

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Research Problem, Objective, Scope and Limitations of the Study

*“Research is to see what everybody else has seen, and to think what nobody else has thought.”* -Albert Szent-Gyorgyi, Nobel Laureate (1893-1986)

#### 4.1 The Prelude

The present Chapter, in Section 4.2, unfolds the gap existing in the literature with respect to commercialization of crafts. It later explains the problem statement in Section 4.3 based upon which it constructs the guiding questions and objectives of the research in Section 4.4 and 4.5 respectively. In section 4.6, the nature of the study is explained whereas section 4.7 presents the scope of the study. The limitations the study are discussed in 4.8. Some conceptual terms and working definitions used in the study are also presented in this chapter in section 4.9.

#### 4.2 The Research Gap

Commercialization of crafts is not locational limited only to few places or communities but it is prevalent across the world wherever local crafts thrive. Many traditional crafts have been commercialized for external audiences or customers like tourists, local consumers, for export markets, etc. It is a worldwide trend as small subsistence economies have now integrated with larger societies and market economies (Parezo, 1982). It is seen that crafts, when turned into commodities, see stylistic transformation in its conventional designs and motifs as well as structure and form to accommodate it for changing aesthetic needs of customers; functionality of the crafts change when crafts are positioned for customers other than local audiences. Original raw materials are also found to be substituted, sometimes with less expensive ones or costly raw materials as per the new requirement and functional dimension of the crafts. The modifications in crafts may also vary depending upon the proximity of producer with that of the customers. Crafts may change due to direct customer influence or the influence of intermediaries and external agents.

The state of Assam, in the North Eastern part of India is a land of thriving crafts and cultures dating back to centuries. Crafts flourish throughout the length and breadth of

the Brahmaputra valley and some tit bits of information, often un-concluded ones, direct our attention to the commercial dynamics of the crafts. Some indicative examples of commercialized crafts are the 16th century mask making traditions from the period of Saint Sankardev, the bell metal and silk crafts of the antiquities, as well as the bamboo and *eri* crafts of the valley. Researchers like Jayanta Sarma (2009) have tried to document the history of textiles in Assam by giving an elaborate description on the cloths used since the medieval times to the present. He identified the emergence of new cultural elements and design changes due to the cross cultural contact of different communities and tribes within Assam, as well as the contact of invading cultures throughout history (ibid). Apart from cultural impact on the textile art, he hints towards transformation and commercial dynamics of textile art of Assam due to changing taste, fashion and the influence of discriminating markets (ibid). But his work falls short of describing the changes as an interwoven process in the context of commercialization. In reference to *eri* craft, it can be said that its demand has increased and hence its production. Weavers on becoming aware of the market trend have taken initiative to be innovative. The *eri* fabric is finding favor for making shirts and *kurtas* for men (Begum, 2010). Likewise, little clues exist in reference to the commercialization of mask crafts from Majuli. Bhattacharya's article speaks of the transformative journey of masks used in religious plays to decorative objects in present times due to growth of tourism in the said region (2010). Recent article again directs attention to commercialization of another revered bamboo craft, the *japi* of Nalbari from traditional peasant headgears to exquisite decorative adornments (Kashyap, 2016). Such examples hinting on modification of the crafts are worth noticing which opens further scope for research on why, when and how crafts commercialized.

Literatures related to crafts of Assam falls short in explaining the quantum of change that the crafts underwent with respect to the change in the design and motifs, forms and structures. The influence of customers as well as external agents and other intermediaries also requires further research to identify their role in commercialization. The process may be more than a mere simple process of transition from tradition to modernity (Cohen, 1983) and has variety differing significantly in their economic and cultural consequences (Cohen, 1989; Markwick, 2001). Artisans create their own world of craft items which depict usefulness and meaning but it is the

researcher's responsibility to understand the variations taking place in crafts under various forces (Chilton as cited in Jennings-Rentenaar, 2005). It is important to study the locational dynamics (Cohen, 1995) of craft producing regions to understand the macro aspects like the influence of various audiences (or customers) on craft production, commoditization and sale of crafts. It is also necessary to document the changes in the craft tradition over the years (Pandya and Dholakia, 2013). Such locational studies have still not received the academic and professional attention in Assam. Handicraft related research in Assam is notable for its absence, especially, on highlighting the continuity of tacit modification of the crafts.

