CHAPTER V

TEXTILE OF BARAK VALLEY

5.1 INTRODUCTION

All through the ages, all over the world, we find vivid examples of man's strong urge to express his artistic and aesthetic characters in visual form (Bhavnani, 1993). Man continues to knit a worldwide magical web with the imagination and memory. He dreamt in his sleep, he dreamt while awake, his mind progressed amongst the existing and non-existing and these all happens with the help of act, the act which light brings before eyes is inexpressively great, but our seeing has not been as great as the scene offered to us, we have not fully seen. We have seen more happenings, but not the deeper truth which is measureless pleasure (Tagore, 2006). Craft is a labor intensive creation and this creation extensively dispersed throughout the country uses the traditional skill of artisans, which passed down from one generation to the other. It provides direct employment as well as indirect dependent of many people; historical significance of craft in India has a history of several centuries. There were exports of handicraft goods and textiles from India to the rest of the world from time immemorial.

Textile is a fabric made by weaving and this term comes from a *Latin* word texture, which means to weave. Fiber can be categorized in two forms: natural fibers and manmade fibers. Natural fibers are obtained from both plants and animals. The major fibers were cotton, flax, wool and silk. Manmade fibers are manufactured from animal, plant, mineral or synthetic substances, some man-made fibers are rayon, fiber glass, nylon, polyester, acrylic, and spandex. The most native textile evidences were found at *Mohenjo-Daro*, an archaeological site of the third millennium BC on the *Indus* River (Gillow and Barnard, 1991). The Indus civilization was fairly advanced in the art of textile-making and many evidences, such as- cotton seeds, cotton silk, and best fibers and filaments, spindles, bobbins, needles, and other instruments were found there (Pathak, 2011).

The weaver's craft had a long and distinguished past and the cotton cloths with diverse designs were used in Harappa cities. From the age of Buddha, we find the clothes created on cotton, silk and woolen. The famous inscription gives a glimpse of

the prestige and prosperity which a guild of silk-weavers enjoyed in the Gupta period (Pande, 1984). Some representations on the seals and terracotta figures from *Mohenjo-Daro, Harappa* and other sites are found with dresses and turbans. One bearded human image or figure has been found from *Mohenjo-Daro*. It is 16½ inches high, details are damaged away, but there is a hint of clothing, at least over the lower part of the body. It is not clear whether the stuffs were made of cotton, wool or silk. The cotton fabric has been given different names in different languages. It is called *Karpasa*' In *Sanskrit*, '*Cupas'* in Hebrew, '*Karpasors'* in Greek and '*Carbesus'* in Latin. Cotton the ancient fibers known to man, and the only natural one to come in filament form. According to Chinese tradition, it was used in China a long ago as the twenty seventh century B.C. (Singh, 1994). The *Sanskrit* word *karpas* and *karpat* meaning cotton and *salmati* and s*imbali* meaning *simalu* cotton were borrowed from the *Austric* language. Thus, the techniques of cotton cultivation and making of cotton thread may be considered as the gifts of the *Austric* race. The *Harshancharita of Bana*, the *Kalika Purana* and the sculptures of the age proved that Assam was well-known for cocoon cultivation and the weaving of cotton and silk from ancient times. Assam was perhaps known even in the time of *Ramayana* as a country of cocoon nurturing (Saikia, 2013). Cotton is durable and reasonable in price. *Mohenjo-Daro* has exposed the use of cotton cloth and an inscription at Babylon says cotton reached there from the Indus Valley. The hand woven textiles have occupied a significant place in the civilization of India since very ancient times.

When the ancient man settled down and created his home, he felt an urge to beautify his surroundings and first he arranged leaves and flowers to make patterns on the wall then he turned to his dresses. The ruins of ancient Egypt have displayed that, first the needles were made of animal bones and then of bronze. In faraway Scotland also, a bronze needle in a silver box was found. The mummies in the pyramids use to be draped with cloth, complexly woven and designed and the creators using thread made of cotton, silk and the hair of camels and goats. Alexander the great was surprised at the needle work he saw in Persia. The most primitive needle work of China deserves special mention. The Chinese designed all their clothes, whether for daily use or special occasions and no woman was considered cultured if she did not know the art. The needle work of the 14th century China resembles paintings, natural

and true to life. The girls of Japan were similarly skilled their kimonos bearing testimony to this.

India has the glorious traditions of woven textiles manufactured from wide range of different materials using variety of weaving methods for both functional and aesthetical purposes. India enjoys a long and wonderful tradition of needle work and weaving. Clothes made in this country had very much impressed the Greek historian Herodotus and later Megasthenes and Marco Polo song their praise. The figures excavated at Harappa and *Mohenjo-Daro* provides evidence of the beautifully woven and embroidered clothes .The art of weaving is found back to the time of the *Rig-Veda* as well (Basak, 2007). The flexibility and creativity of the Indian weavers and embroiderers in their commercial response to both export and domestic developments is well documented, from ancient times. Really, India remains the most original creative and prolific source of textile production in the world. We have both Asian and European literacy references to cloth production to shed light on the many centuries bridging these archaeological finds. From within India itself the Hindu epics such as the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, as well as Buddhist sources, chart in detail the processes and uses of textiles made of cotton and silk between the fifth and the second centuries B.C (Gillow and Barnard, 1991). Silk is a gorgeous luxury fiber and it is strong, elastic and lustrous. Silk is expensive and its price fluctuates widely. Each silk fiber is hundreds of feet long and it is technically defined as a filament. Several threads are thrown or twisted together to form silk yarn (Vidyasagar, 1998). India owed her knowledge and stock of silk from two independent sources: One from central Asia and Persia and other from Assam to Bengal perhaps across the Chinese frontier via Manipur (Singh, 1994).

These above mentioned historical sources have given the information regarding Cotton and silk and clearly saying about the origin of these fibers and their utility in India. In Barak Valley, sufficient numbers of cotton trees are available which provides the good number of cotton to the Barak region as well as textile weavers, like *Dimasa* and *Assamese* of Barak Valley are doing their sericulture practices in their territories. These practices are fulfilling some demands connected to their textile. Due to availability of industrial threads; the cotton cultivation and sericulture practices are comparatively less. Primitive man collected juices from plants and colouring substances from the earth and applied them with sticks to their bodies or to

the simple cloths, but these were only temporary applications and were easily brushed off. The sophisticated concept of dying developed in the ancient civilized centers of the world, these are, India, China, Egypt, Mexico, Peru, Greece and Rome where dyeing became a specialized occupation (Hecht, 1989) and (Sing et al., 2009). The people of Barak Valley are expert in dying. Even in contemporary days, when the synthetic dyes are available in the market of Barak Valley, some of the weavers are using their traditional natural dyes along with ready-made dyes, which are made by chemical industries.

Colour has its significance connotation and declaration. The statements of colour vary on the basis of social, cultural, political and aesthetical views of nation, society and human being. In this regard it is fact that every weaver community has their own concept and beliefs on colour theory. But, in general they have some common understanding about colours.

a) **Red:**

Red is the colour of blood, this colour is also count as a primary colour. Because it has the potential to mix with other colours and to create another colours. This colour signifies bravery, prosperity and good fortune.

b) **Blue:**

This colour signifies depth as well as infinity. Like red this colour is also the part of primary colours, it is also enable to produce another colour. Blue has its many shades, which also visualizes many accepts. The utility of this colour is equally valuable in weaving as well as in embroidery.

c) **Yellow:**

Yellow has the same tendency and very easily can mix with the other primary colours. It plays a vital role in the arena of visual art. Yellow colour signifies the colour of death body as well as it indicates the purity and the freshness. Golden yellow is also equally prominent in the case of weaving.

d) **Green:**

Green is the colour of nature; this colour signifies growth, harmony and peaceful feelings. Therefore the use of green colour in weaving is very dynamic for each weaving communities of this region.

e) **Orange:**

This colour denotes sacrifices and is commonly used in the lower garment of women which is worn on holy occasions as the sign of surrender.

f) **Violet:**

Violet is also another vibrating colour used by the weavers of all community. This colour is used by the middle-age and youth females of *Dimasa*, *Assemese, Rongmei,* and *Meitei*. Lower garment in violet colour of any tribes gives the attractive looks to the female.

g) **Black:**

Black colour always used as supported colour. For the weavers of Barak Valley, black is considered to be the colour which provides the volumes as well as dimension.

Presently, weavers are getting yarn resources directly from the local markets. But, some of the process of yarn production is followed by the weavers of this region, for instance-

Winding: Winding is the technique followed by the weavers of Barak region of transforming yarn to bobbins. The winding machine is a drum-like structure with a wooden stand. A wooden stand is involved on a heavy wooden base. The two perpendicular stands have a notch at the Centre, where the drum is fixed by means of two iron nails. The coil of yarn is engaged in this drum. The next stage is the twisting of thread which is carried out in the twisting machine.

Twisting Apparatus: This machine contains of four parts-bases, stand, blade with spike and handle. The base is hexagonal in shape with two vertical stands and the stands are rectangular in shape with the pointed free end. The blades are fixed to the stand by means of an iron-rod. After this process, the yarn is again shifted to the winding machine. From the winding machine the complete yarn is transferred to the bobbin with the support of spinning wheel.

Spinning Wheel: This instrument contains of four parts and these are -bases, stands, wheel and spindle. The spinning wheel is placed arms of a T-shaped stand. The spindle is fixed on the shorter /arms opposite to the spinning wheel. The spindle is rotated by a belt running around the wheel and the spindle .Spinning is the method by

which twist is imparted to a supply of overlapping fibers to create one continuous thread (Hecht, 1989). Mahatma Gandhi, in the 20th century, was the single individual who successfully prevented the total eclipse of Indian crafts by connecting them to the village economy and the notion of political freedom. The humble spinning wheel became the icon of self-sufficiency (Jaitly, 1990).

The basic purpose of any loom is to hold the warp threads under tension to facilitate the interweaving of the warp threads. The specific form of the loom and its mechanism may differ, but the basic purpose is the same. The *Yajurveda* mentions to certain methods of spinning and weaving. During the *Mauryan* period weavers made a significant progress in their work. *Bengal, Kamarupa, Magadha, Madura, Aparanta, Kasi, Kalinga, Vatsa and Mahisa* were the main centers of textile industry, where people of the weaving profession worked collectively. The *Kusana* period in India proclaim that weaving was a successful profession, and that India cloth had become a popular article in international trade.

Weaving is the final phase in the process of making clothes. In weaving, the warp and the filling may be interlaced in many different ways. The particular technique that is used to interface the warp and filling is called the weave. The plain weave is the most common. Twill weaves produce diagonal lines on the face of the goods and satin weaves give an extra solid and glossier appearance on the face of the goods than any other type of weaves (Vidyasagar, 1998). Waving is the process of interlacing and the loom is the means of keeping the warp threads under tension in parallel order.

Embroidery motifs on the costumes of the sculptured figures of Ajanta periods where dresses were beautifully embroidered in many designs, the descriptions in the classical Sanskrit dramatic plays where mention is made of rich and gorgeous embroidery fabrics (Bhavnani, 1993). There are various types of embroidery works made by the different weaver's community of this region. Such patterns are circular, triangular, square, and liner. At the same time the abstract kind of symbols are also used by the weavers. The direct references of these abstract figures are not possible to find out in the nature. These are the reflection of their extreme feeling and observation towards society and nature. Simultaneously they are equally enable to highlight the realistic patters, for instance-sun, moon, horse, cock, different bird, leafs and elephant. So embroidery is an important art activity among the weavers of Barak valley. It is a

supplement to pattern making in weaving. Embroidery is such an activity which could easily produce curved figures. The loom interlacing could not produce this type of forms. To get more pleasure weavers are similarly involved in needle works and giving the aesthetic touches in the traditional clothes.

A motif is not the same as a symbol, but a symbol can be used as a motif. The motif may be anything from a single flower to a geometric shape. It is probable to use a single motif as decoration, or several motifs can be joined to make a repeat or overall pattern. A design is well-defined as a plan or pattern from which a total picture or an object can be made (Thompson, 2007). Manipur, Assam and Tripura create textiles with strong geometrical motifs symbolizing figures of animals and human beings, flowers and birds (Shankar, 2003). The Assam is specialized not only in weaving but also in embroidery and complicated designs are embroidered by employing a needle. Each woman expert in particular style of designing. Motifs are taken from Nature, flowers and birds, fish and animals, geometrical and circle forms are effectively used with charming multi-coloured combinations. Many types of stitching are used in the embroidery. Some types are more or less commonly used by the weavers like *Dimasa, Assemese, Rongmei, Meitei* and *Bengali*. These are, running stitch, back stitch, satin stitch, long and back stitch, stem stitch and chain stitch.

