

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Commercialization, Stylistic Changes in Crafts and Socio-Economic Status of Artisans: Some Major Findings

The world as we shape it, and our experience as the world shapes it, are like the mountain and the river. They shape each other, but they have their own existence, in their own realms.

They fit around each other, but they remain distinct from each other. They cannot be transformed into each other, yet they transform each other.

The river only carves and the mountain only guides, yet in their interaction, the carving becomes the guiding and the guiding becomes the carving...

- Etienne Wenger (2007)

13.1 The Prelude

The major objective was to study the commercialization of the select traditional crafts of Assam with respect to change in the style, especially the motifs and designs, raw materials and functional changes in crafts. The second objective of the study was to study the socioeconomic status of the artisans engaged in commercialization. This chapter discusses the major findings of these two objectives. Accordingly, section 13.2 discusses the modifications and transformation of each respective craft studied viz. Pottery & Terracotta, Brass and Bell Metal, Bamboo, *Eri* and *Pat & Muga*. The changing dimensions of the crafts are presented from the viewpoint of commercialization in terms of variation in style which engulfs modification in motif & design, raw materials and shift in the utility of the crafts due to its aesthetic dimensions. Sub section 13.2.6, presents the findings in a constructive framework of commercialization. Section 13.3 finally is a discussion on the findings of the second objective.

13.2 Findings for the First Objective: Commercialization of Crafts in the Select Sites of the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam

The commercialization of the crafts as discussed elaborately in earlier chapters (Chapters 6 to 10) primarily reflected upon the stylistic changes. The modifications were discussed from the perspective of change in basic design elements, raw materials changes and the functional dimension of the crafts. The analysis reflected in detail the influence of different customers and their requirements, the channels of sale of the

artisans' produce, role of government as well as individual agencies in the marketing and selling of crafts. The major findings are thus presented below to summarize the analysis.

13.2.1 Pottery & Terracotta of Asharikandi

Clay crafts of Asharikandi divided into pottery and terracotta are found to have come out of the usual nomenclature of rustic utilitarian wares of the rural populace and traditional toy items of the children. The realization of economic potential due to the changing aesthetic tastes and new customer segments of the urban places of Assam has prompted artisans to undertake appreciation in the stylization of both pottery and terracotta products to expand their market beyond the utilitarian customer base. Spontaneousness in design development can be seen as master artisans of the village regularly infused creative elements through introduction of new products either based on conventional shapes or with innovative item line. Some of the traditional pottery wares like tub, *kalah*, *handi*, *khoja*, *ghati*, etc. have been modified into decorative products suitable for use in modern households (refer to Chapter 6, Section 6.4.1 A). Conventional toys like *hatima* were also brought out in different shapes whereas new items like decorative horse, wall tiles, sculptures and vases modeled on metal products of Assam were also introduced to expand the product line. In earlier times, and today as well, the selling of the crafts to local customers takes place directly through weekly markets and fairs while most of the artisans sell their crafts to intermediate and external audiences through local intermediaries and middlemen.

Modifications in basic surface ornamentation and structural forms became a part of the commercialization process since the mid 1970s period (refer to Chapter 6, Section 6.4.1). The usually plain surfaces of the pottery products and simple ornamentation on toys are elaborated for aesthetic uses. The surface embellishment shows the tendency of heterogeneity since old patterns like chipped lines, circles, flowers, etc. though produced, are quickly getting replaced by new overblown motifs and representational designs. Other than improvement and elaboration of the surface ornamentation, artisans have also started applying burnish to give a glazed look to the clay products. In certain cases, artisans have also initiated the use of synthetic color on products like vases and piggy banks (refer to Chapter 6, Section 6.4.3). Customers' orientation towards high finished glazed products brought the use of such raw materials in

practice. In pottery, and also in case of certain innovative objects like decorative horse, the trend is seen more towards gigantism of the products since decorative vases and horse figures are more in use as garden tubs and interior decoration items. However, miniaturization is also practiced for some items like *hatima* and some functional objects.

In recent years, some input has also been received on the design development front through trainings under the flagship schemes of Government of India implemented through agencies like IIE (refer to Chapter 6, Section 6.4.4). The designers working for these agencies, generally the master craftsmen of the village and also individual experts working for the organization have trained artisans to develop some new functional items like glass stand, beads and hangers. The agencies also facilitate artisans to meet customers through organized exhibitions from time to time. However, the role of the external agencies such as IIE is limited and sporadic in nature. Most of the commercialization process of Asharikandi craft is spontaneous with the local intermediary generally working as a channel to facilitate the commerce. Local intermediaries buy the crafts in bulk from the artisans and give them marginal input on the quantity of product and type of the product demanded in the market. Limited influence of direct tourists in Asharikandi Craft Village can also be seen which prompts artisans towards developing products that can be brought by them. However, the larger parts of the objects are always sold across different places of Assam, the sale of which has generally been facilitated by the local middlemen.