Another important dimension in craft related studies is the sustainability of the traditional craft forms. Eminent researchers and anthropologists (Boniface 1998; Haralambopoulos and Pizam, 1996; Pinsam, 2006 as cited in Kaewnuch, 2010; MacCannell 1973; Whalley, 1996) working in the field of craft and culture identify commercialization as the main reason for the loss of authenticity and indigenusness of traditional art forms and in certain cases consider commercialization to be responsible for extinction of a thriving craft. There are examples wherein commercialization is cited to have led to the almost extinction of several craft forms like *Ajrakh* art of Gujarat (Karolia and Buch, 2008). Malik (2011) is also of the view that commercialization of *Phulkari* embroidery in Hazara, Pakistan, compromised with its authenticity as artisans left traditional designs in order to depict rural scenes in their embroidery. M'closkey and Helberstadt (2010) cite example wherein Navajo artisans' (indigenous people of south western United States) entry into production of rugs for sale to whites brought an end to the distinctive aesthetic style of earlier weavings. According to Greenwood (1977), commoditized cultural products lose in the process of commercialization, their intrinsic meaning and significance. However, the other group of exponents believes that commodification or commoditization of traditional crafts is positive as long as it suitably connects tradition, authentic and artistic features with modernity and needs of the market at an adequate level (Proschel, 2012). According to Tolentino, Jr. (2012), commercial art may allude neither to history nor folk mythology, but still it remains traditional for it retains certain features, both in technique and content that link to antecedent forms. Appropriate commoditization strengthens folk art, giving it a fresh authentic expression vital for its survival and sustainability (Tolentino, Jr. 2012; Xie, 2003).

Also, importance of commercialization stems from the fact that traditional crafts cannot flourish in absence of outside market as artisans do not feel inclined to continue a craft unless it remunerates them. ‘Artisans abandon a craft with little regret if the market collapses’ (Chibnik, 2003a). A few pieces would be made for domestic consumption, but in absence of further opportunity production of a craft declines leading to its extinction in the long run. Conventional craft forms will die if there are no takers. Unlike fancy artifacts, conventional handicrafts do not gain popularity in domestic markets (Chuenrudeemol, et al. 2012). In Assam, there may be few crafts with some local viability but are unlikely to survive further without external market, while some crafts which have virtually disappeared can make a rebound with new demand creation. Traditional knowledge is often in tacit form (Nugraha, 2010) among the artisans and if keepers of tradition do not pass on their knowledge to the coming generation of artisans it faces the risk of oblivion (Dormer, 1994 cited in *ibid*). Hence, there is a critical need to integrate tradition in commercial craft-product design with design management in order to address sustainability agendas effectively (Chudasri, et al. 2012). It is important for artisans as well as for craft researchers to gauge whether to stick to traditional components and designs or modify them but to what extent they must compromise and innovate without altering its personality or indigenous image (Baradas, 2004; MacHenry, 2000 as cited in Woofter, 2011). However, there is dearth of literature, more so in context of Assam, which takes into consideration the issue of sustainable production and marketing of crafts. It is important to understand the perspective and opinions of artisans as well as the market with regard to making crafts sustainable in the commercial world. By taking into consideration the opinion of various agencies and intermediaries dealing with handicraft marketing and sale, viable solutions can be drawn for successful commercialization.

Research on cultural production and craftsmen in Assam have largely concentrated on the cultural history of the crafts, especially its role in society (Barua, 1961; Basu, 1970; Chandra, 2005; Das, 1968; Dhar, 1987; Dasgupta, 1988; Duary, 2008; Gogoi, 2016; Goswami, 2005; Islam, 1990; Kalita, 2008; Khadria, 1992; Mazumdar, 2013; Medhi, 1992; Nath, 2009; Phookan, 1987; Roy, 1994; Roy and Medhi, 2005; Saikia, 2008; Sarma, 1997; Sarma, 2010; Sarmah, 2001; Sen, 1985). However, the slow and almost inconspicuous process of transformation of the crafts of Assam as a study is

not documented. Of course, bits and pieces of changes in crafts are discussed in literature. But a thorough study, in terms of studying stylistic change taking place in crafts, with respect to motifs and designs, raw materials and utility is yet not available. Handicraft related research in Assam is notable for its absence on highlighting the continuity of tacit modification in the crafts. Many other existing studies revolve around themes like production process, marketing problems of crafts, socio-economic dynamics, etc. (Baishya, 1989, 2003; Bhattacharjee, 2009; Begum, 2010; Das, 2008; Deka, 2012; Deka, 2015; Deori, 2013; Dutta, 2012; Hazarika, 1995; Hussain, 2015; Kakati, 2010; Kakoti, 2012; Kalita, 2007; Medhi, 1992; Sah, 2011a, 2011b; Sarma, 1978; Sarmah, 2006). Moreover, studies related to the influence of customers, tourists and intermediaries, and the interaction that exists between the producers and customers leading to the transition, innovation and commercialization of a craft are hard to be found. This study is an earnest effort in this regard. It is important to study such information and communication links through which producers identify consumer tastes and engage in product modification (Popelka and Littrell, 1991).

The socio-economic dynamics of craft commercialization are also important to be studied afresh in view of stylistic modification introduced in craft objects by artisans; there is an important link between transformation of crafts and social change (Cohen 1989b) as well as economic change that earlier studies have limitedly addressed. Studies by researchers (Begum, 2010; Bhattacharjee, 2009; Das, 2007; Deka, 2012; Kalita, 2007; Medhi et al. 2012; Sarmah, 2006) have dealt with objective aspects of socio-economic status of artisans. It requires further studies in the existing market situations influenced by customers, intermediaries, tourism activity and export market.