The weavers living in Barak valley are influenced by the elements of physical environment as well as by their myths, legends, rituals, ceremonies, festivals, social organization and cultural norms. There are numerous motifs are available in each community and these all motifs signifies the different aspects of ritual and non-ritual purposes of life. Some common motifs are the cosmos, the sun, the moon, and the earth. Representations of these all motifs are not same for every tribes or communities, but somehow these motifs emphasized their fundamental knowledge about their universe. Their artistic way of representation of these motifs on their textile provide emancipation. The cosmos signifies that their textiles have the quality of universal acceptance; the sun signifies enlighten that means they have knowledge about their textile and its utility. The moon signifies their ability to accept different knowledge, the earth represent their association with their own soil. In the textiles of every community, there are so many symbols are available and these symbols help us to understand the limitless of various abstract concepts and ideas of their textiles as well as their cultural believes and traditions. The proper understanding of textiles of

every community has the symbolic significance and these elements of textiles enrich and enlighten the social behavior. Simultaneously these elements tried to give the inner message by the creative hands of textile weavers. Understanding of history of their textile practices, the symbols in their textiles are important from religious point of view and as well as important from a cultural and historical point view point.

The Indian textile activities are in the process of responding to the changes in the global economy and have exploited their strengths in order to build up international stages. Now, India is the second largest producer of textiles in the world, next to China. India was the major exporter of textiles before the industrial age. Particularly between 1600 and 1800 its textiles became well-known from Europe to China. In India there is an astonishing variety of spun, woven and embroidered fabrics and costumes in response to the social and ritual demands to the social and ritual demands of each tribe, caste or community. The English East India Company, founded in 1600, set up industrial unit in India to export Indian textiles to Europe (Mitter, 2001). Before colonial period; the handicrafts of every parts of Indian were in good condition. But, during the period of East India Company in India, the British started to exporting finished cloth to India. To find a big market for their own textiles, they destroyed the Indian traditions of textile making. But it never died in India; still there the local weavers of every part of India are involved in textile practices, which are regularly used in the daily life by each community.

The North-East India is inhabited by various tribes having different socio-cultural features depending on their respective phases of development and the contacts they have had through the different periods of time .Like the other parts of North-East, in Barak Valley various tribes have socio-cultural characteristics and that is advanced through different periods of time. Today regionalism is a multi-dimensional phenomenon involving geographical, political, cultural, economic, and many other issues. One major issue is the search for identity (Sengupta, 2002). In this regard; textile making of various tribes of Barak Valley is the realization of self-identity as well as activity regarding regionalism. Due to geographical isolation and inaccessibility, Barak remained almost unaffected. The culture of Barak region is undoubtedly a part of Indian culture and it has contributed to the totality of Indian culture. Assam is rich in handloom productions. Specially, handloom from Assam is world famous and the handmade textile of the state has been a matter of discussion

from the time of the *Puranas*. Weaving is a way of life in Assam (Sarma, 2008). Textile of any community is mostly an item of material culture of the societies. It has also signifies the cultural identity of the human societies. Textile describes the cultural, moral, ideological and aesthetical values of human beings. Colour combination, pattern, design and texture on the textile have the great impact on the development of the human values and morality. The human values and morality are very prominent in the textile practices of *Dimasa, Manipuri, Rongmei, Assamese,* and *Bengali.* The culture of moral education through the medium of dress culture is also reflects by the textile of these communities.

In the growth of human civilization, the contributions of females in social system are enormous in each field (Bhowmik and Bhowmik, 2006). Even it is seen in the case of textile making practices of any region of India as well as seen in the Barak Valley as well. Textiles hold a place of pride in indigenous art and craft of Barak Valley and it has immense potentiality in Barak Valley. In ancient India, women were mostly engaged with different art activities. That activity were like their education, it was very rare to encounter with formal education. They were tried to make themselves skillful in art and craft profession. In contemporary times these situations are changed. Now, women are making them enable in many filed, they are doing their traditional art works as well as maintaining their formal education. These actually make them enable to face any kinds of situation. This is not the case of any particular area, it is happening in every part of the country. This development is also seen in case of weavers of Barak Valley. Women of this valley especially, *Dimasa, Manipuri, Rongmei, Assamese* and *Bengalis* are mentionable. Embroidery, needlework and other forms of textile activities are common factors to these women. Through their textile activities they made their special status in the society. They are not only fulfilling their family demands, but also providing sufficient number of textiles for the entire valley.

These communities have their own ritual and non-ritual functions, these two activities are common for each community, and these are universal in nature. Every community always tries to romanticize these two aspects of life and that is reflects in their textiles. The same kind of modulation also maintain by them in different festivals. The rich tradition of their textile shows the different significant meanings. Textile practices of each community are well balanced in Barak Valley, because of

their existing generation. They took their guidance from their elders and learn every possibilities of indigenous textile which made them enable to continue this glorious tradition. When the young girls of these communities would be considered ready for marriage, during that time along with their formal education, it also matter that, how much they are skilled in their textile making. Because, the textile making is such type of vocation which make them self-dependable as well as this ability of making textile secure their livelihood, at least in any situation this girl can fulfill the minimum aspects of her family. Inter-related with daily life and culture, the daily textile practices of this Barak region have created a wide variety of cultural mode, which became the bench mark of Barak Valley. This textile works created an aesthetic atmosphere in Barak Valley, not only within any single community; it extended its fragrance outside the Barak Valley as well. Over the years, the people of this region engaged into a craft culture and these textile practices have been providing and fulfilling the cultural and social needs of this Valley. The primary intention is to make textile for personal and domestic uses almost every member of the textile weavers, for instance, *Dimasa, Manipuri, Assamese, Rongmai,* and *Bengali* try to involve in this highly sophisticated works.

The costume is such an important item in human life, which has so many significant roles in the social system. Sometime costume symbolizes the human status in the society. Costume almost functions all the ritual and non-ritual activities in human life, costume has provides the chance to the human beings, to think about the aesthetical prospect in their life. Utility of costumes are similarly important for every country. Due to geographical position of any places, there we could see different, motifs, designs, patterns, shapes and colours. Consequently these all the factors are seemed to be finding in the textile practices of Barak Valley. The word costume is derived from Latin consuctudo, which means a complete set of outer garments, including ornaments and hairstyles. Costumes are used not only to cover the body and enhance it; they also establish a significant non-verbal medium of communication that serves to establish the cultural identity of a person (Pathak, 2011).

Loincloths are identified as the different status in case of married and the unmarried women in, *Dimasa, Manipuri, Rongmei* and *Assemese* community. Married women cover their upper body through the upper end of the loincloth. Unmarried women/girls, on the other hand, put their loincloth around the waist and the upper part

of the body to be covered by another cloth. In recent times, the married women of these communities are not following the traditional manner for loin cloth and they are more comfortable to use the loincloth like the unmarried girl. But, old ladies of these communities are maintaining the traditional process of wearing cloths. The married and unmarried women of each community used to take a distinct care of about their dressing, when they are in public crowds, mostly in the ritualistic occasion. Another moral implication of these communities mode of dressing can be observed when a married woman covers her head with a wrapper. These women used to maintain this observance both in the public as well as in the domestic level as a symbol of respect to their elders.

For the weavers' community, indeed weaving is a primary qualification. Handloom industry of Barak Valley is practically monopolized by weaver not only from the idea of economic necessity but also from the sense of social custom. Young girls of weavers' community are initiated with this art at a tender age, and throughout their life. Not only they supplies clothing to their family members but also make it as a source of family industry. Weaving among all the groups of people is a part of household duties. The men do not take an active part to transfer technique of this craft to their children. From the very young age, girls are used to start helping their mother and other female members of the family. This practice makes them enable to know the complete process about the weaving and gradually they developed their skill and start full-fledged weaving. Many weavers of Barak Valley have started weaving under federation group. Those federations are getting supports from District Rural Development Agency as well as from the Self Help Group. The March of modern civilization destroyed the traditional way of simple way of living (Singh, 2009). The assimilation of modern and postmodern changes within the Barak Valley has the great impact on its textile practices, which somehow disturbed the textiles of *Dimasa, Meitei Manipuri, Rongmei, Assamese* and *Bengali.*

The women of *Dimasa* community besides their participation in many works create the threads from cocoon and made thus their own cloths (Guha, 2012). The practice of rearing silk cocoon, reeling and spinning into yarn and lastly weaving into fabrics is a flourishing industry among the people of *Dimasa* community .Through the textile, the *Dimasa* weaver articulates the fundamental principles of visual orders through lines, forms and colours.

Dress of *Meitei* is simple and stylish. The woman wears coloured long stripped skirt, blouse and white *chadar*. The man use white *dhoti* and *chadar* as well as in ceremonial occasions a *pagri* .*Meitei* hardly perform any festival which is not accompanied by dance, music, song and traditional dresses. *Manipuri* culture of this region is a montage of ancient traditions and rich cultural outlines. Their classical and folk dance forms are also similarly important because of the skilled textile clothes, which are used by the performers. Among the *Rongmei* women, the participation of young girls and married women are much swift in weaving practices. *Rongmei Naga* people have their indigenous loom and every household producing multifarious cloth as per their requirements. *Naga* women are superb artists; they produce works of art with intricate designs. The *Nagas* have adhered to certain patterns and motifs that have come down through the ages. These designs have become deeply rooted in the tribal consciousness and become a part of their rich heritage. The *Assamese* weavers of Barak region have taken their inspiration from all the natural resources. *Assamese* weavers are very skilled in designs and motifs and their weaving has so many layers of the artistic genius. Their designs and motifs provide the chance to the viewers and the users to avail the knowledge of different folk art. The geometric and non-geometric motifs are closely associated with the textile making of *Assamese* weavers.

Beside these above mentioned textiles of different tribe, *kantha* of Barak region is similarly noticeable. The numerous references of *Kantha* were found in *Pali* literature and in the works of Panini as well as Chandrabati's *Ramayana* also mention *Kantha* stitching as one of the skills in which Sita excelled (Basak, 2007).

Some facts of textile practices of Barak region more or less similar to the other regions of Indian states:

Handlooms play a wonderful role in the socio-economic development of a society (Sharma and Borthakur, 2010). Like other parts of India; weavers of Barak region are expert to produce very fine cloths of cotton, silk and wool. Like the weavers of Barak, *Tamil* weavers are very fine producers of cotton as well as silk cloths. Weavers of Barak is woven continuous piece, which is cut into bits of suitable length, the bits are the pieces of cloth actually used by men and women. *Ga -mosa* is such kind of cloth, which is used everywhere in various purposes. That is more or less similar like the Tamil's *dhoti* is used by the *Brahmins* as well as working class people; the purpose served by dhoti is varying for each class. The weaver's *ga-mosa*

of Barak Valley which is also serves the same purposes like *dhoti* used by *Tamil* people. Costume made by weavers of Barak region have many possibilities to popularize in large cities like the costume of Haryana, because the textiles of Barak have the fresh indigenous touches of colour, pattern, design and embroidery qualities. Some traditional cloths made by the weavers of Barak have the similar utility by male and female, which is more or less similar like the Kashmiri people. The traditional dresses of Kashmiri people are very simple and have some same utility between the male and female. Weavers of this region made a type of cloth, which is used as turban in many occasions. This similar type of practices are in Amritsar and other similar districts, turban is a head dress of men, especially *Baniyas* and shop-keepers, tightly wrapped in regular folds on the head, the proper binding of which is an art itself .Traditional textile made by the weavers of Barak Valley also symbolizes the status and position in their community. This parallel practice is common in every region of India, for instance, in Rajasthan this phenomenon is reflects in their traditions (Bhargava, 2008).

Weaver's community of Barak region produced finest clothes for the tradition festivals, which are more bright and colourful. During festivals colourful dresses are almost popular in every corner of the India. For example, women of Madhya Pradesh ware finest colourful dresses during the festivals. Almost every people of Barak region used a small cloth in their day life, in different manners. That is popular in Barak in the name of *ga-mosa*. Some time it also seen that the villagers round their head with *ga-mosa,* but leave the middle of their head. This *ga-mosa* made by the every weaver's community of this region. This kind of use is also popular in the other areas of the country. In Chhattisgarh *Bhumia* and *Gond* they warp a piece of old cloth round their head/leaving the middle of the skull bare. From the study of ancient sculpture and murals of *Ellora* and *Ajanta* it becomes evident that in the pre-Muslim period it was not the custom in India to wear stitched clothes. Women and men draped their bodies with unsown sheets of cloth, saris and dhotis. Arab travelers who came to India before the Muslim invaders found the people in the coastal region from Sindh to Bengal dressed in this manner. With the arrival of the Muslims in India, sewn or stitched costumes came into practice. The existing textile tradition of *Dimasa, Meitei Manipuri, Rongmei* and *Assamese* of Barak Valley still producing unsown sheets of clothes through their traditional looms and maintaining their customs, beliefs and

prosperity .Prosperity is dear to us not because we desire the fact of prosperity itself but because we desire ourselves. Agriculture is such an activity, which is incorporated with the human activities. Weavers of Barak Valley also made many traditional textiles, for the purpose of agricultural festivals. Agricultural festivals are the part and parcel of the Indian life style. Among the tribal of Jharkhand there is a sequence of festivals throughout the years, practically all associated with agrarian cycle (Bhargava, 2008).

The knowledge related to each art and craft and its technology have to be preserved and conserved through practical training. The heritage of knowledge and related skill of technology have to be promoted through proper planning and implementation. In the existing context of globalization, we look at everything through a concept of loss and profit. But the value of an art and craft objects could not be determined through such an approach. The knowledge system, which has contributed to the molding of an art and craft, is transferred through the centuries and that is the part and parcel of textile practices of Barak Valley (Sathyapal, 2011).

