan, 2012),

It thus seems that micro and macro factors affect women's entrepreneurship (Jamali, 2009), But contemporarily less research has been conducted that gives specific focus on women's artistic skill. Women have 'unique and differentiated stocks of human capital' (DeTienne and Chandler, 2007 cited in Jamali 2009), This study tries to focus on such stocks as motivational or de-motivational factor for undertaking own ventures along with other factors. It proposes to study women in village settings of Assam having desired skills in textile weaving; in general, women weaving textiles in their domestic life as a spare time activity and thus propose to highlight the implicitly hidden problems that restrict their free will. It also proposes to understand if lack of motivation and confidence apart from factors like finance, marketing, family problems, etc. restrict such women to take up entrepreneurial ventures.

## **2. Objectives**

The main objective is to identify the de-motivating factors that hinder women weavers' entry into entrepreneurial activity in villages of Assam. It also aims to study whether artistic skill of women influences their confidence and thus, build up their desire to position themselves in the market through their products. Based on broader objectives, the following objectives are derived:

1. To identify the problems which deter women weavers' entry into entrepreneurial activity in villages of Assam.
2. To examine whether women's artistic skills and entrepreneurship are related.
3. To provide suggestion for increasing entrepreneurial activities among domestic women weavers.

### **2.1 Scope of the study**

The study is limited only to domestic women weavers' of Sonitpur district's Balisiha Kachari, Bahbari Bagicha and Ghatua Chuburi villages in Assam.

### **2.2 Concepts utilized in the study**

In this study domestic women weavers are those women engaged in weaving textiles for their family needs, for gifting to friends, relatives and for occasional sale sometimes within their village community. These women have taken up weaving only as a practice and as a leisure activity and not as a full time business activity. The study relates weaving to fabric made from any yarn like cotton, silk or synthetic. It relates women's artistic skills to her designing skills i.e. the number of designs, the type of design and the number and type of products that she can produce on textiles and from textiles.

## **3. Research methodology**

The paper utilizes empirical investigation and interview methods with rural women engaged in domestic weaving in addition to bibliographical retrospect. Thus interpretive and empirical approaches form the basis of this study. Balisiha Kachari, Bahbari Bagicha and Ghatua Chuburi villages that exhibit typical rural characteristics in Sonitpur district of Assam have been chosen for undertaking the research. These villages are specifically selected as these

villages represent a good combination of Bodo, Rabha and Assamese populations. Bodo and Rabha women folk are very well known for their textile artistry in Assam among other folks like the Mishings and the Kacharis among the scheduled tribes. Assamese women in rural settings also practice textile weaving. Thus woman weavers who are engaged in the production of textiles while making the study are taken as the population for the study.

### **3.1 Sample selection**

To make the study representative of domestic women weavers, sixty two respondents from sixty two households were purposively chosen through convenience sampling technique out of a total of 140<sup>3</sup> households. These women respondents were into weaving textiles for domestic purpose as well as taking it as a leisurely pursuit sometimes constituting a part of occasional sale but not as a full time occupation. The same respondents' in-depth responses also constituted the part of interpretive approach. They belong to the lower age category of 18- 35 years, middle age category of 36-45 years and upper age category of above 45 yrs but less than 60 years. From literature studies it has been observed that women especially in rural areas engage in entrepreneurial activities at later age once they are free from domestic responsibilities like taking care of their children. But, artistic skills are inherited among women at a very young age. Hence the lower age limit is set at eighteen years, as this becomes a legal age in India and thereby legal to start an individual enterprise.

### **3.2 Data collection and analysis**

A schedule was administered to sixty two women respondents engaged in domestic weaving in Balisiha Kachari, Bahbari Bagicha and Ghatua Chuburi villages of Sonitpur district of Assam. The data was analyzed with the help of SPSS statistical package. Frequency distributions and tests like Chi-square were used to find out the relationship among variables. The in-depth interviews were recorded as notes and interpreted accordingly.