### **4.3 Statement of the Problem**

Commercialization of traditional craft objects is a world-wide phenomenon. Researchers in craft producing regions of the world have aptly identified stylistic changes occurring in handicrafts (Cohen, 1983, 1989, 2000; Graburn, 1976; Kay, 1990; Kepler, 1979; May, 1975) due to commercialization. They identified commercialization give rise to variation in motif, design and patterns (Barnett, 2009; Boynton, 1986; Hall, 2004; Lewis, 1991; Parker and Neal, 1977; Timothy,

2005; Yazdani, 2007), raw materials used (Berkin, 2009; Chartniyom, 2013; Guta, 1978; Jones, 1973; Hill, 1997 cited in Kant, 2009; Odegaard, 1987; Popelka and Litrell, 1991; Nettleton, 2010; Thomas, 1969) and most importantly change in functional dimension (Chang, et al. 2008; Chua, 2006; Chunthone, 2013; Hauser, 2002; Nettleton, 2010; O'Neill, 1997; Parezo, 1981; Stephen, 1993; Steelyana, 2012; Terry and Cunningham, 1993; Tolentino Jr, 2012;) of a craft. Commercialization of handicrafts also leads to innovation (Chartniyom, 2013). Limited information on commercialization related craft modification in Assam (Barkataki, 1969; BorSaikia, 2012; Ghosh, 2014; Goswami, 2005; Hoque, 2016; Sarma, 2009; Rahman, 2003; Rahman, 2013) are available without any reference to the systematic change in style with respect to motifs and pattern changes, use of raw materials and changing functionality of the crafts and clientele. In this regard, one study by Sarma (2016) is limited to studying change in three select crafts viz. *japi*, pottery and tribal textile. It is important to investigate the stylistic changes in traditional crafts sector of Assam from the aspect of commercialization related changes in other crafts also for understanding the sustainability of traditional crafts of the region.

Further, there is a need to study commercialization from the perspective of interaction between craftsmen and customer. Researchers have highlighted the influence of direct or indirect communication in modification of crafts (Graburn, 1984; Graburn, 2008; Jauss and Benzinger, 1970; Jones, 1973; Jules-Rosette, 1986; Radovich et al, 2010; Wethey, 2005). Tourists as customers are given an important place in commercialization of crafts in these studies. Cohen (1989, 2000) developed the interaction into spontaneous and sponsored processes of commercialization based on direct interaction of tourist customers and intermediation by middlemen. It is necessary to identify such interactions or interfaces for crafts of Assam. It is fruitful to understand 'how' and 'why' commercialization takes place and how a craft passes through the complex market network to ultimately land in the hands of the customer.

It is observed that commercialization by every means helps artisans improve living standards (Burns, 1996, Chibnik, 2003; Sullivan, 2013). Again, decorative crafts, in fact, fetch more money than conventional products (Berma, 1996; Cano, 2012; Census of handicraft artisans, Jharkhand, 2009; Kakati, 2010; Yang, 2008) and little modification fetches less money (Cano, 2012; Dash, 2015; Medhi et al. 2012; Modesto, 2001). It is extremely important to study the commercialization with respect

to change and modification in crafts and its socio-economic impact on the artisans in the select crafts sector of select places. Based on available studies, it is observed that handicraft of Assam has undergone many transformation and has economically impacted the lives of the artisans. However, thorough study of the transformation is required to fill the gap in the understanding of the dynamics of commercialization of the crafts of Assam.

#### **4.4 Guiding Questions**

The research questions are set of questions seeking to find answers to the problem in hand. As already defined, the extensive literature review helped formulate the guiding research questions of the study. This dissertation will explore the following questions:

1. What type of changes can be seen in crafts due to commercialization?
2. What are the reasons for the changes?
3. What is the role of artisan and intermediary/external agency in the process of change?
4. How do market forces influence the process of production, innovation and diversification?
5. How are the artisan community impacted due to the commercialization of the crafts?
6. How can there be sustainable commercialization of crafts?

#### **4.5 Research Objectives**

The main aim of the research is to develop a deeper understanding of the commercialization led stylistic changes occurring in the traditional crafts of Assam with focus on change in motifs, design, form, structure and raw materials. It also intends to understand the interaction between producer and consumers of the craft to understand the influence on changing aspects of the craft.

Even if the primary objective is to study commercialization of the crafts, it is argued that commercialization brings economic rewards for artisans, which is discussed in detail in the literature review (refer to Section 2.2, 2.9). Hence, it is thought to be prudent to work on the impact of such commercialization in the lives of the artisans. It is thus considered important to study the present socio-economic status of artisans in

view of commercialization of crafts. Lastly, the study by undertaking the various considerations of commercialization from the point of view of crafts, its producers and the market aims to suggest solutions for the sustainable commercialization of traditional crafts in Assam.

Thus, the following objectives are derived for the study:

1. To study the commercialization of traditional crafts of Assam with respect to change in style (motif, design), functionality, clientele and use of raw materials,
2. To study the present socio-economic status of artisans in view of commercialization.
3. To offer suggestions for sustainable commercialization of traditional crafts.