5.2 TEXTILE OF DIMASA

The *Dimasa* are divided into four territorial divisions of Assam, such as, a) N.C. Hill, b) Plains of Cachar District, c) Hojai, Lanka, Kharani and Hawraghat, d) Dhansiri, Mohungdijua and Dimapur (Sarma, 2008). The *Dimasa Kacharis* and the *Bodo Kacharis* of Assam, also known as Hill *Kacharis* and the plains *Kacharis* respectively originally belonged to the same stock of people. The *Dimasa Kacharis* are one of the major tribal communities of Assam and they organize an important ethic group in North East India. The *Dimasas* belongs to the Tibeto-Burman family (Bordoloi, 1984). Their dialectal is under the Tibeto-Burman family which is a branch of the *Sino-Tibetan or Tibeto-Chinese* family. The *Sino-Tibetan* language family seems to have started to come to India through the Eastern and Northern gate of the country from over 3000 years ago (Das, 2006), *Dimasas* who were once a powerful and predominant race in the whole North-East region (Barman, 2013).

The origin of the word *Kachari* is very hard to trace and it is unknown to the people themselves. The term *Kachari* is *Koss-ari,* here *Koss* refers to *Koches* and *Ari* means a clean in *Boro* language. The word *Kachari* is associated with the *Sanskrit* word *Kaksata,* hypothetical formation parallel to *Sanskrit Kirata* which refers to the

earliest native of Assam. The term *Khachar* is derived from *Sanskrit* word meaning a broadening region. The district of Cachar itself might have got its name directly from this word or it might have been so called after its principal tribe. The term *Dimasa* literally means the children or descendants of a big river the Brahmaputra as *Di* means water, *Ma* means big and *Sa* means children.

The *Dimasas* established their capital at Dimapur at about 1086 A.D. Dimapur was a prosperous town during the region of the *Kachari* kings. Industries like textiles, pottery and cotton ginning are played a significant role in the economic life of the *Kachari* and the neighboring *Naga* people. The goods of these industries were sent to Golaghat and Rongpur, the capital of the *Ahoms.* The *Rengma Nagas* who lives in the colonies in the suburbs of Dimapur supplied steel made implements to the *Kacharies* and obtained salt in return. The *Kacharis* had trade relations with the *Zeliangroungs* or the *Zemi-Nagas* whom they supplied iron implements and weapons. The *Kachari* King Kirti or Kartik Chandra Narayan shifted the capital from Maibong to Khaspur in the plains of Cachar about the year 1750. Khaspur is adjacent to Kumbhirgram, the airport of the present Cachar district of Barak Valley. It is located about 20 Kms away from Silchar town, previously the relics at Khaspur were covered with deep jungles, but now the Khaspur is under the maintenance Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) (Bordoloi, 1984).

The *Dimasa* rule was a very significant period for the economy and the social and cultural life of Cachar. During the last phase of *Dimasa* rule, when a displaced British *subedar* Kalyan Singh attacked Cachar (1803) and the king made a humble prayer to the British to provide security. The king, however, received British assistance in 1824 to resist the Burmese attack and in 1826 entered into an agreement with the British following which the independent kingdom of Cachar virtually lost its authority (Bhattacharjee, 2009). The art of weaving was introduced into Assam by the Kacharis, when a part of Assam was ruled by them during the pre-Ahom period.

There are three types of properties in *Dimasa* culture, material property, paternal property and united property, the girls learn preparing clothes in their house from their childhood and in course of time they become expert in this activity. In weaving activity mother is the best teacher in respect of *Dimasa* people (Nath, 2010). More or less at the age of five/six the small girls of *Dimasa* community starts practicing weaving as their part and parcel of their play. The wastage threads and

Rigudima are the preliminary elements about their weaving practices. Simultaneously they are associated with the instruments which are required for the weaving. During wedding the more skilled weavers are very popular among the male. All Dimasa women are expert weavers and most of the domestic requirements of cloths are met from the family looms.

It is rather necessary for a girl to weave by herself the artistically designed wedding clothes required to be put on by her at her marriage. Another significant aspect of weaving which may be mentioned here in the fact that it is not yet commercialized. The women weave only what is essential for domestic use in the family. When there is no surplus production, the question of marketing also does not arise and every family is self-sufficient in respect of dress materials (Bordoloi, 1984). Among the *Dimasa,* women particularly belonging to the Barman community are very hard working and active in textile making. Around hundred and six villages are now in Cachar District and thirty villages in Karimganj District. Some prominent villages which are very well known regarding textile are Harinagar, Jaipur, Darmi, Hawithang, Ganganagar, and Dholai. The situation of textile practices of *Dimasa* in this region is now in revival stage. Now, they are producing their own clothes, which are fulfilling the demand of family needs only.

The cocoons rearing practice is followed traditionally by the *Dimasa* people of Barak Valley. The cocoons are fastened in long festoons a few feet away from the ground. Some fifteen days after this exercise, the insects make their appearance in butterfly and then collect to keep them in a container. The eggs are placed in great numbers after three or four days. It takes another fifteen days to warmth the eggs. To assist the insects to form cocoons they are carefully placed mango leaves kept on bamboo baskets or bamboo platforms. The insects refuse food before they set about the formation of cocoon. It is necessary that reares should keep the insects' quarter clean during the fifteen days preceding the formation of the cocoon (Kalita, 2013). Culture of the *eri* silk worm is the important household industry among the *Dimasa* (Das, 2006). More interestingly it is noticeable that the *Dimasa* weavers are more or less producing their own threads for making clothes in this valley. But the productions of threads are more industrious job. Mostly middle aged weavers are engaged in this process, because it is required more passion. This entire process of production is more

scientific as well as some readymade threads are used by the weavers, which probably comes from the *Shaulkusi.*

Dyeing:

Dying is equally an important job among the people of *Dimasa*. The herbs required for the preparation of dyes are locally available and this is normally done during winter season only. Prior to undertaking of dyeing operation, yarn has to be kept at night outside for a week so that it is fully exposed to dews (Bordoloi, 1984). Threads they generally used for making cloths, these are *Gajaw* (Red), *Akashi* (Light sky blue), *Gormogili* (Yellow), *Kakrang* (Green), *Khadar* (Brown), *Gisim* (Black), *Mashrakhal* (Beep blue), *Guphu* (White), *Gurmu* (Orange), *Tiyarang* (Light green) and *Gulapirang* (Pink) (Nath, 2010).

Loom:

Dimasa women weave cloths with the help of traditional loom called *Dauphang* and the process of weaving is called *dauphang dauba. Dimasa* people use the loom which is made from the materials available in the village. The loom is usually kept under a thatched and the weaving is always done by the ladies (Plates 5.1 and 5.2) (Das, 2006). Like the other tribes, loom is not gifted to the daughter during marriage now days but, earlier it was in their customary. But recently this practice does not exist in this valley, because every house-hold has their loom. The newly married woman must get readymade cloths for the relatives as due respect, in the loom which is already exists in the house of groom. Yellow colour is auspicious in the rituals of *Dimasa,* therefore the clothes made out of yellow colour are common gift to the seniors and thus auspicious cloth is made first by the newly married girl. Instead of yellow some time the white colour might be used, but traditionally yellow colour is always preferred.

Equipment of *Dimasa* loom:

a) ***Gonsai:*** Cylindrical bamboo sticks, which are used to produce motifs, the entire designs need supports of *gonsai*.

b) ***Shamphor:*** Flat bamboo stick, which helps the weavers to separate the threads. The frontal part of this instrument is sharp and it is made out of bamboo (Plate 5.3).

c) ***Gongphang:*** It is made out of bamboo as well as it is made through the battle-nut tree (Plate 5.4).

d) ***Ney:*** *Ney* is major equipment in the loom.

e) ***Sugur*****:** This is important because it create tension in the cloth during weaving, means it is always maintain stretch in the threads.

f) ***Risangong*****:** *Risangong* is very much important article, total three/four number of *risangong* are required to perform weaving.

g) ***Boron:*** Means rod and this is used to hold the cloth.

h) ***Maku:*** It is a shuttle used in the loom.

i) ***Rashi:*** It is looks like comb and this is major equipment in the loom.

Male costumes:

The male usually use deep green colourd *risha* (*ga-mosa*) and shirt (Sarma, 2008). This combination is commonly observed in the urban as well as nearby the urban areas, but these are only used within the house. The villagers of the interior covered their upper part of the body with a rectangular piece of cloth, just like *ga-mosa*, which is known as *Remshau* in *Dimasa.* The border of this cloth is embroidered with different colour and design. Turban is also popular in *Dimasa,* like *Manipuri* people of this valley. Turban is known as *Sgaopha* which is mostly used in festive occasions.

a) ***Risha*** **(Towel)**:

Dimasa man wears a *risha* about a meter in breath (Bordoloi, 1984) *and* this cloth is very popular among *Dimasa* and it is known as *ga-mosa* in Barak Valley. The main body of this cloth made by the single colour and within the border weavers visualizes a different colour. Mostly they organize the colour arrangements with blue and white, green and white, and orange and green .The cloth is commonly used in bathes well as it is used in ritual purposes. There is no such age barrier about the uses of this piece of cloth. There is dissimilarity observed in between the *ga-mosa* of Barak Valley and North-Cachar-Hill. The *ga-mosa* made by the weavers of North-Cachar-Hill is longer but the breath of that *ga-mosa* is comparatively short, which is just opposite in case of Barak Valley. The people of north-Cachar-Hill used their *ga-mosa* like *dhoti* as well as they use flower motifs on *ga-mosa,* which is absent in Barak

region. The flower motifs used by them named as *thurisamin* and this motif weaved in both sides, when they wear this cloth the flower motifs are approaches in front of their private part of the body while another part is hold in the back side.

Dimasa's ga-mosa is thick than the *ga-mosa* made by the other community of Barak Valley and durability of this *ga-mosa* is more than the *ga-mosa* made by the other tribes. The cloth which is known as *ga-mosa* is multi purposes in *Dimasa* society. Whereas some community made *ga-mosa* only for the purpose of body wipe. *Ga-mosa* needs two to three days for production. But if all essential resources are ready to use, then any weavers should produce a *ga-mosa* in a day. At a time total ten number of *ga-mosa* can simply produce by the *Dimasa* weaver through their traditional loom (Plate 5.5).

b) ***Sgaopha* (Turban):**

Dimasa people commonly use this attire in their rituals. This white colour long cloth is beautifully tied on the head that is known as *sgaopha.* Turban signifies male's pride in their society and this is part and parcel of their custom.

c) ***Gainthao* (Dhoti):**

Now dhoti used by *Dimasa* male is very rare in this valley only it is seen during the dances as well as seen in the marriage ceremony. Commonly white colour dhoti is worn by the male from waist to ankle.

Female costume:

Women used a short petticoat made with cotton or *eri* called *Rigu,* (Sarma, 2008) fastened around the waist by means of a belt made of cotton cloth. Another cloth known as *Rijamphai* is used to cover the upper part of the body which is tied under the arms, over the breast. Above these clothes *Rikhaosa* a sort of veil which covers the head and face. That is hung on either side of the shoulder covering the breast. But this is not commonly in use except in marriage and other religious ceremonies In the wedding rituals of *Dimasa* girl-*Rigu, Rikhaosa* and blouse are important and besides these costumes, now sari is also using by the *Dimasa,* which mainly inspired from the *Bengali* tradition. Now *Dimasa* weavers of the valley are making saris with their own motifs and colours. The length and breadth is almost like the sari uses by the *Bengali* women. The bright colour is the significance of the *Dimasa* sari; the s*aris* which are normally made by the *Dimasa* weavers are

comparatively thicker than the normal saris which are available in the markets of Barak Valley. Black, blue and green are the colours are offered in case of wedding sari, but most of the common colour are used by them are red, yellow and pink, the sari as wedding costume is very recent origin.

a) ***Rigu and Rikhaosa set:***

Rigu is the most important textile item in *Dimasa* society, mostly used by the women age between fifteen to thirty years. It is generally used in the houses for daily purposes as well as it is equally used in the festivals and in the marriages. *Rigu* and *rikhaosa* both are part and parcel of each other; *rikhaosa* is used as shawl which covers the upper portion of the body whereas *rigu* is used in the lower part of the body. Any single colour might be used as a body colour of *rigu*. The weavers use small flower motifs around everywhere and the border of the *rigu* is more decorative, mostly made out of free hand drawings, as well as geometrical drawings. The weavers mostly use colours like-white, green, orange and violet to make this cloth. Another pattern of design is put above the base design that visualized the motifs like three.