13.2.2 Brass and Bell Metal Craft of Hajo & Sarthebari

Hajo

The brass ware of Hajo produced since centuries and serving the utilitarian and religious needs of the people of Assam accomplish primarily the same old function even today. The products are still basically marketed through the local intermediaries like middlemen and vendors. But with changing needs of the modern customers, some modifications have encrypted in design and form. The items are made lighter whereas earlier designs on most items are no longer chipped (except on *xorai*). Artisans started producing smaller variants of some metal items like *tow*, *khorahi*, etc. for young bachelor customers of the cities representing spontaneous commercialization (refer to Chapter 7, Section 7.5) but without direct communication with customers. The growth

of gift market has also led to demand of small sized items. The other reason for modification and some structural changes is due to competition arising from imitation items brought from outside the state. But many of the traditional brass products have ceased to exist today due to lack of demand and loss of technique. It is also found that local and intermediate customers are primary customers and hence artisans seem to be less worried about the salability of the traditional products among the external customers. But some artisans at Hajo during 1990s tried producing innovative items suitable for decoration. However, it did not succeed in the market filled by superior quality imported products. Artisans were unable to stand in competition with far finished, machine made and lesser priced brass products traded by the middlemen from places like Moradabad and West Bengal. Except for few trips to brass producing regions of Moradabad, it seems that artisans have not received direct training on design and product development. The commercialization of Hajo metal works is thus found to be spontaneous in nature. However, the local vendors and middlemen are primary channels of sale of the metal products in the market.

Sarthebari

The metal crafts of Sarthebari, like that of Hajo are utilitarian and religious items. Its primary customers are the local populace of Assam. The products are also sold to some Buddhist countries and neighbouring states. Local intermediaries and Cooperative Society like ACBMUMSL have played a prominent role in linking the customers to the producers. However, the modification of the brass and bell products at Sarthebari has been primarily spontaneous in nature. In earlier times customers, directly reached the doorsteps of producers (refer to Chapter 7, Section 7.8). Master artisans of the place have been producing new designs and items bringing wide acclamation to Sarthebari. In brass, crafting of innovative items like *japi* and tray began in Sarthebari during the 1970s as the artisans realized the need to produce beyond the utilitarian and religious craft market. The influence also came from the steel utensils market. Similarly in bell metal too, innovation in product line is seen since the late 1990s after artisans started getting trained to craft novel items. Government intervention came in the form of organizing small training sessions for the artisans. Some NGOs like AdHoc Pacific Organization also provided training to the artisans in jewellery making.

The orthogenetic characteristics of the old designs is still maintained in bell metal items, however, more heterogeneous designs have come into picture in recent decades (refer to Chapter 7, Section 7.4.1 & 7.4.2) especially with respect to chiseled works. The designs have become more spaced whereas the embossing has become lighter for faster production. Modern customers' demand for aesthetics in tradition has also resulted in high ornamental works on surface. Some structural modifications can also be seen on brass and bell metal products of the place as artisans try putting old objects to new uses and for increasing the aesthetics (refer to Chapter 7, Section 7.4.2 C). Some of the traditional products like *xorai*, *bota*, etc. are miniaturized to suit new requirements as that of souvenirs (Chapter 7, Section 7.5). The competition from machine made products also compelled artisans to miniaturize the items to grab external customers. Beside this, use of oil based paints can be seen on some decorative objects and jewellery items (refer to Chapter 7, Section 7.7).

More innovation in the brass and bell metal works is seen due to the growth of institutional demand for trophies and souvenir objects as well as rise of the decorative product market (refer to Chapter 7, Section 7.6) in the last decade. The influence of the external agencies in the design modification and product development has been sporadic and the emphasis is more on fine finish and quality aspects (refer to Chapter 7, Section 7.8). Government agencies through its various schemes primarily arrange exhibition for artisans to sell their products. Artisans have been provided tour to metal producing regions like Moradabad under the training schemes of the govt. Intermediaries like local middlemen, vendors and wholesalers have been the channel for the sale of the crafts. The commercialization of the conventional brass and bell metal products are found to be spontaneously directed with intermediaries and external agencies generally playing the part of a sales agent. However, guidance on improving quality and saleable products provided by some individual agencies helped a few artisans to introduce some novel products after late 1990s.

13.2.3 Bamboo Crafts of Nalbari

The commercialization of bamboo crafts is studied from the perspective of commercialization of *japi* (refer to Chapter 8, section 8.4.1), and of other utilitarian crafts like *pasi*, *khora*, *duli*, *jakoi*, *khaloi*, etc (refer to Chapter 8, section 8.4.2), In *japi*, it is found that the proliferation of the design and structural modifications was

spontaneous artistic responses to the need to create designs that would attract customers other than the rural populace. The declining demand of the *parda japi* (used as veil by women), post independence, and the over production of *haluwa japi* propelled artisans to beautify the *japi* for use as object of decoration (refer to Chapter 8, Section 8.4.1 C (i)). Since then, the product has seen many changes with respect to motifs, plaiting technique and raw materials used for ornamentation. Artisans tried utilization new raw materials available from time to time to ornament the *japi*. *Balichanda* and *jak-jaka* paper used earlier were replaced by velvet papers and velvet cloths; used of golden threads are also seen. Motifs and designs also saw transformation from conventionally used natural elements and triangular patterns to heterogeneous elements and representational motifs. Letter writings like welcome and *namaskar* and other messages were also added to design line. Designs placed below the *doi* or plaiting were now placed on the surface. Similarly, the intricacy of the plaiting work saw some dilution as artisans started giving less importance to the plaiting but focused more on its ornamentation. Time saving and economics of production were the reason for such changes.