These objectives are being explicitly addressed as they thread their way through the core chapters.

#### **4.6 The Nature of the Study**

The study is both exploratory and descriptive in nature. It enquires the state of affairs of the traditional crafts and craftsmen. As an exploratory study, it looks into the new areas of inquiry like understanding the phenomenon of commercialization of crafts to generate some initial ideas about the process (Bhattacharjee, 2012) with respect to crafts of Assam. It tries to explain the modifications taking place in the craft objects through careful observations, detailed documentation and qualitative narrations of the events. While trying to understand and explore commercialization of the crafts, individuals who are knowledgeable about the topic are approached. As a result, the data generated is qualitative in nature.

Again, the part of the thesis that deals with the study of the socio-economic impact due to commercialization is descriptive in nature as it tries to describe the characteristics of the population engaged in the commercialization of the crafts. It is quantified through empirical data and is more structured in its approach due to use of pre-tested tools like schedule. The research, in general, remains primarily qualitative in nature because its primary attempt is to obtain qualitative insights within some specific locations and context. More specifically, this research is an attempt to



generalize ‘words and observations’ in the ‘limited context’ (Onwuegbuzie, 2003) of the studied objects.

#### **4.7 The Scope of the Research Work**

The geographical scope of the study is confined only to the Brahmaputra valley of Assam since it is known for many thriving traditional craft practices (refer to Chapter 3). Background research consisting of sources like gazetteers, government publications, books, official records, census reports, etc. give reference to some of the most well-known and widespread craft works available in this region. Specific locales of study (section 4.7.1) within this valley are selected which have high concentration of craftsmen and long held crafting tradition. Research works by various authors in different places of the world take into consideration prevalence of craft production, long held crafting tradition, high craftsmen concentration (Bajpai, 2015; Bortamuly et al, 2013; Kant, 2009; Parezo, 1981; Popelka, 1989; Sirika, 2008; Suich and Murphy, 2002; Tripathy, 1998) and specialization in particular type of handicraft (Limkriengkrai, 2010) into consideration while selecting particular handicraft and geographical site for study.

##### **4.7.1 Rationale for Selection of the Sites for the Study**

Artisans, narrowly or broadly defined, cannot be categorized as a homogeneous population. Relations of production and circulation vary widely even within a particular region (Tice, 1995). However, the sites mentioned below are known for the particular crafts since time immemorial and has inalienable historical linkage to the craft culture of Assam (refer to Chapter 3). The regions are renowned craft clusters in Assam (Craft Clusters of India Website, Ministry of Tourism, Govt. of India; Ranjan and Ranjan 2007;) where artisans have been engaged in commercialization of the crafts since generations. Many studies have been conducted so far in the regions mentioned (Baishya, 1989, 2003; Barua, 1961; Basu, 1970; Begum, 2010; Bhattacharjee, 2009; Chandra, 2005; Das, 1968; Das, 2008; Dasgupta, 1988; Deka, 2012; Deka, 2015; Deori, 2013; Dhar, 1987; Duary, 2008; Dutta, 2012; Gogoi, 2016; Goswami, 2005; Hazarika, 1995; Hussain, 2015; Islam, 1990; Hoque, 2016; Kakati, 2010; Kalita, 2007; Kalita, 2008; Kakoti, 2012; Khadria, 1992; Mahan, 2013; Mazumdar, 2013; Medhi, 1992; Nath, 2009; Phookan, 1987; Roy, 1994; Roy, 2014;

Roy and Medhi, 2005; Sah, 2011a, 2011b; Saikia, 2008; Sarma, 1978; Sarma, 1997; Sarma, 2010; Sarmah, 2001; Sarmah, 2006; Sen, 1985).

But, as mentioned in the section 4.2, handicraft related studies in Assam are limited mostly to the extent of understanding production process of craft, socio-economical aspects of the crafts, marketing issues, as well as cultural and historical background of the crafts. However, commercialization's related impact on the stylistic modification of crafts in terms of change in designs and motifs, raw materials and functional dimensions are least studied in these major craft clusters in Assam. Also, studies related to influence of customers as well as intermediaries and external agents in the transformation of the crafts are hard to be found. The selected places are appropriate for studying these aspects with respect to commercialization as these places cover the major craft heritage of Assam.

1. Pottery and terracotta craft of Asharikandi
2. Bell metal craft of Sarthebari
3. Brass metal craft of Sarthebari & Hajo
4. Bamboo craft of Nalbari
5. *Eri* craft of Kamrup
6. *Pat* and *Muga* Silk craft of Sualkuchi

The selected crafts are ideal for this research as these crafts have undergone commercialization which has led to its modifications. But on a practical level, the mentioned crafts have received very little attention commercialization and stylistic modification. These crafts will be helpful to fulfill the understanding of commercialization and its influence on modification. It shall provide a base to explore commercialization as a process. These crafts form ideological framing of material culture of Assam which has seen subsequent modification for its consumption outside the producer community but has still maintained a traditional link to the crafting heritage. Due to high concentration of craftsmen in the locations selected, the study shall be helpful to provide insights into the socio-economic aspects of the community engaged in the commercialization of the crafts. The crafts and the locales of production are thus purposively selected for this research.