In case of *rikhaosa* the colour combination and design are more or less same like *rigu*, only the placements of designs are different amongst *rikhaosa* and *rigu*. The designs are placed as vertical manner on *rikhaosa and the* motifs like tree are used on the both sides as base design. Some lose threads are left out at the end of both sides of *rikhaosa*. The pattern which is used on the design known as *raina* in *Dimasa* language and within this design the weavers also uses *buthai*. The three like motif known as *pungphung* and *blai* is another motif looks like leaf which are placed as horizontal manner on the *rikhaosa* .The flower motifs are used around the body of *rikhaosa* is known as *bubar* in *Dimasa* dialect (Plates 5.6 and 5.7).
(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dimasa_people : 4.8.2015)

b) ***Rigu:***

Rigu in *Dimasa* community is like *mekhela* and *phanek* of Assamese and *Manipuri*. The use of this tradition dress is more or less same like *mekhela* and *phanek*. The body of *rigu is* made by the single colour. The base design is placed as horizontal manner. *Roinakhaiding* is the tradition motif used by the weaver. Just below this *roinakhaiding* the weaver also used the pattern known as *godali* in *Dimasa* language. Above these two another pattern used by them which is popularly known as

mandir and the motifs like flowers which are spread around everywhere of *rigu,* known as *phutasa*. This cloth is made out of cotton thread and that is used by the any women below fifty (Plate 5.8).

c) ***Beran:***

Batoromai is an important design of *Beran*, this design is nearly like-*mandir* ,which is located within the eight horizontal steps, these steps are also made out of different colours, for instance, the total four number of red steps, four number of black steps, four number of yellow and three number of green. Simultaneously another traditional design known as *misa* also placed near by these *batoromai,* in vertical manner and *misa* is recognized as deer. *Godali, the* traditional design which is placed just nearby *misa*, in vertical manner and *prophang* design is made with various motifs and colours. The meaning of *prophong* is identified as pipal tree. *Phanthoubar* is another design is emphasized by the weaver almost nearby that *prophang*. *Phanthoubar* is known as flower of brinjal. At the end of this cloth weaver highlights *phutosa* in a vertical manner and it is almost looks like a dot. This cloth is made with the cotton, this designed cloth is very popular in *Busu* festival, and this festival is conducted by the *Dimasa* community in 28th January every year as well as it is used popular during wedding ceremony in *Dimasa* society. The tradition is also followed by the *Dimasa* people of North-Cachar-Hill (Plate 5.9).

d) ***Romei****:*

This is a kind of *chadar and* yellow ochre is the more dominant colour is mainly preferred for *romei*. The small *misa* is used as more attractive motif inside this cloth, then *godali, roinakhaiding, phanthoubar* are the major designs which are used by the *Dimasa* weavers of this valley. These designs or motifs are used in a vertical manner. *Phuta or Khimbar* is used around the entire cloth. In the both sides the weavers left out some threads which also equally provide the aesthetical aspect to this cloth. Besides yellow colour all other colours are also preferable to weave this textile item. Cotton is the basic medium for the item. There is a set which is well known within the *Dimasa*, which is- *rigu, romei, rikhaosa.* The total set is required three to four months to create (Plate 5.10).

e) ***Rigu:***

Lemon yellow is the common colour for this *rigu.* The *rainabathai, rainabikri and sine;* the best standard design motifs are used to make this cloth. *Roinabathai* is a kind of seed, *rainabikri* looks like mountain, and *sine* is signify the shining sun. Some black lines are separating these motifs are known as *dilam*. These whole arrangements are placed in a horizontal manner and this *rigu* is made with cotton threads only (Plate 5.11).

f) ***Rijamphai:***

This cloth is mainly made for the senior ladies and very specifically as it is used by the widows in large number. Even the importance of this cloth is seen after the death; because the family member of died person use this cloth as her ultimate dress. White, black, red and green are commonly used this cloth. *Godali* and *phuta* are used as a common motif for this cloth. Regarding the male *risha* (*ga-mosa)* and *dhoti* are used as compulsory dress for death body (Plate 5.12).

g) ***Rigudung* (Shawl):**

Around five or six colours are used to make this cloth and commonly bright colours such as, red, blue, yellow, green and white are used. *Daukhu Daukhlai* is the most common design for *rigudung. Beran* is the part and parcel of *this cloth*. Wool is used as the main fiber for this tradition shawl. More than one week is essential to manufacture a single shawl. There is no restriction about age, to use this cloth, but the aged male or female use to prefer this cloth during winter (Plate 5.13).

Costumes in *Busu* festival:

Several costumes are associated with agrarian festival known as *Busu*. This festival observed in the harvest season where the young boys, girls and children wear different traditional costumes and they performed different dances in this occasion. The main dances are *Bydima* (performed by a few pairs of girls and boys), *Jaubami* (specially performed by children), *Jaophourbani* (a dance which is performed by half circle way), *Ranginbani* (dance performed by two lines), *Narimbani* (dance at the time of thrashing paddy by allowing cattle to tread on it), *Hadu ban* (one of the agricultural dances), *Bymjai* (dance with metal discs in hand), and *Madaikin bani* (religious song and dance) (Barthakur, 2003).

There are three type of *Busu* Festivals are organized by the *Dimasa* people of this valley. The festival which is planned for seven days is known as *Hangseu*, the festival which is for three days is named as *Surem* and the last one known as *Jidap* that is only organized for single day. The day of *Busugaba* is important because married women wear traditional dresses and visit to the other houses; to take the blessings from the seniors. The costumes used by the females are *rigu, rikhaosa* and blouse, whereas males costumes are- *ga-mosa (Risha) or dhoti (Gainthao), punjabi*, muffler (*Rimai*) and turban (*Sgaopha*), in white colour. The female costume which used in the *Busu* needs three months to get ready. Instantaneously the clothes used by the males requires, fifteenth to twenty days only.

Uses of traditional textiles in various purposes:

Rimsaw is the cloth has fundamental importance in *Dimasa* society, because this is used on dead-body. The basic purpose of this cloth is to cover the dead body. The yellow colour is used for this cloth and the straight lines in the border of *rimsaw* made out of green colour (Plate 5.14). This cloth is most important for every household, because it is used during the cremation ceremony. This yellow is more or less like lemon yellow and the major significance of this cloth is made out with single thread, each thread is individual. In *Dimasa* this is known as *kunowba.* The use of flower as motif is also seen to this cloth, besides yellow colour pure white is also used by the weavers. The size of this cloth is around like single bed cover and it is made out of cotton. The uses of cotton are the part and parcel of the cremation. White cotton thread has to spread along with paddy up to *Shamshan (Mangkhlong)* is the customary of *Dimasa.*

The textile made by the *Dimasa* is now using as the cloth of *Salwar-Punjabi* and that is used by the other communities of this region. The people those have minor understanding about the patterns, motifs and designs of *Dimasa* cloths, they should easily identity that the *Salwar-Punjabi* made out of *Dimasa* cloth. There is a good customary within the *Dimasa* regarding their new born babies. If baby is a boy then they use the *ga-mosa(risha)* as his first cloth, where as if the baby is a girl then *Dimasa* people provides *mekhela*, which is locally known as *rigu*. Simultaneously *chadar* that is known as *rikhaosa* is also used as an auspicious gift for new born baby which is a girl. Apart from black other colours can be used for these clothes. Even some where red colour is also restricted. Mostly orange and yellow are preferable.

5.3 TEXTILE OF MEITEI MANIPURI

The term *Meitei* denotes, man detached from the image of God. *Mee* means image or shadow of man and *Tei* means detached from God. Another meaning is man different from other people. If the word *Meitei* is taken as a single compound then its modules are obviously *mei* and *tei.* There are several phonetic differences of *mei: mi, moi* and *mai* similarly *ti, tai, tay* could by phonetic differences of tei. The possible forms of their combination could be *moi-tai, me-tei* and *mei-ti* (Sanajaoba, 1988). This history of the *Meitei* society, their customs, traditions, religions, beliefs, art, culture and rich literature are laid down in their old manuscripts like "*Leithak Leikharol".* Other manuscripts like *Poireiton Khunthok* recorded their identification and origin. The *Meitei* speak *Manipuri* dialectal which is in *Kuki-Chin* group under Assam-Burmese Branch of the *Tibeto-Burman* family. The common features of *Meitei's* are of *Mangoloid* type will small eyes, fair complexion and rudimentary beards (Roy, 1979).

The language which is used by the *Meitei* of Barak valley is commonly used in the state of Manipur, Tripura and Nagaland of India. Simultaneously, in some part of Burma and Bangladesh this *Meitei* dialectal is famous. *Meitei* language has its own scripts called *Meitei-Mayak.* The *Meitei's* of this region at present include *Meitei Sanamahis, Meitei Vaishnavites, Meitei Christians, Meitei Buddhists, Meitei Atheists, and Meitei Mohammadans* among others *Meitei* aesthetics has a close association with life and religion, *Meitei* genius is reflected in literature, music, dance and other items of aesthetics. The textile practices, which is another significant aesthetical aspect of *Manipuri* culture of Barak Valley (Sanajaoba, 1991). *Manipuri* women are very expert in weaving and in skill related with knitting and embroidery. They need to have different colours to make their designs and pattern perfect. They are proficient of handling dyes too *Meitei's* have good taste of colours; women are basically crazy about different variety of designs and new delightful colours .Young girls started to weave at about the age of seven/eight, but they would have imbibed the weaving processes by watching their mothers, even from boy-hood (Thompson, 2007). This observation gives them visual as well as aesthetical pleasure. Finally these visual and aesthetic senses provoke them to learn their traditional or hereditary process of weaving.

The *Meitei* social tradition of the art of weaving is based on a mythological foundation. Accordingly to the manuscript on mythology called *Leinunglon,* the supreme Goddess of the *Meitei* traditional pantheon, *Leimarel* is believed to have had hosted the work of weaving as a necessary item of work in the whole course of creation of the social universe. It is also specified that the Goddess *Panthoibi* was the first primitive celestial ancestress of the *Meitei* and it was she who introduced the art of weaving. The *Leinunglon* manuscript mentions that the first cloth made by the Goddess *Panthoibi* was a material obtained from the soft tissues of wood and bamboo. *Tamitnu,* one of the seven primitive celestial ancestresses of the *Meitei,* produced cotton for manufacturing textile. Thus *Tamitnu* is popularly known as the Goddess of cotton. Another statement in the said manuscript states that *Leimarel,* the chief of those seven primeval ancestresses, invented the art of making thread yarn from ran cotton for use in weaving (Devi, 1998). Besides these all it is believed by *Meitei's* that the Goddess of *Lesembi* who taught the *Meitei's* the method of textile weaving as well as the mystic dance of creation. There is another school which holds that the weaving appears as an imitation of the cosmic process. Creation is a wonderful process of weaving to the cosmic being (Singh, 1993).

During the period of 1786-96, large numbers of *Meitei Manipuri* were entered in Cachar, Tripura and *Purbabonga* (present Bangladesh) (Sengupta, 2013). During the period of Krishnachandra, who did wedding with Indhuprova, daughter of Madhuchandra of Manipur. Indhuprova is also known as the wife of Govindachandra. That was perhaps the beginning stage, when the large numbers *Meitei's* were started to migrate and settled down in this Barak region (Guha, 2012). Compared to other areas of Barak Valley the large number of *Manipuri's* are inhabited into Cachar. Like *Ima* market of Imphal (Manipur), Lakhipur of Cachar district is also well-known among the valley, because of its market place (Plate 5.15). Around ninety percent of the *Meitei* villages of Barak region are involved in textile making. All the clothes made by the *Meitei* weavers of this region are unique in many ways, because only the *Meitei* community is focusing on some textiles of their tradition and therefore pure traditional costumes of *Meitei's* are surviving in this region. If we compare *Manipuri* textile within the three districts of Barak Valley. Then Cachar district of this land is found to be more prominent than Hailakandi and Karimganj, in Barak Valley there are many Self Help Groups (SHG) in *Meitei* Community, who are working for their

textile making. Besides that CRP (Community Resource Person) and DCRP (District Community Resource Person) these persons are directly connected with the women and trying to provide the opportunity for their livelihood and *Manipuri* weavers of Barak Valley emphasis weaving as their way of earning livelihood.

The *Manipuri* dresses were important during pre-independent periods in Cachar (Allen et al., 1979). Even in contemporary days the *Manipuri* textile of Barak Valley has its own value and reputation in the arena of art and craft of this valley. Barak Valley is also well known to the other places of North-East as well as in India, because of its glorious tradition of *Meitei Manipuri* culture. *Meitei* textile of Barak Valley has immense possibilities. *Manipuri* of this region are famous for their cultural activities, within cultural practices the textile making is one of the major part. Designs are very normal phenomena in *Manipuri* textile, but some weavers made cloths without any design. The *Manipuri* weaver of Barak Valley weaves beautiful designs on their traditional clothes which involve animals, flowers, birds, diamonds and many other designs. Weaver weaves with the help of small graph designs, which are made on paper which are graphs used as a reference.

Manipuri people of Barak region have a special distinction in handloom. Among the other social groups, the *Manipuri* women constitute to be very hard working and have retained an almost monopoly over their traditional silks of weaving (Bhattacharjee, 2009). They are very much studious about their social and cultural life. The women of *Manipuri* community manage all the domestic concerns. Moreover, they are more supports of the families than their husbands (Sanajaoba, 1991).

Phanek is very common attire in *Manipuri* women. This *phanek* of this region is made out of different colour, such as, white, red, brown, pink, cream, violet, yellow and blue. The very common motifs in *phanek* are, geometric shapes, lotus, fish, deer, parrot, leafs and creepers. *Chadar* with *moirangphee* border and flower designs are common. *Moirangphee,* the name of this design is originated from the name of the village Moirang, about twenty seven miles south of Imphal. Once the *Meitei* King of *Manipur* attacked Moirang village and ultimately occupied it and as a result of that brought back some Moirangs as prisoners. The king of Moirang, while paying respect to the king of Manipur for release of the Moirang prisoners, offered some handloom cloth prepared by the Moirangs. The king of Manipur liked the design very much and

named the design as *Moirangphee*. Now this design is also known as temple design as it shows the shape of a temple top and it is believed that it was invented by the princess. This design is usually in red, green, black and blue colours and is woven in the border of *chadar* and *sari*. Sari with typical *Meitei moirangphee* and *Lamthang khut* designs is very popular among the Manipur people of Barak Valley (Roy, 1979).