The growth of institutional buyers of *japi* fuelled its miniaturization to be used as badge. In case of *japi*, it is found that the craft has modified through spontaneous commercialization as artisans tried developing *japi* into a saleable product altering its functionality. However, in recent times, role of external agents like NGOs and intermediaries like local middlemen can be seen with regard to giving inputs on the size, shape and dimension of the *japi* as well as raw materials (refer to Chapter 8, Section 8.4.1 F). The functionality of the *japi* has changed from veil used by women to decorative object and to souvenir items. Concepts like badge *japi* were introduced for institutional buyers whereas clock *japis* were also made for drawing room decorations. The size and structure of the *japi* is also found to be modulated with the introduction of *japi* in various sizes and forms.

The commercialization of the utilitarian crafts as aesthetic and decorative products has progressed in Nalbari only since 1980s (refer to Chapter 8, Section 8.4.2). Prior to this, bamboo craft commerce was mostly related to farming and fishing items sold generally in weekly markets. Some were traded in far off villages by the middlemen and local vendors. They brought in information about new types of bamboo products

found in towns and cities. Artisans started developing small decorative products like flower pots and produced miniature versions of utilitarian objects as toys for children. Meanwhile artisans trained through government's ITI (Industrial Training Institutes) also started innovation in product line which fellow artisans followed. In later stages in 1990s and early 21st century, more number of government agencies like NEHHDC and several NGOs started engaging artisans to develop novel products as well as items molded on conventional items. Innovation in bamboo crafts is found to be induced by intermediaries and external agencies and is more a sponsored process. Novelty in the product line is also attributed to the influx of innovative items from other states. Artisans under the direction of middlemen, who used to bring samples of such items, produced many new items for modern day functional and aesthetic requirements.

Miniaturized utilitarian items sold as toys for children are now used as decorative products as well as souvenir objects. Some objects like *duli*, *dala*, etc. are converted into waste paper bins and tea trays respectively. Change in the use of raw materials can also be found as artisans regularly used plastic threads of different hues to tie the open ends; use of such colored threads also add to aesthetics in the objects. Burnish and paints are also used on the products to offer more glazed look and sophistication. The products are either directly sold to customers or sold through NGOs, government marketing bodies or intermediaries. In earlier times, primarily, intermediaries' mere helped reaching crafts to destined markets whereas intermediaries in present times also help to sell the products apart from initiating product modification and diversification (for more details refer to Chapter 8, Section 8.4.2 C).

13.2.4 Eri Craft of Kamrup

Eri silk products, especially coarse *borkapor*, and *thaan* pieces had always been woven and its commerce was prevalent even during the British era of the 19th century (refer to Chapter 9). Smaller variants of the *borkapor* called as *chadars* were also woven but with lesser and simpler ornamentation limited only to the ends of the *chadar* often with *muga* yarn or cotton fiber in red, black or green. The commerce of the *borkapor* was spread to the neighboring countries while the *chadars* were sold at domestic level. Weaving finer pieces with high ornamentation was a pastime activity of the women as there was no market for such pieces then. Motifs were generally

inspiration drawn from the nature consisting of flower, creeper, rosettes, geometric patterns, etc. *Kalka* or *magar* was a common motif woven on *eri chadars* (refer to Chapter 9, Section 9.4.1) generally on the border ends. The middlemen generally traded the *borkapor* with the customers of the neighbouring regions. Its utility remained as simple winter fabrics of the villagers. The design till the later part of the 20th century remained simple and small. However, some commerce of the *chadars*, especially the ornamented ladies' *chadar* began to flourish in limited amount, as these products came to be sold in the nearby markets of Bijohnagar and Guwahati. The middlemen brought the *chadars* to the intermediate buyers of the towns and cities. As a result, demand for the *chadars* gave way to modification in designs. Tribal designs were brought to use on these *eri* pieces for more aesthetics. The *eri chadar* started to rise above being mere winter wraps to a fashion object.

Some intermediaries such as local middlemen and entrepreneurs, by the late 1990s and in the early 21st century, started giving design and product related instructions to the village artisans based upon the feedback received from the intermediate customers. Ornamentation became more spread out, complex and heterogeneous and use of synthetic yarn in several colors for designs came into being. *Eri* commercialization also resulted in intermixing of synthetic yarns and other silk types for creating several varieties of expensive and inexpensive fabrics for different customer segments. The intermediaries also started looking out for innovative products and diversification in *eri* fabrics (refer to Chapter 9, Section 9.4.4). As a result, functional items like stoles, mufflers, *kurta*, wrappers, etc. came into being to address the functional requirements of modern customers. Designs from *pat* and *muga* were also incorporated in *eri* in order to offer more design variations and choice to the aesthetics seeking customers. Natural dyeing is found to be brought into practice on *eri* which was not practiced earlier for sale.

Since the later part of the last decade (i.e 2000s), the commercialization has been more prominent due to the influence of private players or external agents like Fabric Plus. Old designs are simplified and produced on *eri* products and more than ever use of natural dyeing has taken place. The designs today are either complexified or simplified depending on the customer segments (refer to Chapter 9, Section 9.4.2). Motifs have been enlarged and heterogenetic elements are also found to be woven.