## **4. Analysis**

Women entrepreneurship faces a series of problems especially when they belong to village settings. Being a woman itself poses issues pertaining to their responsibility towards family, society and agricultural work in rural areas. Women in India are faced with many problems to get ahead their life in business. With respect to women weavers in the selected villages it is astonishing to observe that only 33.9% of the women weavers in surveyed villages weave for occasional sale and 9.7% respectively weave for gifting purposes. But every woman who knows to weave dedicatedly weaves for her family.

According to statistics given below, 87.1 % women believe that lack of access to start-up finance is a major hurdle in their endeavor.

It is seen from the table one that no access to property, difficulty to secure loan due to collateral security and dependence on family members for finance are major obstacles with respect to access to finance.

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<sup>3</sup> A total 140 households have been engaged in weaving as a practice at present in the villages of Bahbari Bagicha, Ghatua Chuburi and Balisiha Kachari of Sonitpur district in Assam. This information has been taken from the ongoing UGC SAP sponsored project on Microfinance and Livelihood, 2011 undertaken by Tezpur University, Assam. The authors are grateful to Tezpur University, Department of Business Administration for providing with this information for this present research article.

Contrary to such dependence on family members, one unmarried respondent staunchly refused taking any help from family members. She mentioned:

[...] I already depend on my brothers for food and clothing. I do not want any brawl from my sister-in-laws for taking monetary help from my brothers.

However, another two unmarried middle-aged respondents strongly believe in staying dependent on family members. They retorted:

[. . .] we have a younger brother [. . .] why not take his help to sell our products. Can we go and sell it ourselves if he does not?

**Table 1:** Obstacles to take up weaving as an entrepreneurial activity

Major Obstacles	Responses (%)	
	Yes	No
1. Lack of access to start-up finance	87.1	12.9
2. Lack of access to raw materials	83.9	16.1
3. Lack of access to mechanized tools	14.5	85.5
4. Lack of access to Market	80.6	19.4
5. Lack of time to be in full-fledged business	61.3	38.7
6. Domestic problems	59.7	40.3
7. Socio-cultural attitude of the society	12.9	87.1
8. Legal formalities in starting up new business	48.4	51.6
9. Lack of government assistance	54.8	45.2
10. Health related issues like poor eyesight, back pain, etc.	35.5	64.5

\*The percentage (%) is calculated with respect to the responses obtained from a sample size of 62.

Certain in-depth issues related to access to finance are as depicted in the Table 2 below.

**Table 2:** Access to finance as obstacle

Access to finance as obstacle	Yes (%)	No (%)
No access to property	66.1	33.9
Dependence on husband or other family member	66.1	33.9
Lack of knowledge about securing loan	56.5	43.5
Difficulty to secure loan due to collateral security	77.4	22.6
Bank officials apathy	32.3	67.7
Tedious process of securing loan	54.8	45.2
Insufficiency of loan amount	29.0	71.0
Lack of necessary documents to secure loan	77.4	22.6
Loan refunding issue	67.7	32.3

\*The percentage (%) is calculated with respect to the responses obtained from a sample size of 62

Loan refunding and lack of documents to avail loan are also major concerns for women which de-motivates women to start a venture. For few women, loan is something which they never prefer over financial support from family. A respondent mentioned:

[. . .] it is an unending misery for me. Once I took loan for [buying] two pigs. [. . .] did not survive. I am still paying for it.

Still one respondent angrily rebuffs:

[. . .] taking loan is not easy as you think. We are poor people. Bankers give damn about us. On top of that we have no documents to show. [. . .] do not want to fall into this trap.

But there are some who are quite ok with the idea of approaching banks for loans and do not mind the process as tedious.

For one respondent, as she retorted:

Certain things have to be compromised if one truly requires loan. [. . .] do not mind waiting in queue and beg to officials for [. . .] work to be done.