Some important aspects of weaving:

Ginning:

Ginning is such a procedure through which the hardened parts of cotton seeds are detached from the fiber. The apparatus used in this process is called *Kaptreng* in Barak Valley. But ginning process exists in very less number to this valley, because now the readymade yarn is available in the market of Barak Valley.

Carding:

Carding is a mechanical process that separates, cleans and mixes the fibers to produces a continuous web.The device is called *Huitri*. It consists of a bow made of bamboo and cane strip used as string of the bow and an elongated bamboo basket called *Lashing kapon*. This method is also very minor in existing textile making process of *Meitei Manipuri* of this land. This is happening because of the readymade yarn.

Spinning:

This is the final step of converting the cotton to twisted yarn. The spinning tool called *Tareng* is made of wood and it consists of a small drum made of bamboo strips on the right hand side and spike on the left hand side. The right and left hand parts are combined with a wooden strip is kept flat on the floor while working (Plate 5.16).

Bobbining:

Now all the weavers are preferred to purchase their raw threads from the local Bazar of Barak Valley, but this thread need to pour into revive solution, which provides some solid effect within threads and which will come out nicely after proper sun dry. After dry this thread is placed on the *Masha* which is another beautiful artifact of traditional weaving machine, made out of wood and bamboo. It is used for holding the hank of yarn and it turn on its axis when the yarn is pulled out while

bobbining .Then the yarn is attached with *Langchak*, this is very small round bamboo piece, maximum 4/5 inch only and which is also need to fuse with the *Tareng* (Devi, 1998).

Loom:

There are three types of weaving looms are popular among the weaves of *Meitei Manipuri*, these are-*Khwang lyong* (loin loom), *Pang lyong* (throw-shuttle loom) and *Kol* (fly-shuttle loom). Handloom weaving is one of the oldest and most important household industries in *Manipuri* community of Barak valley. Since time immemorial handloom weaving is a necessary part of every *Manipuri* women and it is considered as a prestigious profession for the women in the *Manipuri* villages. Earlier the *Manipuri* weavers used loin-loom, but at present it varies than earlier. Now they use throw-shuttle loom, which is more comfortable than lion loom. This present loom is more mechanized than the loin loom. Comparatively this loom has more production capacity and comfortable. But, the loin loom has its own charm. The structure of throw-shuttle loom mostly made out of wood, the uses of bamboo is comparatively less. Whereas loin loom is made of bamboo rather than wood.

The function of throw shuttle loom is almost same like a loin loom, but the mechanism of the throw-shuttle loom is more difficult. Throw shuttle loom was started to use in eleven century (Sharma, 2006). This type of loom was introduced in response of the society for better fabric. Through this loom weavers can easily produce finer and more uniform cloths. Throw-shuttle loom consists of four upright large wooden poles and each of them have a notch and tongue for carrying the front and the back roads. The weaver sits on a stool/bench to regulate the entire loom. The two poles on the right and the other two on left of the weaver are bridged by piece of round smooth bamboo stick at the top (Plates 5.17 and 5.18).

Some important equipment of loom:

a) ***Khongnet* (Treadles):**

Khongnet is a wooden device to be pushed down with the feet. Pressing on one treadle pulls up the other. Heralds form the mechanism which make the insertion of weft yarn between the warp banks and thus make weaving comfortable. In the simplest form of weaving, two sets of heralds are used on the upper side of the warp

yarn and two banks under the warp. Every odd unnumbered yarn is looped up and a *Natchei* and a *singmit* each are used to hold all the odd number yarns.

b) ***Samjet:***

Samjet is a set of thin bamboo strips. A row of these small strips bound by two bamboo strips and solid cord or twine on each end of the bamboo strips and the whole assemblage is fixed rigid by lea coating. It makes the warp yarn pass through the bamboo strips. It is very important for the entire process of weaving (Plate 5.19).

c) ***Natchei:***

These are round bamboo splits and used for tensioning of the warp with the *konnaba,* and are also used as the healed rod.

d) ***Singmit:***

These are small round bamboo splits and used with the healed rod and also with the *konnaba* as a retainer of the woven cloth.

e) ***Suna Upak*:**

It is a split of thin wood and the *suna upak* is used in making the healed length uniform by warping the healed round the *suna upak* with a *singmit* on the top of the upper edge.

f) ***Konnaba:***

It is a front and back rod, almost similar the rods of loin loom. It is wooden rod and it is round, but not that much even. Two *konnabas* are used, one at the weaver's side and the other at the opposite side.

g) ***Nawongkhok:***

It is a round bamboo piece cut out of thin walled bamboo like the *Moubi*, and it is positioned on the side-rails of the four poles and the cord from one healed rod makes a turn round this road before it is tied to the other healed rod.

h) ***Pangtem* (Shuttle):**

It is made of wood and the middle portion is hollowed out and this tool is made in such a smoothen manner that, it should simply run in between the yarn. It can easily place bobbin inside the hollow. The bobbin is engaged there with the help of a

small bamboo pin thrust in from one side of its end. In the middle there is a hole of one and half millimeter in diameter, through which the yarn comes out of for use as weft (Plate 5.20).

i) ***Suna Chei* (Healed rod):**

It is a round piece of bamboo and this rod is used for lifting a set or group of yarn to form a shed with the help of the healed.

j) ***Phihau Keirak*:**

It is a four-sided frame with platform for standing on the floor and there are three to four horizontal wooden strips with holes between the top and the bottom strips. Total twenty number of *longchak* (bobbin) should be hold in this frame. There are twenty number of thin bamboo strips, which helps to holds *longchak* in accurate distance. Around six inches gap in between these each bamboo strips. At a time the skilled weavers should use two numbers of *phihau keirak*, to systematize or synthesis variety of colour yarns for preparing different cloths and finally these yarns are placed in the *pang iyong* (Plates 5.21 and 5.22).

k) ***Uchuk*:**

This is an important equipment of loom for preparing yarns in systematic manner. This equipment is made out of bamboo as per the breath of cloths and its number is dependable on the weavers, around six numbers of *uchuks* are used by the weavers of Barak region. But in both sides the total number is twelve. *Uchuk* is the part and parcel of *Phiruk Pheirak* and height of this *uchuk* is around 18 inches.

l) ***Masha*:**

Masha is another important device, it is a vertical machine with a central upright rod with two iron spikes on each end to which are attached with two wooden beams, one on the top and the other of the bottom. The two free ends of the beams are merged by a rotating pole to which two sets of spokes of bamboo splits are fitted, one at the top and other at the bottom. The two circular sets of spokes are joined with cord by their outer margins and the complete structure assuming the shape/ of an upright drum. The reel of yarn is positioned about the middle of this straight drum. *Masha* is used for holding the reel of yarn and it turns on its axis when the yarn is pulled out while bobbing.

Each aspect of *Meitei* life, either of cultural value or of social establishment has been well reflected through material culture. The values of morality, aesthetic and ideology of the cultural history of the *Meitei,* expressed in terms of the colour combination, pattern, design and texture of fabric. *Manipuri* weavers of Barak Valley have done their embroidery on the border of the *phanek.* The colours which are used by them are dark red, plum or chocolate, pink and green. Design is made and it is evenly fused with the *phanek* and it provides the beautiful result as a single cloth. Fine embroidery work with creative designs is seen on the borders of the *phanek Mayek Naibi* which is a traditional typical dress of *Manipuri* women. The artistic decoration on the *Meitei* dress, particularly the female dress with embroidery work, first appeared during the reign of *Yanglou Keiphaba* (969-984 AD) Before the introduction of the decorations on the borders of the *Mayek naibi* with embroidery works, i.e., before the time of *Yanglou Keiphaba* the *phanek* was not dissimilar to that traditionally work by the females of old tribes. So, the introduction of embroidery works on the border of the stripped *phanek* may be traced as one of the remarkable cultural trendy that marked the differentiation of the *Meitei* as a distinct cultural group .The cultural history of the people registers two main patterns of embroidery work on the borders of a *Mayek Naibi Phanek,* namely the *Khoijao* and the *Hijamayek.* The *Khoi Akoibi* pattern is of latter development.

Khoi pattern on the border of the female loin dress *Mayek Naibi,* the stripped female lower garment is gorgeous and attractive (Devi, 1998). *Khoijao,* this pattern of embroidery is constant series of figures in semi-circle and these figures are one after the other, arranged in upward and downward manner. The figure is called *khoi,* which is popularly known as hook or bee in *Meitei.* Simultaneously *khoija*o means a big hook or bee, here *jao* means big. *Khoi Akoibi, this* design is a uniform series of rectangular figures. The flower shapes of designs are used inside the rectangular. Total eight petals are visualizes in the flower, where four number of petals are small in size. Some semi-circular lines are demonstrates with the rectangular motifs and these are followed the ascending and descending orders. The two narrow strips are shown at the both sides of the oval figures, which are located in the middle as big size. The both strips are embroidered in many designs and main motif is leaf. Here in the embroidery *Akoibi* means roundness.

Meitei of Barak Valley has enriched their patterns and colour schemes. The different motifs do not only satisfy their domestic needs but have deep root into their mythology and religion. For the *Manipuri* weavers of Barak Valley, colours are associated with their seasons and festivals. *Meitei* colour schemes are-white, black, orange, green, pink, crimson, red, blue and violet, all bright colours are mostly used by the *Meitei* on festive occasions. The range of traditional designs among the *Manipuri* hand woven textile have been known and admired for long time. The designs and embroideries prepared by the *Meitei* are delicate and extremely fine.

Male Dress:

The materials for traditional *Meitei* male loin dress are commonly of cotton. Besides cotton, silk was also used in certain type of dresses, but silk was mostly reserved for aristocrats and royals; commoners usually wore cloths made of cotton. These differences do not exist in contemporary times of Barak Valley. Traditional *Meitei* male loincloths are mostly in plain design of varying colours but more commonly in white .Brahmin dresses were influenced the *Meitei* dresses and this fact still exists in the present traditional dresses of *Meitei*. History says that *Kiyamba* requisitioned a Brahmin from the West, probably from present day Assam, to administer the worship of the Hindu God. There are also historical evidences that cultural influence of the Hindu, had already settled in some quarters particularly in the Western hill ranges and their foothills of present Manipur. This intervention of Hindu Brahmin in Manipur influenced the dress, for example, Hindu dress like the *dhoti*, *kurta* and thin wrapper, which are also usually seen in Barak Valley as well.

a) ***Khudei* (Towel):**

Khudei is a kind of male loincloth, found in chequer weaving design all over the body of the cloth with plain border strips in different colour. Variety of colour patterns and variety of sizes of the square are used in chequer design. This kind of *Khudei* is used normally for daily purposes (Plates 5.23 and 5.24).

b) ***Pheijom (Dhoti):***

Kwakpa Thawanthaba, son of Meidingu Thangbi langthaba (1302-1324 A.D) was considered as the patron of introducing Hindu tradition. Because there was possibility, that the male fashion of wearing *pheijom* was more inclined from the west

by people who had been exposed to the influences of the Aryan culture (Devi, 1998). Such reflection still exists in the *Meitei* culture of Barak Valley (Plate 5.25).

c) ***Kokyet* (Turban):**

Turban has cultural significance between the *Meitei* and that is reflects according to the purpose of use in the occasion.

Female Dress:

The *Meitei* women of Barak Valley wear a loincloth locally called *Phanek* and on the border of the *phanek* they made embroidery. *Phanek* passed round the body under the armpits and over the breast and the *phanek* is such type of cloth which is used by the married as well as unmarried *Meitei female of this region*. It is worn in two styles, reflecting either married or unmarried position of the wearer. The first style of wearing the dress is known as *Khoidom Shetpa* and the other is known as *Phidol Chgingkhatpa*. The first style is worn by the unmarried girls and the latter style by the married women. *Phanek* should be categories according to the various designs. The *phanek* is made of cotton or silk cloths.
(http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in:8080/jspui/bitstream/10603/39482/6/06-chapter%202.pdf:20.12 2014)

Some of the traditional Meitei female cloths:

a) ***Pumngou Phanek:***

This *phanek* is found in different plain colours. The border of *phanek* is made with plain designs with various colour, which create difference from the body colour of the cloth, as well as weavers visualize popular design called *Moirangphee chanba*, which is the sequence of triangles made along with border. The white or light pink colour *Pumngou phanek* is used by the *Meitei* women on the occasion of funeral ceremonies as well as at the time of prayer in temple. The *Pumngou phanek* with *Moirangphee chanba* is widely popular in Barak region.

b) ***Mayek Naibi Phanek:***

This *phanek* is made with stripped design and all the strips are set horizontally throughout the body of the cloth, the pattern of strips is one of regular repetition of the set of two or three colours of matching combination. For instance, the colour schemes which are used in this *phanek* are the amalgamation of light pink which is followed by

the line of white and black colour. These combinations made a tremendous vibration shade within the cloth. The *mayek naibi phanek* is made up of two equal parts and each parts provides nice border. These two parts are lastly fused with each other and this give up a whole combination of *mayek naibi phanek.* The making of *mayek naibi phanek* is very popular in the *Meitei* weavers of this region. This is popular because this type of loincloth is provides them the identity mark in their social life as well as in the cultural life .This *phanek* is distinct and it is worn when women participate in social gatherings as well as it is used when they go out for office. Customarily, the *mayek naibi phanek* is of the seven different colour schemes which were recognized by society and which relate to the seven clans of the *Meitei* society (Devi, 1998).