Saris, pillow covers and home furnishing materials like door mats as well as products like ladies bags, mobile pouches, table runners, etc. are produced. During the last decade, local intermediaries as well as external agents have also induced different types of fabrics in *eri* to suit several other uses such as shirting materials and home furnishing linens (refer to Chapter 9, Section 9.4.3). Government organizations with the help of agencies and institutions like IIE and SIRD as well as through NGOs and Cooperative Societies are providing training to the artisans on design and product front. The role of the intermediaries and external agencies has changed in recent times (refer to Chapter 9, Section 9.5). Some organizations like SIRD and NGOs such as Mouman Sevashram facilitating with the Dept. of Handloom & Textile, Govt. of Assam along with local intermediaries are now working more prominently as change agents along with the role of being facilitators of sale. They brought in standardization in size and shape of the products and made the products uniform. More than spontaneity, the commercialization of the *eri* craft has been a sponsored process initiated at first by the local intermediaries and middlemen and at later stages involving private players and government and non-profit agencies.

13.2.5 Pat & Muga Craft of Sualkuchi

Pat and *muga* craft has underwent revolutionizing change with respect to design, raw materials used and the functional dimension of the craft itself (refer to Chapter 10). In earlier times, the motifs were crude, primarily consisting of small floral motifs, creepers, butterfly, birds, circles, dots, lines, etc. laid in geometrical shapes to form design pattern (refer to Chapter 10, Section 10.4.1a). Simultaneous tribal influence on designs was also found. Some famous motifs like *kalka* and *kinkhap* brocade works were due to influence of Muslim elements in the Ahom regime. The designs were not spread profusely on the silk fabrics except for special wears and particular people belonging to higher classes (where the individual motifs covered more area with more spacing). The *anchal* of the *chadar* were decorated only on one side and the *mekhela* had designs spread from bottom till just below the knee. The original hue of the silk was preferred over other colors, yet some natural dyeing was practised basically in darker shades in limited hues. The raw material for ornamentation was golden metallic wire and cotton yarn in colors of red, black, green and, at times, yellow.

In the mid part of the 20th century, the primary customers of the silk products were the local and intermediate customers, and some plain *thaans* were exported outside Assam. During the period of independence of India and after that for around two decades, some well known master artisans of the place gave creative dimension to the designs. As a result, a large number of new designs like *raj-mukut*, *kaziranga*, *monimala*, bottleneck, *hatipati*, etc. came into being. The use of new loom technology was also influencing the production of design elements. In the 1920s period, *muga* and *pat* saris, often made plain but with *lata pari*, was seeing tough competition from Banarasi saris imported from Uttar Pradesh. But conventional designs like *lata*, along the borders, were only designs produced on the *pat* and *muga* saris for few wealthy takers (refer to Chapter 10, Plate 10.33). However, during later stages of 1950s and 1960s, Banarasi prints influenced the designs. The competition among master artisans and other craftsmen, to carve a niche in the market for the products gave rise to larger variety of designs. In the 1970s (refer to Chapter 10, Section 10.4.1.C ii), some of the motifs made only on *gamosa* like the *dolma-deli* and *japi* designs entered into the *muga mekhela chadar*. Artisans till then maintained symphony in the motifs and the *pari* works. But by end of 1970s, designs that were produced only on one end of the *chadar* were replicated to the other end too.

By 1980s, ornamentation started to become more and more profuse and compact. Some political situations of the time like the growing sentiments of seven sister states in the North East were economically harnessed by artisans through designs like *satbhoni* (refer to Chapter 10, Section 10.4.1.c iii). Heterogeneity in designs became more prominent. Intermixing and conjugation of the designs started taking place as local customers started appreciating dense ornamentation. Denser and widespread *paris* were produced with spread motifs throughout the fabric and the relief works stood out more prominently. It was due to growing artistic pursuit, professionalism and technological advancement like design cards among artisans. Old designs were modified to a great extent. Colors also came to be used in several combinations (refer to Chapter 10, Section 10.4.2). More use of synthetic yarns with silk started to take place by this time as artisans became more concerned about economic feasibility as well as customer demand for less expensive fabrics. Ornamentation also was done in synthetic yarns found in several hues and varieties which gave artisans more freedom to express artistically. Brocade works usually done only in metallic threads were now

done with synthetic *rolex* threads. Diversified products like saris started gaining more demand from customers outside Assam as a result of which further design development took place.

Since the late 1990s, product diversification saw new dimensions as tourists started visiting Sualkuchi (refer Chapter 10, Section 10.4.3.C). Prior to this, artisans had been producing tribal garments since commercialization began at Sualkuchi. During the 1950s, a few artisans also produced *muga* bedcovers. But the demand for functional fabrics since the growth of tourism to Sualkuchi since 1990s gave way to the production of items like stole, scarves, mufflers, etc. in silk. Herein, some spontaneous influence could be seen as artisans tried producing items that might be of some use to tourists. More diversification could be seen in recent years as a range of new items like pillow covers, home furnishings and other value added products like handbags are produced today. More number of young artisans have been experimenting with product innovation and entering to cater to modern customers. Use of natural colors and contrasting effect along with simplified or complex ornamental designs, modeled on both new and indigenous ones, are seen in recent decades. Growth of modern garments like jackets, *kurta* and *pyjama* for men and *salwar kameez* pieces for ladies is the result of demand generation in the modern and educated customer base of the towns and the cities (refer to Chapter 10, Plate 10.37).