**Table 3:** Raw material availability and infrastructural issues as obstacles

<b>Raw material availability and infrastructural issues as obstacles</b>	Yes (%)	No (%)
Cost of raw materials limits purchase quantity	88.7	11.3
Good quality raw material is not available nearby	72.6	27.4
Dependence on other family members for raw materials purchase	58.1	41.9
Difficulty to access work shed	35.5	64.5
Lack of necessary tools for weaving	29.0	71.0
Old and outdated tools	32.3	67.7

\*The percentage (%) is calculated with respect to the responses obtained from a sample size of 62

In case of accessibility to raw materials like thread and dyes and infrastructural issues, 83.9% (Table 1) believe that lack of access to raw materials is one of the main obstacles in their decision to take weaving as an entrepreneurial activity. The implicit problems with respect to raw material and infrastructural accessibility are presented in Table 3.

The above table shows that women weavers find difficulty in purchasing raw materials due to high costs. A majority (72.6%) believes that lack of availability of good quality raw materials like variety of yarns and dyes in the nearby market is a problem factor in their pursuit.

A talented poor weaver exclaimed:

[. . .] God! Let's not talk about yarns. It has become very costly. One has to think hundred times before finalizing on the yarn. Above that, good quality yarns [. . .] of my choice are nowhere to find in our small markets. [. . .] no money to go and buy from distanced markets.

However, it has been seen that women in villages do not have major issues related to access of work shed and weaving tools. Only 14.5 % (Table 1) believe that lack of access to mechanized tools is a hurdle in their desire to become self employed. This suggests that women weaving domestically are least bothered about access to mechanized tools. This may be due to the fact that they mostly use makeshift looms and tools which is made of readily available bamboo and wood and thus can be brought to use when the need arises as one of the respondents retorts:

[. . .] if somebody truly wants to take it as an activity, she may not require a big work shed with mechanical tools.

Another mentioned:

[. . .] comfortable with my pair of tools [. . .] do not require mechanical ones. If one pair of tools and a small work shed helps running the family [. . .] fine.

But women having training in weaving and using mechanical tools are never satisfied with type of work shed and tools they possess. One trained weaver responded:

[. . .] undertook training at Sualkuchi<sup>4</sup>. What am I supposed to do without proper work shed and tools?

Dependence on other family members for raw material purchase is of major concern to some 58.1% of domestic women weavers. A woman of lower age category depends entirely on her family for yarns and other raw materials. However, one respondent of upper age category stated:

[. . .] how can others understand [. . .] yarn we require? I go to whichever the nearest market is and bring yarns of my choice [. . .] makes me satisfied.

A whopping 80.6 % (Table 1) believe that lack of access to markets is a primary obstacle to their willingness to take weaving as a commercial activity. Among other problems within this domain Table 4 below shows that far flung main market and dependence on others to sell products in nearest markets are major hurdles for domestic women weavers. Also village women's lack of knowledge about 'where to sell' and 'whom to sell' is also a hindrance in their desire to take up this activity as a full-fledged business.

For example, one respondent stated:

[. . .] I have never gone out of my house alone. Forget about [. . .] customers and market. I find it much easier to sale occasionally in my village where I know everyone.

Another respondent enounced:

[. . .] no difficulty in knowing your market and customer [. . .] one who needs shall come or one may go and sell it in some shop.

64.5% women weavers believe that weaving for sale within village market is unprofitable due to less price and credit sales and barter. A disgruntled respondent retorts:

[. . .] selling to neighbors is like selling for free. [. . .] exchange your artistic product for less artistic one. Is it worth? [. . .] can't help it.

Hence, they give less importance to weaving for sale. As below, 54.8% women acknowledge the fact that they do not have any idea about the present market demand condition for woven products.

**Table 4:** Marketing issues as obstacles

<b>Marketing issues as obstacles</b>	Yes (%)	No (%)
Market is very far	80.6	19.4
Dependence on others to sell products in nearest market	56.5	43.5
Lack of knowledge about where to sell	51.6	48.4
Lack of knowledge about whom to sell	51.6	48.4
No knowledge about market demand	54.8	45.2
Difficulty due to credit sales and less price in village markets	64.5	35.5

<sup>4</sup> Sualkuchi is a silk weaving village in the state of Assam in India and is known for its Mulberry and non mulberry silk fabric.