There are many types of *mayek naibi* made by the *Meitei* weavers of Barak region, which are looks like same, but these all *mayek naibi* should be recognized or these should be distinguish from each other through the designs uses by the weavers, as well as these might be identified with their uses of different age groups.

i) ***Mayek Naibi***:

The designs which are mainly seen to this *mayek naibi* are *khoi*-means hook, *akoibi*-means circle, *mapan*-means border.The colours which are mostly seen to this cloth, these are black, white, brown, red and blue and this cloth is mostly used by the women, those are more than fifty years (Plate 5.26).

ii) ***Mayek Naibi***:

The designs of this *mayek naibi* may be divided into two parts as per their utility on this cloth. For instance, the top portion of this costume is made by the designs like *kurak*-which means butterfly, *tin*-means insect and mapan-means border, as well as the lower part of this cloth made with *khoi*-means hook, *akoibi*-means circle and *mapan*-means border. Around six types of colours, which provide gorgeous appearance to this cloth and these colours are yellow, pink, green, blue, red and orange. The women around twenty five to forty are mostly choose to use this cloth (Plate 5.27).

iii) ***Mayek Naibi*:**

The designs which are shown on the top of this *mayek naibi,* such as *tharoi*-which means snail, *uyen*-means mushroom and mapan-means border, whereas the bottom part of this *mayek naibi* is made as like other *mayek naibi's*, i.e., *khoi*, *akoibi*

and *mapan.* This cloth is commonly used by the ladies those are around twenty two to forty years and the colours which are usually seen to this cloth are red, white, yellow, black and brown (Plate 5.28).

iv) ***Mayek Naibi*:**

The upper part of this *mayek naibi* is ornamented with *numitlee*-means sunflower, *mana*-means leaf, *apombalei*-means bud and mapan-means border. Simultaneously the lower part is same like other *mayek naibi's,* i.e., *khoi, akoibi and mapan.* The total five numbers of colours are used on this cloth these are, red, blue, green, orange and white. The women around twenty five years to thirty five years are mainly use to wear this costume (Plate 5.29).

c) ***Moirang Kabi Phanek*:**

The designs which are implemented on this cloth are very simple, for example, *moirang*-means temple and *mapan*-which means border. These two designs nicely execute with brilliant colours, such as, green, red-violet and golden yellow. This particular cloth is used by the ladies around twenty two years to forty years old (Plate 5.30).

d) ***Moirang Phi***:

This is another beautiful cloth made by *Manipuri* weavers of Barak Valley and it gorgeously ornamented with many designs, like *moirang*-which means temple, *mapan*-means border, *phijim*-means vertical border and *phinataba*-which means decorative thin pattern. The ladies between twenty two years to forty years are usually preferred to use this cloth. The colours are very simple and gorgeous used by the weavers, these are-sap green, lemon green, light red and violet (Plate 5.31).

e) ***Khudei Matek***:

This is popular attire among the *Meitei* females and the *khudei* of this kind is used in day to day life, in public occasion at home or within the locality. The designs which are commonly visualizes on this cloth are, *maya ahum langbi*-which means total three colours are together and *phijin*-means vertical lines. Simultaneously there is no restriction about the uses of colours on *Khudei and* this cloth is made out of cotton (Plate 5.32).

f) ***Innaphi:***

The *Innaphi Langdom*, the *Innaphi Aphaibi* and the *Innaphi Pakung* are very fine white wrapper made with cotton and these are worn by *Meitei* females of this Valley. The *Innaphi pakung* is the finest than others and commonly the middle aged females of *Meitei* wore this *Innaphi* during the worship at temples as well as they used this cloth at cremation. The aged persons used the other two types of *innaphi* on these occasions.

g) ***Ngabong:***

This wrapper which is very uneven in texture and this cloth is usually used at home and in the neighborhood in routine life on wintery days. This cloth is done in white background of plain design but ornamented breadth wise on both ends with a design known as *pungri*, a chain like design by interlacing uneven threads when weaving, when this interlacing design woven on the breadth ends , that is generally weave with white and black colours .

h) ***Leirum:***

This is a traditional rough shawl of *Ngabong* type, but with atypical woven design. Ceremonial significance is attached to this cloth and it has been an essential item of gift given by parents to their daughter on the occasion of her wedding. This practice has been followed till today by all sections of the *Meitei* community of Barak region. This cloth is not that much of glamour's compare to other contemporary shawls, it is simply made with cotton thread and the design on it is not that much attractive (Devi, 1998).

Some other cloths are also popular among the Meitei of Barak region:

a) ***Mapak Phidik:***

Besides traditional dresses the *Meitei* weavers of Barak also made this beautiful cloth to cover their beds and commonly it is known as bed cover, which is more or less looks like bedcovers which are available in the market of Barak Valley. But technically and aesthetically this *mapak phidik* is totally incomparable. Because within this cloth weavers use their traditional motifs, such as *temthokpi* means wooden stick, the shape of this stick used as design to this cloth and *kabok*-which is

indefinable kind of design used by them and apart from these any colours is applicable for *mapak phidik* (Plate 5.33).

b) ***Mongum Phi***:

This cloth is known as pillow cover and this cover is also made by the *Meitei* weavers of Barak region with various motifs, for instance, *temthokpi*, means wooden stick, *kurak*- means butterfly and *kobak*-which is purely abstract form. Besides these beautiful motifs, the weavers also use various types of colours to make this cloth more aesthetic (Plate 5.34).

c) ***Phi Matek*:**

This is an important textile item for for female of *Meitei Manipuri*. The motifs which are commonly seen to this cloth are *phijin*-which means vertical lines and *mapan*-means border. There is no restriction regarding the utility of colour application.

Applique:

Types of needle work in which small pieces of cloth are sewn or stuck in a pattern into a larger piece. It is another kind of artistic activity and this technique gives fine blending of the two fabrics in harmonious combination. This artistic touch provides dazzling effort and the dress with such technique and design are used mostly in socio-religion functions. The utility of this technic is mostly seen in the *raas* costumes.

Raas-Leela:

The *Raas-Leela*, the epitome of *Manipuri* classical dance is woven through the celestial and eternal love of *Radha, Krishna* and *Gopis*. *Raas-Leela* is a seasonal dance-drama and is performed in the enclosure of the temple during *Vasant Purnima, Sarat Purnima and Kartika Purnima.* The dance actions of the participants are very much graceful and highly stylized. The exquisite richness of the costumes of the dancers adds the attractiveness (Roy, 1979). In *Raas -Leela,* the dress which is used is known as *Poloi* (Plate 5.35). A kind of cane known as *sundibet* is used in *poloi*, to make this costume more flexible. The cane is nicely executed in *poloi,* which is not possible to see from the outside. Two number of cane is required for a *poloi* and these are fused in the top as well as in the bottom. *Khoijao and chamaki* are the major

decorative elements which are used on the surface of *poloi* and the utility of this readymade industrial material on *poloi* mostly for the purpose of aesthetic. Rice powder with homemade white fabric or readymade fabric used by the artisans to start their basic process. Cotton cloth is the main material for *poloi*. The wool also used by the artisans to made different decorative elements of *polio* as well as readymade velvet cloth is another important material which also provides the aesthetical looks within the costume.

These are so many types of *Raas-Leela* have been practicing by the *Meitei* since back, such as-*Maha Raas, Vasanta Raas, Kunja Raas, Nitya Raas, Gostha Leela (Gopa Raas).*

a) ***Maha Raas:***

It is created on *Rasapanchadhyaya of Bhagavat Purana*. Lord *Krishna* on the full moon night of *kartika* to fulfill his promise of performing the *Raas-Leela* with the *Gopi's* reaches the appointed place, known as *kunja.*

b) ***Vasanta Raas:***

Holi khel is offered in the context of the spring season, well-known as *Vasanta* and thematic variation is provided by *Krishna's* play with *Chandravali,* another competing superwoman of *Radha,* followed by jealously and anger on the part of *Radha* and concluded by settlement between the Lord and his *Hladini-Sakti Radha.*

c) ***Kunja Raas:***

There is not much difference and the story is rather pacified, with Krishna and *Gopi's* retiring to the appointed grove *(kunja)* and playing *Raas-Leela.*

d) ***Nitya Raas:***

This theme follows the old pattern and offers nothing new in the thematic content and it may be played any day in the *mandaps* all through the year.

e) ***Gopa Raas:***

It is created on the *Bhagavata* theme. Sage *Narad* teaches *Krishna* and *Balaram* to perform the task of the *Gopalakas* (Sanajaoba, 1991).

Poloi was created during the period of *Bhagyachandra* of Manipur. It was mainly originated from the *Gourio Vaishnavism* which is related to Lord *Krishna*. In Barak Valley some artisans are famous for making *poloi*, such as-Seram Rajendra Singh, Sarogini Singh, Baburen Singh, Natum Singh, Bosarat Singh, Nandamohan Singh, Upandra Singh and Bipin Singh (Plates 5.36). The design, structure and colour of this *poloi* were made by *Bhagyachandra* himself with ten Brahmins. Bhagyachandra built a temple of Lord *Krishna* and now days it is known as *Kona Govinda* temple of Manipur. *Bhagyachandra* encouraged his own daughter to act and play the role of *Radhika* and that was first time *Raas-Leela* was celebrated in *Govinda* temple under the patronage of king Bhagyachandra. The dress which was introduced for *Raas-Leela* worn by Bhagyachandra's daughter was called *poloi.* When Bimbabati Devi had perform *Raas-Leela* by wearing *poloi,* the set of *poloi* was in green colour because she had signified herself as *Radha* and other girls had performed as *Gopi's* with red colour *polio* .

Radha Poloi is always in green colour (Plates 5.37, 5.38, 5.39 and 5.40), whereas *poloi* used by the *Gopis* are in red colour as well as red colour *poloi* is mostly used in *Manipuri* wedding (Plates 5.41, 5.42, 5.43 and 5.44). *Jhapa and Mangdabi* are worn in *Manipuri* wedding. Rented *poloi* is commonly used in *Manipuri* wedding of Barak Valley and rent is depends on the time of utility of *poloi. Kajanglei* is a round shape decorative element used on the forehead of the bride. *Khuwangoi* is another decorative element used in *Manipuri* wedding of Barak region. Red colour *Khuwangoi* is now more popular instead of any other colour. Earlier it was not that much decorated, but recently it is more decorated and made with glittering elements. *Khuwangoi* is covered the upper front side of wedding *poloi* (Sarkar, 2010). *Manipuri* people of Barak Valley, Manipur, Tripura and Bangladesh has a glorious tradition of textile and that was actually popularized by the Rabindranath Tagore to the world-wide through his educational institution called *Visva-Bharati.* Because after watching this graceful dance drama in Tripura, Tagore had decided to start this *Manipuri* dance as well as textile in *Visva-Bharati,* Shantiniketan when this institution was newly formed by Tagore (Sengupta, 2013).

Merriage Ceremoni:

There are three forms of marriages among the *Meitei's* two approved and one un-approved. But, whatever may be the forms of marriage, the uses of the traditional

textile must be seen during the wedding ceremony. These marriage systems are marriage through proper engagement and negotiation among the guardians of the parties, marriage by elopement, also known as love marriage and marriage by force, without the consent from the bride herself or from her parents.

Out of these above mentioned forms of marriages, the first two are approved forms. These two forms are continuing by the *Meitei's* of Barak Valley. Meitei families of Barak Valley used to believe in the concept of dowry and it is come under their customary. The traditional cloths, such as-*phanek* and *innaphi* are compulsory dowry, amongst the *Meitei* (Gangte, 2008). In *Meitei* marriage the gifting of the *leirum* cloth is an unavoidable item of the bridal gifts (Devi, 1998).

Lai-Haraoba:

In Barak Valley a cycle of festivals are performed by the *Meitei* every year which is the result of the fusion of the ancient and modern cultures. *Umanglai* is an occasion, *Umang* means-wood forest and *lai* means-God. *Meitei* celebrate this occasion as a festival known as *Lai-Haraoba, Lai*-means God and *Haraoba* means for happiness (Sarkar, 2010). The dancers of *Lai-Haraoba* wear traditional cloths with traditional ornaments, which provide them dazzling looks during dance as angles. *Lai-Haraoba,* as the major dance has a close relation with the inanimate Gods of the Pre-Hindu period. The meaning of *Lai-Haraoba* is the festival of the Gods and Goddesses, *Lai-Haraoba* festivals take place normally during the months of April-May before the season of main agriculture starts. The customary law connecting to *Lai Haraoba* was so strict that when it took place in a specific village, during the festival no member of the villages was allowed to leave the village and no outsider allowed entering the village. In case, an outsider came to the village, he had to stay there till the end of the Haraoba. These kinds of strictness are now more flexible in Barak Valley.