The conventional designs made in the old times are yet produced but are either simplified or made more complex to increase its aesthetics for different customer segments. Substitution, addition and elimination of major or minor components of the stylistic pattern have taken place. Extremely innovative and fancy designs are also observed which initially and even today are mostly due to the involvement of the master artisans and graphs men. It is also found that some of the sacrosanct motifs woven only on religious fabrics are produced in general silk garments today.

However, intermediaries and external agents have also influenced changes in design elements especially in the reproduction of fusion motifs as well as production of innovative designs (refer Chapter 10, Section 10.5). Local middlemen and entrepreneurs collect designs found on modern textiles and direct artisans working under them to reproduce it on *pat* and *muga*. They have been advising artisans to produce fabrics of particular dimensions, quality, color and shape. They brought in

standardization of the products. The role of cooperatives in facilitating sales of the crafts, and some instructions on product types can be seen since 1938s (refer Chapter 10, Section 10.5 A). Local intermediaries had always remained an essential organ of the commercialization process since the old times. Their role has also increased in present times as they provide input to artisans on design aspects too. Private entrepreneurs from cities are also bringing modification in design and product line in Sualkuchi (refers to Chapter 10, Section 10.5 B). Govt. agencies like NEHHDC and Directorate of H & T have also been instrumental change agents. Designs produced by the organizations are utilized by entrepreneurial artisans and middlemen (refer Chapter 10, Section 10.5 C). These agencies help artisans who approach them by providing guidance on design, technique and market information. Apart from that, they also help artisans in selling the products by organizing exhibitions and craft fairs. Others like Cooperative Societies and AGMCL also help artisans enrolled with them to sell their crafts. Value addition in silk products is due to the training facilitation provided by institutes like IIE and SIFT.

13.2.6 The Commercialization Process of Crafts of Assam in a Framework

Commercialization of crafts is a fascinating area debated and discussed by many researchers across the globe. As discussed in literature (refer to Chapter 2), the different facets of the phenomenon involves commoditization of the crafts leading to stylistic modification in motifs, designs, raw materials, form and the changes in the utilitarian and religious nature of the crafts into aesthetic and functional objects (Graburn, 1976; Keppler, 1979; Parezo, 1981). Other than the modification in crafts, the process or stages of change involving spontaneous change in the craft or directed modifications is also discussed extensively by some researchers (Jauss & Benzinger, 1970; Jones, 1973; Bonyton, 1986; Jules-Rosette, 1986; Cohen, 1989) (refer to Chapter 2, Section 2.7). It has been suggested in these literature that crafts are modified by artisans as and when they come in touch with external audience (especially tourists). The systematic description of the process of commercialization with respect to direct influence and indirect influence of customers in case of tribal crafts of Thailand was presented by Cohen in 1989. His model of spontaneous and sponsored process of commercialization reflects the role played by external agencies in the modification of crafts (refer to Chapter 2, Section 2.7). According to his

concept of spontaneous commercialization, customers (in his case tourists) and producers of crafts are in direct interaction with each other. As a result, stylistic modifications take place in crafts when craftsmen initiate change to fulfill tourists' demand. He did not discuss in detail the role of external agencies or intermediaries in this process. The sponsored commercialization was more due to the intermediaries (in his case were international missionaries and NGOs) who direct necessary changes to artisans to produce crafts for customers located away from the indigenous crafts maker.

13.2.6 A The Commercialization Aspects of the Crafts in Assam

Craft commerce in Assam, especially in the studied locations, has been a long phenomenon being pursued since centuries (refer to Chapter 3). Crafts such as utilitarian metal objects and silk fabrics were traded within the region, as well as in neighbouring states and countries. Information available from historical sources draws attention to the craft produced in the old times and changes occurring to the crafts in terms of the modifications in motifs and designs due to various cultural influences. Usable information on commerce during that period is rare. However, literary records of the early 20th century and other limited secondary data for the mid 20th century, and primary investigations done for this study suggest the growing influence of commerce in the transformation and modification of many traditional craft objects. Also, as seen through the primary field investigation, artisans of the study area kept producing crafts primarily for the local customers. However, at the same time, they have been changing various aspects of the crafts in search of new customer segments. During research, it is observed that direct customer influence leading to spontaneous change is not a very prominent aspect of craft commercialization in Assam. The craftsmen of Assam are located in rural areas and villages located away from the actual consumers of crafts. It is noticed that spontaneous commercialization is not always related to the influence of external customers like tourists as they rarely visit the rural craft producing regions. This is seen in spite of declaration of Asharikandi (2007) and Sualkuchi (2005) as craft villages for rural tourism. Thus, crafts mostly underwent spontaneous modification as producers change certain aspects of craft in anticipation of customers, especially the intermediate and external audiences in the cities and towns across Assam and other regions.

Unlike in Thailand where producers reacted spontaneously to direct tourists, in the studied places of Assam, artisans produced spontaneously but sold mostly through agents. Master artisans' creative desire led to introduction of multitude of designs and motifs, and novel products. Interestingly, in many of the cases of craft commercialization in Assam in the selected study areas, artisans, especially the master artisans, brought necessary changes in the crafts. Artistic inclination, desire to have an edge over competing artisans and inclination to cater to larger customer base of the towns and cities of the region led to modification in crafts. The P & T crafts of Asharikandi during the 1970s (refer to Chapter 6) and the bamboo *japi* of Nalbari (refer to Chapter 7), since the period of independence, underwent modification for realizing new customer segments. *Phulam japi's* design and structure as well as utilization of new types of raw materials are generally due to artistic inputs of the craftsmen. Some structural changes are noticed in brass craft of Hajo (refer to Chapter 8) as well due to artisans' anticipation for new customer base. Brass *japis* came into being as artisans tried to capture decorative market. Likewise, *pat* and *muga* crafts (refer to Chapter 10) underwent changes in design, in use of raw materials and some innovation in product line due to foresighted master craftsmen of the village who tried commercializing the crafts for other customer segments.