Difficulty due to credit sales when middlemen is approached	53.2	46.8
Lesser price for products than male businessman	35.5	64.5

\*The percentage (%) is calculated with respect to the responses obtained from a sample size of 62

Regarding domestic problems only 59.7 % (Table 1) women in villages believe that it can be a major issue for them. As compared to literature review that shows lack of support from family as a primary obstacle for women to enter into business, the picture in villages of Assam tells a different story. Table 5 shows that only 30.6% of women agreed that their family will not support them if they desire to start their own weaving business. At the same time it is also true that women in villages cannot take business decisions on their own as is evident from responses of 53.2% respondents.

One lower age group respondent boasted:

[. . .] family always recommends me to have my own business since I know this craft well. Not everyone is bestowed with such talent [. . .] must utilize when I know. [. . .] However, I cannot decide what is good or bad on my own [. . .] need guidance of my husband in every matter.

82.3% women believe that family responsibilities holds first place for them but at the same time they believe that it is not impossible to balance family and work life as stated by 43.5% respondents.

In the middle age group category, one woman weaving chadar<sup>5</sup> on her loom for her family put forth that:

[. . .] no matter however profitable a business seems, if [. . .] do not have time for my children what is the purpose of earning. As a mother I should first ply to my children [. . .] then come business.

**Table 5: Domestic problems as obstacles**

<b>Domestic problems as obstacles</b>	Yes (%)	No (%)
Lack of support from family	30.6	69.4
Cannot take business decision on own	53.2	46.8
Family responsibilities come first	82.3	17.7
Difficulty to balance between family and work life	43.5	56.5
Taking care of agricultural responsibilities and other menial jobs	64.5	35.5

\*The percentage (%) is calculated with respect to the responses obtained from a sample size of 62

Also women in villages face major difficulty to take up weaving as business venture due to agricultural responsibilities and allied jobs. Most of the women in villages rear pigs, poultry, etc. alongside agriculture which take away most of their time.

Socio-cultural deterrents do not bother women to take up entrepreneurship which is reflected when 87.1 % (Table 1) disagree to it as posing a problem for entrepreneurship.

<sup>5</sup> Chadar is a piece of cloth worn as an upper garment by the women folk.

**Table 6:** Social issues

Social issues	Yes (%)	No (%)
Wrong attitude of society towards women in business	14.5	85.5
Difficulty to move and travel alone	62.9	37.1
Difficulty due to caste and social status	9.7	90.3
Village society believes that women should stay within their house	11.3	88.7

\*The percentage (%) is calculated with respect to the responses obtained from a sample size of 62

As one of the respondents' states:

[. . .] village society nowadays respect women who can do business. [. . .] it is no longer a stereotypical society with prejudices against women. Are you not addressed 'madam' because you work? [. . .] is the same in rural societies too.

As reflected in Table 6, for 62.9% of the village women, difficulty to travel alone is a hindrance to their willingness to start weaving venture.

Also, legal formalities in starting up a business and lack of government assistance deter only 48.4 % and 54.8% (Table 1) women respectively. Rural women believe that if they want to do business then these are minor things. For one of the respondents, these are small obstacles that one has to overcome and hence should not be counted.

As far as health issues are concerned women weavers suffer from poor eyesight, back pain, head ache, etc which affects 35.5% (Table 1) of women weavers mostly in the upper age category.

A woman above fifty years of age retorted:

[. . .] I have ample time during the day but only weave for family requirements. [. . .] cannot sit for long hours due to back pain. However my eye sight is good.

Another woman in the middle age group stated:

[. . .] since I weave difficult and fine designs my eye sight has become poor [. . .] I enjoy weaving even with watery eyes. [. . .] think I need spectacles to enjoy my work.

Around 61.3% (Table 1) of women agree that lack of time to be in full fledged business is a deterrent to their aspirations of entering into the weaving occupation.