In Barak Valley the uses of cloths are now more flexible in *Lai-Haraoba.* The costumes of the *Lai-Haraoba* dance are colourful and decorative. The male head dress called *Shamjin* is a turban of white cloth. Two fan like cloth pieces stand on both sides of the snout of turban. This small belt of cut-out yellow pattern on white base twins from the base up the snout. Another parallel ornamental strip ties down the turban with a knot under the chin. The male shirt is commonly of green velvet,

decorated with golden glitters at the end of the half arm sleeves. The lower group consists of a dhoti *Ningkham* and *Khwangyet*. Each piece is decorated- the *dhoti* being plain light pink or cream colour with *khamen chatpa* joint on it. On top of this, *Ningkham* is tied at the waist. It is a triangular, trailing the ground between the legs. The piece is highly decorative with cut-out scarlet and yellow solid pattern cut-out, stitched on white. At the waist another plain cloth is tied and the tussle hanging loose to the left.

The costumes of unmarried *Meitei* girls in the *Lai Haraoba* dance is similar to those worn by the *Gopis* in *raas* dance of *Vaishnavites* accept the headgear. The girl in *Lai-Haraoba* wears a round garland of wool yarn-scarlet in colour and from this narrow strips guided metal hang down. The lower dress of the girl contains of two pieces, the *poloi* and *poswan. Poloi* is a circular piece hanging down almost touching the ground and the upper one i.e. from the waist to about knee. *Poshwan,* this is part and parcel of *poloi,* which is transparent and being worn to cover the upper part of the *polio, poshwan* provides more aesthetical looks to the performer (Sanajaoba, 1991).

Yaoshang (Holi):

Celebrated for five days commencing from the full moon day of *Phalguna* (February/March), *yaoshang* is an important festival of each villages of Barak Valley and especially *Manipuri* villages. The *Thabal changba*, *Manipuri* folk dance, where boys and girls hold hands together and sing and dance in a circle, is particularly related with this festival. The old men and women also involved in this festival and most of the old men wear turban (*koyet*), *punjabi*, *dhoti* (*phijom*) and also held a piece of cloth known as *lengjan*. These all the cloths in white colour are mostly preferable, but sometime yellow colour *koyet* also used by them. Simultaneously middle aged or above women are also used a cloth in white colour known as *thambalk-leikok,* along with *Innaphi* and blouse in white colour, young girls also followed the same combination as well as they also used *thambal-leikok* in pink colour.

Kang (Rath Yatra):

One of the greatest occasions for the people of Barak region and more particularly *Manipuri* people of this region, this festival is celebrated for ten days in the month of July. Lord *Jagannath* leaves his temples in a chariot know as *Kang* and dragged by enthusiasts who contest with one another for this honor. In this ritual the

old men wear *punjabi*, *dhoti* (*phijom*) with *lengjan*, whereas old women wear *makey-naibi* in pink colour with *innaphi* and blouse.

Bright colours *(Machu)* are the part and parcel of *Manipuri* textile, some common colours are *Angangba* (Red), *Angouba* (White), *Higok Amuba* (Blue), *Amuba* (Black), *Gulapi* (Pink), *Awaoba Higok* (Sky Blue), *Asangba* (Green), *Khamen* (Violet), *Napu* (Yellow) and *Komla* (Orange).

5.4 TEXTILE OF RONGMEI NAGA

Cultural relation or cultural exchange has become very dominant theme in the contemporary global society in order to establish peaceful relation among the different communities and societies in the world (Pamei, 2010). According to myths of *Rongmei Naga*, all human beings and animals are originated from the cave of *Ramting Kabin* after the big flat stone cape was remote by the Bison under the command of God. They settle down in Makhel village, which is now in *Mao* area of Senapati district in Manipur. According to the anthropologist, ethnically and linguistically *Rongmei* and *Zeliang* are belonging to the *Naga Bodo* sub family of *Tibeto Burma* in *Mongolian* race and it has three associated sub tribes viz, *Zemei, Liangmei and Rongmei* who inhabited in, Assam, Manipur and Nagaland with more or less similar customs, traditions, customary laws, folk songs, folk dance and folk lore (Kamei, 2010).

The *Nagas* are classified as one of the *Mongoloid* stock and trans-migrator races in India having come from outside as is evident from their physical and cultural characters. Most of the experts have suggested that the *Nagas* were known as *Kiratas.* The *Mongoloid* population were said to have spread over in China, Amazonia, South-East Asia and North-East India, thousands of years ago. The *Nagas* are therefore, considered as *Mongoloid*, who bears physical and cultural affinity with the people of Mongolia, China, Tibet and South East Asia (Nshoga, 2009). Physically, the *Nagas* have the straight black hair, black eyes, epicanthic eye-fold and other features of the huge spread of *Mongolid* people, who now reside in diverse part of world (Jacobs, 1990). These *Mongoloid* groups speak *Tibeto-Burman* language, as it was concluded by Grierson. Sir George Grierson, a linguistic scholar, who determinedly studied diverse languages and he later categorized *Naga* languages under *Tibeto-Burman*

speakers. The *Mongoloid* races who speak *Tibeto-Burman* language are Tibetans, Chinese, Japanese, Siamese, Burmese and the *Nagas.*

The origin of the *Mongoloid* groups in the North East India is further authenticated by Julian Jacobs, who writes: *"The general expression of the Mongoloid people throughout the South-East India Asia (including to North-East India) may have begun as much as 10 or 12000 years ago, possibly from a region of North China. This movement has continued into recent historic times. In much of South-East Asia, the Mongoloid people appear to have supplanted earlier aboriginal populations, generally characterized as Australoid or Negrito. This may well have happened also in the Naga Hills"* (Nshoga, 2009).

The origin of the name '*Naga*' is still hidden in mysterious condition. The fallacy of the name '*Naga'* has become one of the most sought after hypotheses among the scholars. Many ethnologist, anthropologists and philologists hold different ideas about the origin of the term *'Naga'.* The name '*Naga'* is a homonym; it confuses many scholars and non-*Nagas.* Normally, the name *'Naga'* is a generic term to an agglomeration of tribal groups living in Nagaland, Assam, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh and West of Myanmer (Nshoga, 2009). In the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata,* there are references to the *Kiratas* who have been recognized with the Indo-Mongoloid tribal people of North-East India. The *Puranas* and the Epics refer to many *Naga* dynasties. In the *Mahabharata,* Arjuna, the great *Pandava* hero is said to have married Ulupce, a *Naga* prince. Indian scholars have tried to identify the *Nagas* of the ancient Sanskrit literature with the *Nagas* of North-East (Sanajaoba, 1995).

There are numerous theories about the origin and meaning of the word *Naga.* The *Ahom* Chronicles refer to the *Naga* people as *Noga* which means 'hill people' in the *Tai Ahom* language. *Some* they are still named *Noga* by the Assamese and *Naga* only by the *Bengalis*. The term *Naga* is derived from the *Bengali* term *nangta* or the Hindustani *nanga,* meaning naked, while another theory suggests the *Kachari* word *naga,* a young man and hence 'a warrior' (Joshi, 2001). *Naga* historians have put forward their own theories on the origin of the word-*Naga.* Some have claimed that the word *Naga* is derived from '*Na ka'* meaning 'pierced ears' in Burmese. In fact many *Naga* languages refer to ears as *'Na',* for instance, ear decorations are called *Nikie* in Angami, *Nika* in Chakesang, *Nakhui or Nikha* in Tangkhul and *Naro* in Liangmei. The word *Naka* was analyzed by the British into *'Naga'. Naga* national

leaders also admit this description for the origin of the word *Naga* (*Na*=ear and *Kha*=decoration), so *Naga* means "People with bored ears" (Haksar, 2011).

The *Rongmei Naga* tribe is now been identified and located along with the other tribes of different states of North-East India, such as-

Nagaland:

Ao, Angami, Sema, Lotha, Rengma, Chakhesang, Yunchunger, Kalya Kengnyr, Konyak, Chang, Sangtam, Phom, Zeme, Liangmei, Rongmei, (Zeliangrong) and Khiemungan.

Manipur:

Anal, Maring, Moyam, Monsang, Lamgang, Chote, Tangkhul, Mao Paomei, Maram, Thangal, Zeliangrang (Zeme, Liangmei, Rongmei, Puimei), Chiru, Kharam and Koireng.

Assam:

Zeme, Rongmei and *Rengma* (Sanajaoba, 1995)

It is interesting to know that the same groups of people are known by two different names- namely, *Rongmei* and *Kabui* in Manipur. Regarding this the first name generally used by the people of this tribe themselves to distinguish them from the people of other tribes, while the second name is used invariably by all other people to denote the people of this tribe. Thus *Kabui* is the only designation used in all the contemporary *Manipuri* literature as well as their folk songs and folk tales to denote this people. The same name was used by the British government's records, like administration reports and census reports and in the same way, this name was invariably found having been used to signify people of this tribe in all the works-books, reports, articles and research papers. This people namely *Rongmei* is known as *Mee*-long by the *Kukis* (Sanajaoba, 1995). The *Kabui* or the *Rongmei* tribe in Nagaland is distinctly recognized at administrative level (Raha and Ghosh, 1998). In official records of Manipur state, the *Rongmei* community referred to as the *Kabuis* but they call themselves *Nruongmei or Maruongmei*, people hailing from the south as well as the *Lushai* call them *Milong* (Haksar, 2011).

The term *'Rongmei'* has indeed, a very strong bearing on geographical direction. The term *'Rengmei'* means 'man of the north' or Northerner, since *'Reng'*

means ‘North’ and *‘Mei’,* means ‘Men’. The *Rongmei* recognized popularly as a single tribe called “*Zeliangrong”, Zemei, Liangmei* and *Rongmei* have the same dialect and those are understandable to each other, because of their roots are same (Sanajaoba, 1995). The movement for the unification of the *Zeliangrong* territory started from the time of Jadonang and Rani Gaidinliu. The *Zeliangrong* communities were also divided by the names and terminology given by the colonial rulers. The *Zeliangrong* people have kept alive their traditional arts and crafts, their dances and music, their games and sports, their festivals with the ancient rites and rituals and also their old religion. The rich culture is a part of the living traditions of the *Zeliangrong* communities (Haksar, 2011).

The *Zeliangs* wear a few varieties of clothes, the designs of which do not basically differ from those of the *Angamis* (*The Arts and Crafts of Nagaland, 1968*). The *Zeliangrong* is an abbreviation of the prefixes of three cognate groups, which were adopted with the foundation of *Zeliangrong* council in 1947.Historically the *Zeliangrong* people are an ancient tribal community of North-East India. The *Zeliangrong* people have a long past and a rich cultural heritage, due to the absence of literacy sources in the pre-colonial times, there were no written texts dealing with the history, culture, religion and festivals of *Zeliangrong* people (Kamei, 2012). The *Zeliangrong* people have their own religion that is known as *Tingkao Ragwang Chapriax (TRC). Tingkao Ragwang* is a primitive religion, initiated from the times immemorial; primordial religion means a religion which has primordial existence since the beginning of time ancient and eternal. It is almost equivalent to the Sanskrit word, *Sanaton Dharma* meaning ancient and eternal religion. Again, primordial religion means that culture is the integral part of religion. *Tingkao Rgwang Chapriak* is a primordial religion. The belief in the Supreme God, *Tingkao Rangwang* the creator of this universe including star, sun, planet, land, air, water, man and animal (Kamei, 2013). Haipou Jadonang constructed temple named Kaokai at the villages of Kambiron, Nungkoa, Kekru and Binakandi village of Cachar district in Assam (Kamei, 2012).

Haipou Jadonang and Rani Gaidinlu were the pioneers to introduce temple culture; it was during the year 1929. Binnakandi of Cachar district is one of the earliest places where the temple culture of *Rongmei* people of Barak Valley was started. *Rongmei* people of this region have offers their exhaustive support for the

revival of *Rongmei* religion. These social contributions of *Rongmei* people are exploring the social existence of Barak to the outside. The decision of naming of *Tingkao Rongwong Chapriak* (TRC) was taken in Imphal on 16-4-1994 by a religious congregation consisting of fifteen hundred representatives from Assam, Manipur and Nagaland. Some of the important personalities of *Rongmei* communities of Barak Valley are the pioneer members of *Tingkao Ragwong Chapriak*. They are- Gaiphunnag Thaimei and Sangbonnang Gangmei from Binnakandi and Chamkhandai Kamei from Kaguilong, Silchar of Cachar district (Kamson, 2011). *Rongmei Nagas* of Barak Valley are living in well demarcated areas in this region.

As per the record of the Silchar Municipality Board, the *Rongmei Naga* people were first brought in the Silchar town in the year 1883 for the engagement in manual labour work of Silchar Municipality (Kaguiluang Development Society. 2010). The *Nagas* are always distinguished by an impressive bearing and splendid dress. The design of their clothes is conspicuous for the right use of brilliant colours. They love to wear their traditional dresses which are nicely coloured with attractive and intricate designs woven by them according to their fancy and skill.