It is found that pure producer-customer (especially tourist customers) interface in modification of crafts seldom occurs. The direct interaction section shown in orange (refer to Figure 13.1 in this Chapter) represents *pure spontaneous* process of commercialization but a rarity. Some instances of this type of commercialization are seen in the *pat & muga* craft of Sualkuchi in the late 1990s when tourists' visit materialized. Realizing tourist (international) need for functional items like wrappers and stoles, some young artisans started producing these garments adding to the already existing traditional product line. Artisans also try incorporating modification for internal customers as well as intermediate audiences of the towns and cities, but yet again sell their handicrafts through sales agents like middlemen and sometimes also through vendors. Local intermediaries like middlemen, in earlier times and even today, work as a link connecting the artisans (producers) to the consumers of the crafts and provide sales intervention to the artisans.

On the other hand, there are also external agencies like ARTFED, NEHHDC as well as SIRD who provide support to artisans by procuring their crafts and selling those through their sales outlets. At times, sales platform is also facilitated through arranging exhibitions and fairs. The process of commercialization where intermediaries and external agents only provide sales intervention, shown in section engulfed by blue wing, is presented as *spontaneous commercialization*. This form of commercialization is very general in the crafts producing areas of Assam. Middlemen and vendors often collect items from the doorsteps of artisans and generally give input on the quantity sought in the market. They also bring feedback on the sold product which helps artisans decide to continue or discontinue a particular design or a product. Majority of bell and brass metal artisans of Hajo and Sarthebari sell their crafts to the wholesalers and vendors and fall under this process. In case of pottery & terracotta crafts of Asharikandi, *eri* craft of Kamrup and bamboo crafts of Nalbari too, craftsmen generally sell their crafts to local vendors and middlemen.

Some Government bodies like Directorate of H &T also provide design support and guidance to the artisans through training programmes or design brochures. Over the years, role of intermediaries as well as external agencies has increased. Under various programmes and financial support of Govt. bodies like Development Commissioner (Handicrafts), agencies like IIEs, NIDs and NGOs offer training to artisans on designing aspects. Artisans are trained in novel products and designs as well as offered training on remodeling of conventional motifs and items. Bell metal artisans in Sarthebari underwent such training on innovative items like jewellery. Different functional items are developed in Asharikandi based on traditional models under IIE. However, such instances of design interventions are sporadically scheduled under Govt. bodies. Such interventions where only design interventions are offered by the external agencies, is presented in Figure 13.1 as *pure sponsored commercialization* shown in portion engulfed by red color wing.

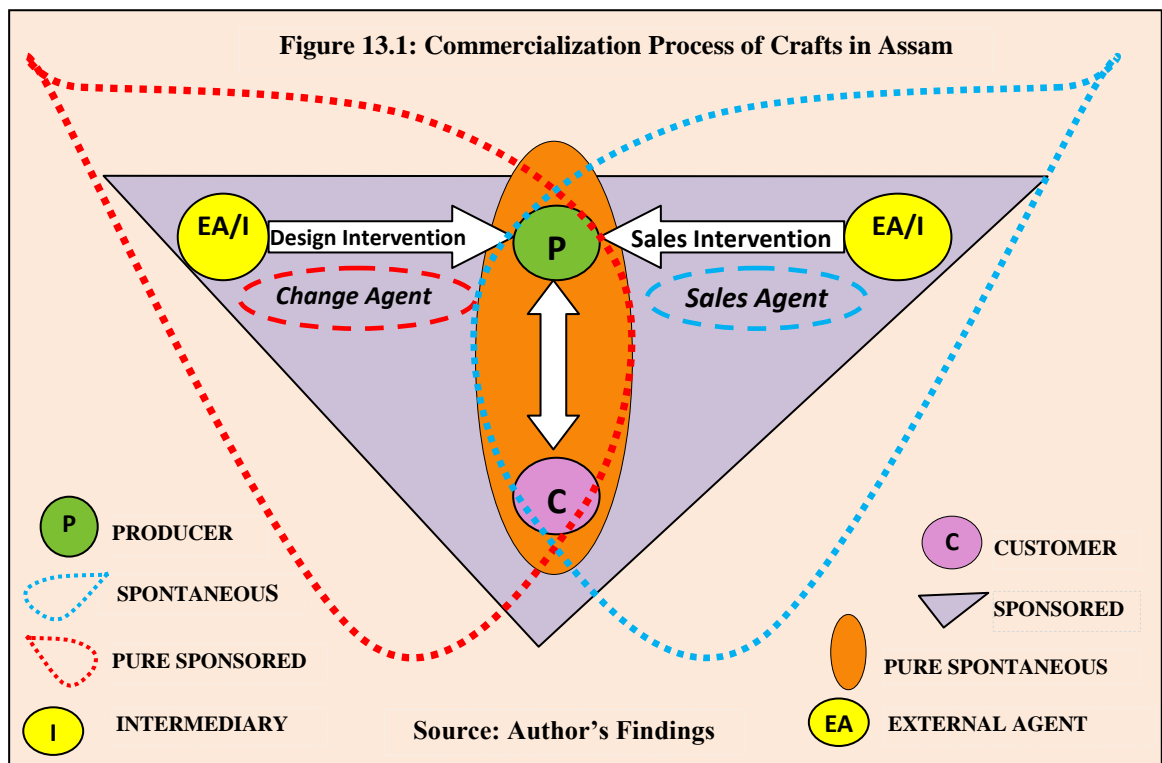
But there are several NGOs which offer regular design and sales interventions. Madhapur Milan Baniyik Samabay Samiti and Nalbari Zilla Bah Bet Udhayog employ artisans of the villages to produce items as per the design specifications of the markets. These external agencies guide artisans to produce items as sought in market. They provide design, size, shape, color and raw material specifications to the bamboo