#### **4.8 Limitations of the study**

1. The major limitation is the volume of this research work. Being a qualitative study and dealing with photographs and sketches of craft objects and designs presented throughout the report, the limitation arose with respect to restricting the explanation to few pages. Hence, the report looks little voluminous.
2. Cultural interaction brings transformation in crafts. However, changes are studied only through the prism of commercialization.
3. In studying modifications in crafts, only commercial motivation or modification for economic opportunism is studied.
4. Stylistic changes are not studied from the perspective of a design student to cover in-depth aspects of style in craft objects.
5. The study is basically confined to only those places which have high concentration of the artisans in a particular craft. The selection of these places is again based on literature review. Places which are well-known for the craft, where the craft has been traditionally practiced through the generations have been taken as the study sites. It thus, neglects other places where the commercialization of the craft is taking place.
6. Certain discussions in this study are based on the oral narratives of knowledgeable artisans. Knowledgeable artisans are considered as those artisans whose family has been hereditarily engaged in the production of the particular craft. Generally, it is difficult to find such knowledgeable persons. But care has been taken, that the oral narratives regarding the transition of the crafts are derived from the oral history of older generation of artisans. Due to convenience sampling techniques, few such aged respondents could be interviewed and were included in the study.
7. Even after locating such elderly respondents who are in their late eighties and nineties, it is difficult to generate desired information because of their inability to respond for various health reasons. In some instances, responses had to be corroborated factually from other family members. Although efforts were made to ensure that responses were independent, it was not always possible to do so. At times, it was also difficult for these individuals to articulate the tacit information they possess.

8. Pictures of craft objects are taken by the researcher herself. Hence, qualities of the photographs that are included in this work may not be of high standard. However, care has been taken to make sure that the pictures indicate the intended views.
9. Though efforts were made to collect old items for giving a picturesque presentation to explain changes taking place in craft object, at times, old products were difficult to be obtained in its original form and quality. Certain crafts like bamboo craft, pottery and terracotta and some fabric craft like *pat*, *muga* and *eri* are degradable. As a result, the researcher has to rely on oral information and sometimes sketch provided by the artisan respondents as a source to link the transition process.
10. The authentication of the age of the old products is based on artisan or the members of the household's view. No specific validation tool could be used to predict the actual age of the craft products.
11. Crafts like *pat*, *muga* and *eri* are undergoing value addition in the hands of designers and tailors. However, this aspect is excluded from the present work limiting it only to the study of transition of the crafts.
12. The study on influence of external audience, especially international tourists, in the modification of crafts is limited in nature. It is studied only from oral perspectives of artisans, craft sellers and intermediaries. Similarly, study of influence of export market is also limited.
13. Export market of crafts is not taken into consideration. Only views of shops and agencies regarding export of crafts are sought.
14. Certain limitations exist with respect to explaining the stylistic modifications in crafts which takes into consideration changes in design or motif, structure, shape and form. Stylistic aspects like change in form, shape or structure of the craft and change in the functionality are very much interrelated aspects. For example, change in structure of a craft might be due to change in functionality and vice versa. However, for many crafts these aspects are difficult to be presented separately.

In qualitative research, findings are often criticized for its trustworthiness due to issues of credibility, dependability and conformity arising from subjective or qualitative data (Levy, 2006). In this regard, it is important to state in the context of this research work that every effort has been taken to see that data generated from

field remain credible, dependable and conform well. Despite such limitations, the methodology adopted in the study guided the researcher and yielded substantial qualitative and quantitative data to write this research report.

#### **4.9 Conceptual Terms and Working Definitions Used in the Study**

Before proceeding to discuss the study in detail, it is important to conceptualize the terms and definitions to be used in the thesis. This section describes the terms used in the thesis in detail for clear understanding of the reader.

##### **4.9.1 Conceptualizing the Term ‘Traditional Crafts’**

Traditional is a term generally used to refer to things which is static, old and indigenous (Nugraha, 2006). Tradition is the ‘internal handing on through time’ (Kroeber, 1948). A folk item, say for example, a folk handicraft is traditional as it has ‘temporal continuity rooted in the past but persisting into the present in the manner of a natural object’ (Bauman, 1992). Traditional crafts, thus, can be conceptualized as those crafts that have been produced generationally by artisan communities. It is an art that a craftsman inherits from his or her parents and is a hereditary one (Jena, 2010; Nugraha, 2006).