As reflected by literature review, difficulty to trust people is seen among 75.8% women weavers. The below table shows that women in surveyed villages do not suffer from major psychological issues like sense of inferiority, or belief that business cannot be run by any women.

**Table 7:** Psychological issues

Psychological issues	Yes (%)	No (%)
Difficult to trust people for doing business	75.8	24.2
Women's inferiority to men	14.5	85.5
Money making not considered as women's job	9.7	90.3
Women cannot run business	33.9	66.1

\*The percentage (%) is calculated with respect to the responses obtained from a sample size of 62

Women of villages in Assam do not feel inferior to men. This reflects when a lower age group woman retorts:

[. . .] I feel proud that I shoulder some financial responsibility [. . .] with my artistic skills. I may not run a business at present but intend to do so if opportunity prevails.

Another woman explains:

[. . .] today's society do not make any difference between a man and a woman. It might be difficult for women to trust other person especially some male person in business [. . .] I shall feel secure if my husband or son helps me in my business than any other male person of my village.

The interpretive and empirical data reflects the many hurdles that women face in our villages. Thus objective one gets fulfilled from the above discussions.

Some Chi square tests were also performed with respect to certain variables like age, experience, educational background, confidence on developing designs and products, confidence to produce any product as available in the market, contentment in weaving at present, different caste groups, number of school going kids etc. to establish their relationship to the desire to be self employed and financially be independent and confidence to start business ventures.

The following null hypotheses were developed for the chi square tests.

*H1: Age and desire to be self-employed and financially be independent are not associated.*

*H2: Educational background and desire to be self employed and financially be independent are not associated.*

*H3: Women weavers' desire to be self employed and financially be independent is not related to their having school going kids.*

*H4: Women weavers' role in decision making in home affairs and their ability to take decisions related to their business on their own are not significantly associated.*

*H5: There is no significant association between weaving experience and confidence in producing new products and designs.*

*H6: Confidence in present artistic skills and confidence to start business have no significant association.*

To prove H6, it is divided into H6a and H6b.

*H6a: Confidence in developing new designs through observation and confidence to start business with present artistic skills have no significant association.*

*H6b: Confidence in developing new products available in market and confidence to start business with present artistic skills have no significant association.*

*H7: Age and contentment in weaving have no significant association.*

*H8: Contentment in present way of weaving and desire to be self employed and financially be independent has no significant association.*

*H9: There is no significant association between different caste groups and confidence to start business.*

For a significance level of 0.05, Chi square results for H1 shows that no association can be established among different age groups viz. 18 to 35 years, 36 to 45 years and above 45 years but less than 60 years and their desire to be self-employed and financially be independent. H2 suggesting no association between educational background and desire to be self employed and financially be independent also could not be rejected.

A lower age group woman with only primary qualification up to class seven and selling her products occasionally believes:

[. . .] only qualification and degrees cannot help in [. . .] business, [. . .] the zest and courage to run business.

Results of the test indicates that H3 could not be rejected and thus women's desire to be self employed and financially be independent is not related to their having school going kids. H4 is rejected as  $p\text{ value} < 0.05$ . From the results Contingency coefficient (C) of 0.383 also shows significant association between women weavers' role in decision making in home affairs and their ability to take decisions related to their business on their own. Results of Chi-square test and contingency coefficient indicate significant association between weaving experience viz. less than 10 yrs, 10-20 yrs and above 20 yrs and the confidence to develop new products and designs which leads to rejection of H5.

H6a is totally rejected as it is seen that confidence in developing designs and products through observation and confidence to start business with present artistic skills has significant association. This is reflected when a respondent mentioned:

[. . .] I may not be as talented as a woman running boutique stores in Guwahati<sup>6</sup> or that of a fashion designer but [. . .] I am a designer in myself as I could design products as many as I could see around me.

Similarly, H6b is also rejected. Thus, objective second gets fulfilled when it is observed that relationship exists between confidence to start own weaving business and women weavers' confidence in designing skills and their confidence in their ability to produce products as available in the market.