artisans of Nalbari. Similarly, *eri* artisans of some villages like Pyranga also follow advice of these agents. Local entrepreneurs of the craft regions also offer both design and sales interventions to the artisans. This process is addressed here as the *sponsored commercialization* of crafts (as shown by the triangular section in Blue color wings) primarily led through external agencies and intermediaries. Cooperatives like Kasturba Gramin Bayan Samabay Samiti that directs *eri* artisans' output through their market expertise. SHGs are also instrumental this regard. In case of *pat* and *muga* textiles, as well as *eri* crafts, intermediaries have been playing crucial role in craft transformation and sale. It is found that involvement of intermediaries have led to introduction of heterogenetic elements in the design line. It is important to mention that due to the intermediaries and external agents, crafts have become standardized now as specific size, form and dimensions are followed in the production on the direction of intermediaries and external agents. In *eri* and *pat & muga*, many new varieties of fabrics have been introduced by local intermediaries and external agents like Fabric Plus, SIFT, etc.

In case of pure sponsored commercialization, where only design interventions take place, it is seen that orthogeneity in design line is continued but with simplification in the motifs and designs. Original motifs and patterns are modified within traditional frameworks. Agencies like Directorate of H & T, IIE and NEHHDC emphasize on modification in motifs within traditional lines. As a result simplification in designs and motifs can be seen. Fusion of old motifs is also seen as a result of their involvement as change agents. Their involvement has resulted in introduction of new functional items in crafts like pottery & terracotta and bamboo as well. A few artisans in brass and bell metal, due to training, have also picked up manufacturing of novel items. Some ITI trained craftsmen started developing innovative products in bamboo. Artisans situated in interior villages were asked to develop items like bamboo hair clips, show objects, file covers, fruit baskets and functional garments like stoles, mufflers, wrappers, home furnishing items, etc. Individual artisans trained under government schemes also became entrepreneurs and started guiding fellow artisans of the villages. Intermediaries like local entrepreneurs and middlemen are very much instrumental in bringing heterogeneity in products and design lines. Complexification seen in design elements and excessive fusion of motifs as well as transformation in use of colors, raw materials is more due to local intermediaries whose motive is, more

so, economically oriented. Both local intermediaries as well as external agencies employ village artisans to produce items as demanded in exports market. The artisans working for these external agencies are trained by the organizations to satisfy the growing demand in cities and towns both within and outside Assam.

The different processes of commercialization are presented in the suggestive framework as shown in Figure 13.1. It is noticed that the instances of commercialization in Assam vary from the process mentioned in works by researchers in other places of the world. However, it is argued that the craft commercialization in Assam as a whole can also be generalized into definitive processes. The findings are presented in the Figure 13.1. It is argued through this diagram that commercialization in Assam shows varied instances. *Spontaneous commercialization* is the major process due to artisans' own involvement in modification and transformation of crafts. But, it is generally led by the intermediaries and external agencies due to their involvement as sales agents of the crafts. *Pure spontaneous commercialization* instances are rare due to artisans' lack of proximity to the touristic customers and intermediate customers.



Pure sponsored commercialization is seen in case of crafts of Assam since past few decades as external agencies, generally under Govt. programmes, tried providing

design interventions to artisans for promoting their crafts in new markets. *Sponsored commercialization* has been seen due to involvement of intermediaries and external agents in providing design interventions as well sales intervention to artisans. However, Prof. Medhi states (based on the interview with Prof. Medhi) that commercialization of the crafts in Assam even to this day is more spontaneous and the tendency of sponsored commercialization is seen in spurts from time to time. The process of *pure spontaneous commercialization* is rare though not uncommon.

13.3 Findings for the Second Objective: Socio-Economic Status of Artisans in View of Commercialization of Crafts

1. The socioeconomic status survey was conducted to study the present state of the artisans engaged in the commercialization of crafts. It was found that artisans produced conventional, decorative and both (Conventional & Decorative) genres of crafts. Engagement in the decorative craft genres and production of both crafts gave artisans the opportunity to earn more (refer to Table 11.22, Chapter 11). It is seen that 10.1% and 13.8% artisans respectively earn in the highest net income slab of Rs. 21000 & Above as compared to the conventional craft makers (2.7%). Major percentage of conventional artisans earn in lower income groups of Rs. 3001 to Rs. 6000 (35.5%) while the maximum percentage of decorative and both craft producing artisans fall in Rs. 6001 to Rs. 9000 (29% & 30.9% respectively).