Craft, in its broadest terminology, is defined as original creations through an artist’s disciplined manipulation of material (Smith, 1986). Folk art researchers assume it to be products having simple, crude and naïve qualities which help differentiate between superior works of elite traditions and mean products of the folk (Jones, 1973). Folk utilitarian objects, according to Jones are ‘inept in execution, crude in construction and lacking meritorious qualities because the craftsmen have been only the fortuitous inheritors of formal styles emanating from urban centers. Crafts are products of simple application of traditional skills and material based knowledge (Chattopadhyay, 1984; Adamson, 2009 cited in Kamaruddin et al. 2013) in a small scale production system. Having said so, its production is not divorced from some mechanism (Chattopadhyay, 1984). Towards the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century, the term ‘craft’ began to be widely used in reference to handmade decorative arts (Chudasri et al, 2012). Handicrafts are thus perfect examples of traditional objects as they hold for eternity the ‘essence of its original abode’ (Pandya and Dholakia, 2013). Handicrafts are the

outright expression of cultural, natural and historical features of a region and society (Albayrak and Ozdemir, 2012).

The UNCTAD Report of the Inter-Governmental Group of Experts on Tariff Reclassification in the year 1969 adopted a provisional definition of handmade handicrafts goods. Handmade articles according to the definition cover those articles produced with or without the use of tools, simple instruments or implements operated directly by the craftsman mainly by hand or by foot. Again, within the handmade category, products such as handicraft ones, often have additional identifying features such as: (a) traditional or artistic features deriving from the geographical region or country of production; (b) production by craftsmen, working generally on a cottage industry basis.

According to the definition adopted by UNESCO/ITC Symposium 1997, crafts or artisanal products are objects made completely with hand or with the help of simple tools, even mechanical ones, as long as manual effort remains the most substantial part of the final product. There is no restriction in terms of its produced quantity and sustainable resources are used in its production. The intrinsic attributes are its utilitarian, aesthetic, creative, artistic, decorative, functional, culturally attached, traditional, religious and socially symbolic aspects (ibid). The Craft Council of India, in its 2011 report namely “Craft Economics and Impact Study” utilized a working definition of handicrafts as products or services delivered by artisans wherein manual effort forms substantial part of the final product or service, mechanical input is very less and traditional knowledge forms the base. The objects are easily identifiable with certain traditions or geographies (ibid). It further defines artisan as ‘a person with special hand skills, often handed down traditionally across generations, and often linked to a complex traditional knowledge system encompassing the material, technology and/or design aspects’.

Liebel and Roy (2003) defined handicrafts as products produced with ‘i) manual labour with minimal or no input from machines; (ii) a substantial level of skill or expertise; (iii) a significant element of tradition; and (iv) history of survival in significant scale’. ‘Crafts are not simply a particular way of making objects, but are inextricably bound up with the structure, values, history and identity of the communities in which they are practiced. The nature of crafts and their significance to

their practitioners are not fixed but rather change over time (Donkin, 2001). The notion of being handmade does not reject the use of machine in toto but merely emphasizes its use under of control human being. It is reflected in Yanagi's (the founding father of Japanese folk art movement) theory quoted by Triharini, 'as long as man does not become enslaved to machines, he may use them freely. However, if the machine is master and man the slave, the effect is disastrous. Man is most free when his tools are proportionate to his needs. The wisest planning would be in the direction of using the power in the preparatory stages of work and the hand in the finishing stages. Handwork would be too wasteful for the one, and machine finish too destructive of quality for the other' (2015).

In this thesis, traditional craft will be used in reference to crafts of the early societies as well as contemporary art forms that retains recognizable aspects of the early art and culture that produced it (Kay, 1990). Craft objects may be considered traditional if the 'basic structure and sentiment' are retained or if 'they have evolved along traditional lines (Kaepler, 1979). The terms craft/handicraft/folk craft/traditional craft or handicraft shall be used interchangeably in this report.

#### **4.9.2 Types of Handicrafts and Genres of Crafts viz. Conventional and Decorative**

The Craft Council of India, in its Craft Economics and Impact Study (2011) Report specified 15 categories of handicrafts which are i) Earth including clay/terracotta items, ii) wood iii) leather, iv) fiber which include bamboo, rattan, cane, leaf, etc. v) textiles vi) carpets vii) ivory, bone and shells viii) Toys and Masks ix) Musical instruments x) Paintings xi) Metal xii) Jewellery xiii) Combined media articles, excluding musical instruments and handmade toys (includes items like bullock carts, or handmade looms, etc.) xiv) Plastic or other new age recycled materials and xv) Craft skills offered as a service like carpentry, tailoring, tribal/traditional art, etc.

This thesis shall be based on the following types of handcraft: 1) Pottery & Terracotta 2) Brass Metal 3) Bell Metal 4) Bamboo Craft 5) *Eri* Craft 6) *Pat & Muga* Craft as these crafts form the material culture of Assam and fall strictly under the above classification.

Greenhalgh argued that craft, as a field, has three elements: decorative art, vernacular form and the politics of work (1997, as cited in Triharini, 2015). Vernacular stands for ‘cultural products of a community, things collectively made, spoken, and performed. It is as close to nature as a culture can get; the unselfconscious and collective products of a social group, unpolluted by outside influence’ (ibid). According to Terry (2001), there are two types of crafts viz. traditional and contemporary.