As H7 could not be rejected, it proves that statistically there is no significant association between age and contentment in weaving. However, contentment in present way of weaving and desire to be self employed and financially be independent has significant association as H8 gets rejected.

As being said by a talented weaver:

[. . .] I do not feel content [. . .] with no money, no yarn and no income. I am capable and can still make a living out of my skills as a weaver.

At (0.037)  $p\text{ value}$  less than (0.05)  $\alpha^7$ , H9 gets rejected and establishes significant statistical association between different caste groups (Assamese, Bodo and Rabha) and their confidence to start business.

As against the non-tribal Assamese community, tribal communities like Bodo and Rabha are more interested in having their own source of livelihood.

One Bodo woman stated:

[. . .] I never sit idle. [. . .] run my family rearing pigs, chicken and cattle. I also undertake custom weaving for my neighbors whenever I get time.

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<sup>6</sup> Guwahati is the capital city of state of Assam in India.

<sup>7</sup>  $\alpha$  is the level of significance

## **5. Suggestions**

The study identified certain issues related to women weavers' unwillingness to take up weaving as a business. Based on the analysis the following suggestions are made:

1. Provision of product and design training to women weavers can enhance the confidence level of women in villages to start their own ventures. Women can be provided training on mechanized tools to increase efficiency and decrease labour time. This can be done by opening weaving schools in potential villages.
2. Though access to weaving tools and work shed are not posing as major hurdles for undertaking weaving as a practice but steps must be taken to provide women weavers with better weaving tools in order to bring improvement in the quality of woven products. It also can help women in saving labor and time and thus women can feel inclined to weaving for commercial purposes.
3. It has been observed that 51.6% of women in villages do not know where to sell and whom to sell their woven products. Also 54.8% do not have any knowledge about the market demand. State level handicraft marketing and promoting agencies and NGOs can conduct regular workshops in potential villages to help women weavers identify their potential market source as well as acquire knowledge on the latest design and product.
4. It was also observed that far flung main market areas are major problems for women as they have to depend on middlemen or other members of the family to sell their products. Main town markets cannot be brought in to the villages but at least a market chain can be created with the help of agencies who could purchase the products from weavers at reasonable rates. This can also reduce the travelling constraints issues of women.
5. Women weavers in villages face difficulty to access raw materials like thread and color and other materials due to its high cost and inability to find it in nearby village markets. In such cases government interventions are required to provide good quality raw materials at low costs.
6. As is seen, the major problem that women face when deciding to start business is the lack of access to start-up finance. Seed-capital can be provided to such women at very low interest rates and with minimum document as well as minimum collateral security requirements through mobile-banking (bank on wheels) systems under government banking network.
7. It has been observed that women weavers lack trust on people which deters them to enter into entrepreneurial activities. In such cases, it is necessary to bring co-operative movements in villages. When a talented weaver joins such institution by gaining membership it can help in decreasing the distrust factor in women. Petridou and Glaveli's evaluation found that rural women are more prompt to participate in entrepreneurial activities as members of co-operatives (2008), But such cooperative institutions must be under regulatory guidance of some established institutions.

### **5.1 Conclusion**

Women weavers face many challenges in rural areas. But the study results make it evident that women weavers are not averse to the idea of taking up weaving as a full time occupation or enterprising. They have the inner urge or creativity and they want to prove themselves. Also, as thought before village society has come out of the superstitious beliefs that women fit only in domestic affairs. Rural society is ready to provide family support to their women to take up entrepreneurial activity. What is lacking is the fact that they must be encouraged and allowed by their family to take decisions related to their business idea freely instead of the

normal culture of taking opinion of husband or other family members. There is no dearth of artistic talent in rural societies. All that is needed is provision of finance, raw materials, training, access to markets, etc. to help such women utilize their skills productively. Because studies from time to time has focused on these persisting issues it is imperative to see that their requirements are fulfilled so that these obstacles do not hinder their entrepreneurial pursuit. If such provisions are given to our village women, we could expect more number of talented women weavers joining the commercial activity, and thereby, making the village society prosperous and self sustainable.

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