2. It is also found that the artisan families, those who produced both the crafts, had more family members engaged in the occupation than conventional genre artisans (refer to Table 11.7, Chapter 11). In case of pottery & terracotta however, decorative type provided more opportunity to the members of the family to engage in the occupation. Work hours are also found to have reduced more in case of decorative genre artisans as compared to conventional and both genre artisans (refer Table 11.15, 11.16, Chapter 11).

3. Likewise, the annual savings are also found to be higher for the artisans producing decorative and both craft genre (refer to Table 11.32, Chapter 11). Types of marketing channel used by artisans also determine their net income from the occupation. It is found that artisans selling their crafts directly to customers or selling through retail shops are falling in the higher net income slabs than those selling through local intermediaries like *mahajans* (middlemen), wholesalers, hawkers, etc. (refer to Table 11.39, Chapter 11).

4. The quantity produced is seen to be increasing in case of decorative category and both crafts producing artisans respectively (refer to Table 11.17, 11.19, Chapter 11). Again, work characteristics as that of being independent artisans is seen to have influenced the income positively than that of being piece-rate and wage-rate artisans (refer to Figure 11.5, Chapter 11). Similarly, richer product mix is also found to drive the income higher (refer to Table 11.25, Chapter 11). Artisans producing only 1 or 2 types of items are found to be mostly falling in the Rs. 3001 to Rs. 6000 group while those producing 2 to 5 different items fall in the Rs. 6001 to Rs. 12,000 categories. Those producing above 5 different types of items are found to be lying in higher net income ranges.

5. In commercialization, the degree of change in the craft is also found to have positive impact on net income. Artisans who introduce changes in their craft according to market requirements and changing customer tastes seem to lie in higher income slabs whereas those producing status quo crafts, majority fall in lower net income slabs (refer to Figure 11.6, Chapter 11).

6. Similarly, perception regarding income sufficiency and reliability of the craft as a source of income and social status is also found to vary across the three craft genres (refer to Table 11.31, Chapter 11). At an overall level, artisans of the decorative and both craft genres have higher mean perception of sufficiency of income (Mean Value 5.79) than conventional genre artisans. Similarly the perception about craft occupation being a reliable source of income and providing higher social status is also higher for these groups of artisans.

7. Artisans of the decorative and both genre of craft find the occupation more profitable than the conventional craft makers (refer to Table 11.35, Chapter 11). It is also found that 81.2% of the decorative genre and 87.2% of the conventional & decorative genre artisans would wish to continue the occupation in future as compared to on 64.5% conventional genre artisans (refer to Table 11.34, Chapter 11). Compared to conventional craft makers (21.3%), the percentage of respondents willing to encourage children or other family member to take up the craft as an occupation is also higher for decorative genre and both genre artisans (refer to Table 11.38, Chapter 11).

8. The data measuring perceived status of women in the craft occupation highlights that involvement of women in the production of crafts is 'fully considered'

in majority of the cases (64.6%) (refer to Table 11.41, Chapter 11). Participation of women in case of decorative genre is also considered more than conventional genre. However, only 20.1% agree to the perception that women have or should have full participation in selling of the crafts outside the home premises. In case of perception regarding involvement of women in selling the craft from home, it stands at 41.8% (refer to Table 11.42, Chapter 11).

13.4 Wrapping up the Chapter

From the findings of first objective of the study, it can be concluded that commercialization led to changes in the craft objects in terms of motifs and raw materials used. Most importantly, it led to change in the functional dimension of the craft. Utilitarian, religious and rustic crafts used in social affairs transformed into decorative and aesthetic objects. Some crafts are even miniaturized and used as gifts and souvenirs. The change was a result of artisans' aptitude to economically remain sustainable in changing market circumstances where different segments of customers are evolving. Some of the changes in recent times, though infrequent, were initiated through government sponsoring or private participation of individual entrepreneurs. However, in case of *eri* and bamboo crafts other than *japi*, it is seen that commercialization induced changes were mostly led by the external agencies. The role of external agencies and intermediaries, in earlier stages, were found to have been only limited to the extent of selling the crafts to various customers.

Finding of the Objective 2, i.e the study of the socio-economic status of artisans highlight that commercialization positively impacts net income of artisans, their perception of well being, reliability on the craft and most importantly, the involvement of women in the occupation. Artisans engaged in producing decorative craft genre as well as both craft genres fared better than conventional craft producers in terms of net monthly household earnings from the craft as it is seen that 10.1% and 13.8% artisans respectively earn in the highest net income slab of Rs. 21000 & Above as compared to the conventional craft makers (2.7%). Decorative craft making provided more opportunity to the members of the family to engage in the occupation. Similarly, annual savings of the artisans and output in terms of quantity produced is also found to be more for decorative craft makers and both genre artisans. Degree of change in crafts produced is also found to have positive impact on income.

Introduction of more changes according to market requirements help artisans earn more. Artisans producing decorative craft genre and both crafts find the occupation comparatively profitable than conventional craft producers. Perception regarding reliability of income as a source of income and income sufficiency has high mean value for decorative and both craft genre artisans suggesting that these groups find themselves at better place than conventional craft makers.