Chudasri and her colleagues (2012) defined three types of crafts viz. i) Traditional (Conventional), ii) Contemporary and iii) Modern. Traditional or conventional crafts have recorded multicultural history, especially of societies, in the form of objects (Alfoldy, 2007, as cited in ibid). Contemporary crafts offer aesthetics, individuality, function, customer service, problem-solving, rational analysis and technology since guided by art and design (Harrod, 1997, cited in ibid). The last category, that is Modern crafts can be ‘characterized by decorative and vernacular attributes as well as maintaining the political badge of handmade’ (Greenhalgh, as cited in Alfoldy, 2007, as cited in Chudasri et al. 2012). Conventional, as per Khan and Amir (2013), are age-old and traditional; modern ones are in keeping with the changes of consumer preferences and tastes and conventional and modern is a combination of both types.

Conventional and decorative craft genres are thus identified for Objective 2. Conventional craft genre, in this thesis, is defined as those crafts which have recorded history, which have been practiced by traditional craftsmen for generations, which are utilitarian in nature. The terminology ‘decorative crafts’ shall be used in reference to those crafts which shows plurality in its design and style due to contemporary influences or crafts that are completely new alluding to the history of the producing community and those which represent aesthetics and functional dimensions.

### **4.9.3 Conceptualizing the Terms ‘Art’ and ‘Craft’**

Art and craft are almost similar, but the distinction arises in their utility (Sarma, 2009). According to Henry Classic, ‘If a pleasure-giving function predominates, the artifact is called art, if a practical function predominates; it is called crafts’ (Dorson, 1972). Art in fact, represents process which is open ended with its outcome admired while on the other hand, craft utilizes specific materials to form products that are put to use (Bajpai, 2015). Textiles however, are difficult to be defined as either craft or art



but over a long period it is included among crafts (Das, 1992). In this thesis, the term art, craft, folk craft and handicraft shall be used interchangeably.

#### **4.9.4 Conceptualizing the Terms ‘Commoditization’ and ‘Commercialization’ of Traditional Crafts**

Crafts in earlier times had always been valued for their utilitarian nature. But in present times, the concept of craft or handicraft has changed dramatically due to the change in the attitude of people towards craft objects (Jena, 2010). Handicrafts are rapidly becoming commodities of sale. Many handicraft objects were kept outside the domain of market earlier. But, due to commoditization (the process through which craft objects are converted into commodities), craft items are getting evaluated in terms of their exchange values (Cohen, 1988). Commoditization, according to Cohen is ‘initiated by cultural brokers and entrepreneurs from outside the local community’ and thus ‘tends to affect the cultural products themselves’ (1988). According to Resinger (2009), cultural commoditization is a process of creating inauthentic cultural artifacts, specially designed for tourist consumption. Commoditization, meanwhile changing the meaning of cultural products, also has the ability to alter relations between the producer and purchaser (Erisman, 1983 cited in Hiwasaki, 2009; Howell, 1994). Commodified arts adhere to marketing rules (Ballengee-Morris, 2002).

‘Commercialization is the process of introducing a product to market (or a reinvention of a previous product)’ for profit (Reynolds, 2011). It involves production, distribution and promotion (ibid). Manufacturing a new product, or reinvention of an existing product, is the first step of commercialization (ibid). Meanings of cultural objects change when they enter ‘regimes of value’ (Appadurai, 1986). According to Isabella (2004; as cited in Omar, et al. 2014), commercializing is the ‘process of translating research knowledge into new or improved products, product and services, and introducing them into the marketplace to generate economic activity benefits’. Parezo (1981) defines it as a process by which any art at first used primarily for socio-political, religious or aesthetics purposes is converted into an item for sale. It involves realigning of the object in purpose and function. In developing countries of the world, commercialized handicrafts production is defined as a traditional skill based activity of artisans (the primary producers) like weaving, carving, knitting, painting, etc. to produce pretty trinket items for sale as gifts, furnishings, house-ware items and

fashion goods that reach local and foreign markets through intermediaries (Subramanian and Cavusgil, 1990 as cited in Fabeil et al. 2012). The definition of commercialization is complex and still inconsistent (Omar et al. 2014).

Commercialization, for the present study, will be used in reference to the modification process of craft as well as its transformation into an item of sale. Also, a craft need not compulsorily change in its style, structure, design, color and form for its sale. Many crafts retain the same original structure and form. However, they do become objects of sale. The definition of commercialization, thus, also covers this aspect of craft being used as salable object. Commercialization, in this study, is studied in regards to the informal and small-scale production of handicraft items. Moxon (1999) uses the term community industry as applied to the studied place to specify the local artisans, businesses, and markets that produce and commercialize in the community.

#### **4.9.5 Craftsperson, Artisan and Artisan Households**

The terms 'craftsperson' and 'artisan' are used interchangeably. 'Craftsperson' is one possessing a high level of traditional skill (Liebel and Roy, 2003). In a broad sense, the terms artisan and artist are also closely related. According to Little, artisan is 'one who practices or cultivates an art'; an artist is 'one occupied in any industrial art; a mechanic, hands-craftsman, artificer' (Howard, 2006). This study will utilize the term artisan and artist interchangeably along with craftsperson and craftsmen having same meaning as that of an artisan as defined. Also, the study utilizes the term artisan as a person deriving more than 50% of his income from craftwork (Yadav, 2012). Artisan household, as utilized in the study, thus represents that class of households in which crafting contributes an important share of income to the entire household income for sustaining the family. The term encompasses those households in which the members of the household cannot do away without the craft activity. Artisan household, thus, is a term used to define a household where crafting is one of the important activities of livelihood.

#### **4.9.6 Conceptualizing the Term External and Internal Audiences/Public/Customer and Intermediate Audience/Public/Customer**

The external audience according to Graburn (1976) is the public unfamiliar with the culture of the producer's society. Shiloah and Cohen (1983) define external public as tourists who become the direct consumers of cultural products. Garrett (1998) has

used the term ‘external patronage’ for tourist customers belonging to external cultures. External users, according to Larasati (1999), are people who are not directly involved in the production and original use of handicraft products. Customers who hail from the community or the place of the craftsmen are defined as internal audience in literature. Chudasri, et al. (2012) defines internal market as domestic market and the external one as export market. Internal community members’ from the domestic market has similar needs and aesthetic preferences (Modesto, 2001).

Other than the internal and external audiences, there is also an ‘intermediate audience’ which ranges between internal and external audiences (Bentor, 1993). The first includes community members in different parts of a place and second consisting of people who are non-community members but has adopted the culture of the artisans. This thesis will also utilize the term intermediate audience as members who are community or non-community members but residents of Assam.

#### **4.9.7 Conceptualizing the Term ‘Style’**

According to Merriam-Webster dictionary, style is a distinctive technique by which something is created. Style helps in grouping art objects into recognizable categories. As per art historian Schapiro (1953), style is defined as the constant of any form, element, quality and expression peculiar to a particular period or epoch of culture. Layton (1991) furthered it to encapsulate literary elements like vocabulary and grammar and defined style as regular shapes of the depicted subject and the manner of its arrangement and composition (as cited in Francis, 2001). Style, thus, equates general appearance of an art work (ibid). Accordingly, the placement of motifs forming a pattern will undoubtedly represent the existing style. By style, Glassie (1972) means a subjectively specified assemblage of artistic or aesthetic features that fits into a chronological sequence. Studying style helps in demonstrating the visible changes in motifs and techniques applied on art objects (Kapoor, 2015). For example, the denseness of designs in earlier *chikan* work and its sparseness in present form, refinement in motifs as well as change in its base material from white cotton fiber and cotton base to any colored synthetic base in modern times presents a stylistic shift (ibid). Shapiro (1953) also considers the constant prevalence of particular shape as style e.g. pointed arch shape edifice in Islamic and Gothic architecture and round arch in Roman buildings. Style is the result of ‘rule replication behavior’ or ‘rule creation

behavior' (Roe, 1976). The former descriptor is symbolic of craft while the latter is for art. Wolfflin (1915) has discussed three types of styles- Individual Style, Period Style and National Style. Wolfflin's concept of these styles demonstrates the visible changes in motifs used on the discussed object. The term style can be used to refer visual appearance, a technique, a theme or subject of work, a place, a period, a ruler and a cultural group (Visual Resources Association Foundations). On the other hand, Sackett (1977) has considered the concept of function as a perfect complement of style in an artifact as it determines variability in objects. Style then concentrates, in case of pottery, upon decoration, where pottery served as a symbolic image or as pure utilitarian objects of the society (ibid). For Wobst (1977), style is a 'part of the formal variability in material culture that can be related to the participation of artifacts in the process of information exchange'. The definition thus, stresses upon the visible aspects of the art object.

In this present study, style is basically considered in regard to motifs or a combination of motifs i.e. designs. However, other aspects like size, shape, form and structure of craft are also discussed while studying stylistic changes.

#### **4.9.8 Conceptualization of the Term 'Intermediaries' and 'External Agencies'**

An intermediary, in this thesis, refers to middlemen (mahajan) such as local vendors, wholesalers and retailers. External agencies are local or international, governmental or non-governmental, semi-governmental agencies and organizations as well as cooperative societies who work in the area of commercialization of the craft. Their activities can be segregated as those working in the direction of the modification of the crafts i.e. as change agents and on the other hand working towards establishing marketing linkage, i.e. as sales agent. They also can also simultaneously perform the task of change as well as sales agents.

#### **4.10 Wrapping up the Chapter**

This chapter presented the research gap, the statement of the problem and guiding Questions of the study based on which objectives were framed. The nature and the scope of the study are also discussed along with its limitations. The chapter also defined the conceptual terms and working definitions that shall be used in the study. The next chapter shall discuss the research methodology followed for collecting data and analysis of the data.