Art is an external expression of human creativity. This creativity includes various human feelings and habits like weal and woe, laughter and joy. The geo-political environment of a place decides, to a large extent, its artistic activities and conventions which are intrinsically and tied up to the life style and habit, taste and culture of that place. The conventional and traditional flow of artistic strivings all on a sudden take a new curve and thereby create a new space for unforeseen possibilities. This handloom production includes as raw materials-cotton, wool and silk. All *Naga* girls are expected to know weaving and they usually produce at home the necessary cloth for the family. It is completely a woman's possession and a man may not touch it. In fact, both spinning and weaving are the monopoly of women (Joshi, 2001). It is also true that textiles came to be associated with social and ritualistic events from the early times. Textile weaving seems to have played a pivotal role in the social and economic life of the Indian people throughout the age. The continuous existence of this craft helped in decentralization of the social and economic power and also provided with enough employment to the people. The art of weaving made the village society a self-contained and which is a characteristic of Barak Valley too. The

execution of this craft is not taken as a compulsion but a sacred duty by the weavers of this valley.

Rongmei women, weave for the entire family. In fact it is the tradition in *Rongmei* culture that a young girl has to know weaving before she got married (Plate 5.45). Her skill in weaving determines to a great extent for her popularity amongst eligible bachelors of *Rongmei* community. The textiles of the *Rongmei* people are very colourful, the designs and patterns are mostly on the ends of clothes are made by them. Black body with red colour is very common combination in the textile of *Rongai-Naga* and white body with red, yellow, orange, green, red and black are common in the textiles. *Rongmei* weavers produced cloths are not for market. Mostly they prepared cloths only for their daily consumption as well as for different festivals. Therefore, they can easily take a long time to produce a piece of cloth. This nature of weaving activity of *Rongmei* weavers made a wide difference with the other weavers for instance-*Assemese, Meitei* and *Dimasa* of the Barak region In the *Rongmei* family, only mother plays a very important role next to the father, apart from growing vegetables and educating the children particularly the daughter in weaving and other various handicrafts. *Rongmeis* are settled in Barak Valley mostly from Manipur; therefore still there is a good connection of *Rongmei* of this region with the *Rongmei* people of Manipur. But there is no such relation of *Rongmei* of this land with *Rongmei* people of Nagaland.

Loinloom:

Rongmei developed mechanism of weaving cloth with readily available materials and easily assembled parts mostly included of bamboo and wooden rods. Through this loin loom the *Rongmei* weavers should tightly wove their cloths as well as the cloths made out of this loom is more durable. The maximum widths of the cloths are restricted and the complete weaving is limited to a certain length because of the weaver's seating position. The back-strap loom is used exclusively by *Rongmei Naga* weavers of this region, which is used by them inside as well as outside of their own houses .The loin loom is a simple affair in both in construction and operation. Loin loom is neither heavy nor has a permanent fixture. The simple structure of the loom permits its parts to be replaced practically without any cost. This loom can be created with case in a suitable place and can be rolled up with the warp when not in use because of its portability, this loom has a wider distribution in India and South

East Asia and are in common use in Japan, Indonesia, Jawa, Burma, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizo Hills, Arunachal, Assam, Tripura, Orissa, Bihar, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat (Plate 5.46).

The loin loom consists of:

***Tambang* (Front bar):** It is a circular bamboo piece which is strongly tied with the *phaipam* to the wall of the house or any suitable place to form a support in a horizontal position at a highest of about 2½ feet from the ground. Front bar is locally recognized as *Tambang*. The front-bar is usually 40 inches long and 1.4 inch diameter.

***Tamben* (Sword):** This is made flat pointed of the end or sometime pointed at both ends depending on the choice of the weaver as well as sizes of the beating sword depend on the choice of the weaver. But normally the size does not exceed six inches in breadth and 40 inches in length and it is called as *Tamben*. The lower edge of the beating sword is straight while the upper edge is curved.

***Hu Tamben* (Designing heddle)**: It has the shape and length like a beating sword but smaller in size. It is made of bamboo and is used for depicting designs and this is locally called as *Hu Tamben*.

***Nhu* (Harness rod)**: It is a round piece of wood of 33 inches in length and one cm in diameter. The rod is pointed at the other end and is known as *Nhu.* This rod is used for lifting a set yarn to form shed with the help of the harness. It is placed in front of the *Tamnukbung* towards the weaver.

Rai (**Lease rod)**: It is a circular rod of wood exactly like the harness rod which is placed after the bamboo rod (*Tamnukbung*). It is a little bit longer than the bamboo rod. This is locally known as *Rai* and it checks the yarn from getting entangle.

***Tamnukbung* (Circular bamboo rod)**: This rod has 40 inches in length and seven centimeter in diameter. The yarn passing over and under the bamboo makes an opening and this is harness rod acted as another shedding. This bamboo is called *Tamnukbung.*

Pangyamtiam -A wooden frame around thirteen or sixteen inches long and it is used for bobbin.

Langchak- A small spool or reel

***Tamjin* (Tension rod)**: It is a circular wooden rod of 29 inches in length and 4 cm in diameter. The ends of the tension rod are grooved to take a back strap. This tension rod is called *tamjin* in local dialect. The warp is wound round from the front row to the tension rod.

***Tangnam* (Back strap):** Back strap is locally known as *tangnam* and this is made of leather having a length of 19 inches and breadth of 4 inches. It is cut out sufficient to cover the complete back of the weaver's hip. There are two lops at the two ends of the back strap which are attached to the notches of the front warp bar. The weaver maintains the tension of the warp by placing her feet, pressing against the foot rest (Plate 5.47).

***Phaipan* (Food rest)**: A stout beam as a foot rest named *phaipan* is placed against the wall and towards the feet of the waver. It is then, adjusted according to the warp length.

(http://e-pao.net/epsubpageExtractor.asp?src=Manipur.EthnicRacesManipur.
Traditional method of making clothes of the zeliangrong part 4: 12.12.2014)

Textile and its significance in the festival:

There are many groups in the *Rongmei*, working on their culture as well as intervening in different aspects which are motivating them to keep their culture alive. Textile making is a living tradition among them; more vibrating uses of textiles are seen within the traditional functions of *Rongmei. Rongmei* textile reflects the philosophical and cosmological relationship between the *Rongmei* and the Universe. The profound knowledge about their textiles has provides them a constructive social organization, the artistic and aesthetic consciousness. *Rongmei-Naga* has always been proud of their enormous cultural diversity. *Rongmei Naga* religion and culture reflect the importance of agriculture in their way of life. *Rongmei* women contribute to the economy of the family weaving. So, the women positions of *Rongmei* villages are more valuable. The main *Rongmai* festivals of Barak Valley are connected with the agriculture and the utility of their traditional dresses are seen more into these festivals. Apart from other traditional aspects of festivals, these festivals are like of social exhibition; there every form of textile practices is luminous through their responses of dance, songs, and other activities. *Rongmei* festivals have become more elaborated the attitude towards social organization, agricultural development, maintenance of ponds

and paths, seed sowing and towards religion. *Rongmei* festivals are very bright and colourful because of their indigenous textile. Weavers of Rongmei community use very bright colours, these are, *Hangmei* (Red), *Rimmei* (Blue), *Njinmei* (Yellow), *Hangnawmei* (Pink), *Panthawmei* (Violet), *Mumei* (Black), *Bangmei* (White), *Ndiakmei* (Green), *Nijinminmei*(Orang) and *Mummei* (Brown) (Kamei, 2012).

Among *Rongmei* people of Barak Valley, *Gaan-Ngai* is one of the leading festivals. *Gaan-Ngai* is common festival for *Zeme*, they called *Hegangi* and *Gin-Ngi* among the *Liangmai*. Like *Rongmei, Puimei* also called *Gaan-Ngai*. The *Gaan-Ngai* is a post-harvest festival. But during festival the representation of all the traditional dresses are incredible. The *Gaan-Ngai* is the major festival of the *Zeliangrong* people. The religious aspects of *Gaan-Ngai* may be classified into (a) prayer of *Tingkao Ragwang,* the creator and Almighty God (b) tribute to the departed souls (c) sacrifice and ritual to the Gods and Goddesses of the lower realm including the deities of village and areas (Kamson, 2003).

Hoigammei procession of *Gaan-Ngai* is very significant (Plate 5.48), because the whole village elders, married males, youths and children ware their traditional dresses (Kamson, 2010) and meet at the boy's dormitory known as *Khangchu.* The dresses ware by them signifies their ages. The girls of the villages also gathered in their dormitory known as *Kailu* (Plate 5.49). Before going to start the procession some girls with their traditional dress have performed the dances in front of boy's dormitory (Plate 5.50). Only male members of the village should participate in this procession. This procession is the activity of the first day, which is called *Ngai-Gangmei* (starting or coming of the festival). The second day is called *Ngai-dai* (the great festival). It is also widely known as *Tamchan Ngai* (The performance of *Tamchan* dance). Majority of female dancers used to in this event with their traditional dresses. All the dancers maintain equality in their dresses, as well as in the performance. The third day is known as the *'Tuna-Gan-Ngai'* (Festival of the youth).During that day females and males ware their traditional dresses and the females performed, '*Thei-Kadi-Laam'* (Dance in honor of the dead) (Plate 5.51). This dance is performed in the houses where the dead were occurred and within this dance the male members are also used to play the traditional musical instruments. In *Rongmei* community the uses of textile items are considered as a most useful. It also seen that the uses of different textile items are used on their graveyard, which have a

significant meaning in their customary beliefs. Through textile, *Rongmei* people beautified the graves and provided the ritual farewell or departure (Plate 5.52). The fourth day is known as Long *Kumei* (Hill Trekking) performed by the boys, girls and members of the dormitories in a nearby mountain range. In this event, almost everyone must wear their traditional textile dresses (Plates 5.53, 5.54, 5.55, 5.56 and 5.57). The fifth day is performed as *Nap-Chanmei* and during that day along with the other dancers the married couples also take the participation in the dances with their traditional dresses. The last day is called *Rangpatmei*, this day is equally important for *Rongmei* people of Barak Valley. But the representations of the traditional dresses up to the fifth days are incredible. It is a collective festival of the *Rongmei Naga* and their bright dresses of male as well as female supports and enriches their festival. Textile is always considered as a part of social as well as religious activity of *Rongmei* society. The *Rongmei* dances with their colourful costumes are recognized as a performing art.

There are modes of wearing loin cloth in Rongmei society, for example, the upper end of the cloth is raised up to cover the breasts by the married women. So, there is no need of putting shirt. On the other hand, the unmarried woman, put loin cloth around the waist leaving the upper part of the body to be covered by shirt. Girls tightly fastened their shirts to the body to suppress the breasts as much as could be.The matter of moral significance is also symbolized in the distribution of the strips pattern as well as cultural value attached to the colours. The brighter colours are allowed for the youngsters while the fainted ones for the elders (Plate 5.58). The associated symbolism in the brighter colour is the source of sensual fascination, enthusiasm and potentiality for a female in the prime of her life. The choice of colour is a matter of aesthetic contemplations. Like any other culture, the *Rongmei* culture articulates the sense of beauty of weaving, embroidery and appliqué work. It can be stated that material culture of textile of *Rongmei* has functional values, to organize their society in contemporary days, helping in strengthening its moral, aesthetic and ideological foundations. The *Rongmei* dresses should be categorized on the basis of gender (male and female) and through age gradation. According to age, costumes of male and female are divided in many categories, these are mentioned below

(http://e-pao.net.epSubpageExtractor.asp?src=Manipur.EthnicRacesManipur Traditional dress and ornament of the Zeliangrong of North East part 3: 12.12.2014).

Male costumes:

a) ***Kharam-pheipong* (Shawl):**

This is a common black wrapper having only white stripes near the border and is used mainly by the age groups between forty to hundred years and this shawl is taken seven to eight days to weave or complete. Now-a-days, weavers of *Rongmei Naga* use readymade fiber which is normally available in the market of this region. *Piaw* is a very common design for this shawl and *piaw* signify lines, for the enhancement of design weavers use black and white combination. There are various kinds of shawls which are available in *Rongmei Naga* community. Most of the shawls bear the traditional and aesthetical aspects of *Rongmei Naga* (Plate 5.59).

b) ***Masin-pheipong* (Kind of shawl):**

This is used by the age groups between sixty to seventy years old. This shawl normally takes seven to ten days to complete. In compare to *Kharam-pheipong*, this shawl is more expensive, it costs one thousand rupees in the market. For this cloth *piaw* is an equally important, here weavers visualize the assimilation of various colours, for instance, white, green, red, black and orange (Plate 5.60).

c) ***Phaingao* (Shawl):**

This is made of four pieces, it is a ceremonial wrapper. The two side borders are made with red and narrow strips of yellow, green and black respectively. The ground of this cloth is white. The ends borders are quite broad and have interlacing of different colours and in between there are four rows of pyramidal structures in black on red, background. The ends are sometimes ornamented by tying extra laces with free ends of the woven strings .It is used by the age groups between forty to sixty years old. This shawl takes thirty days to complete. Various motifs all and the applications of lines are very common, the lines are known as *piaw*. *Phailakhu* is another motif; it is a kind of insect. Besides these two, *Faibai* means broken lines in dark colours, is another associated motifs for this cloth. *Khuaimik* means eyes of honey bee and this motif also provide the visual pleasure into this specific cloth, some common colours which are usually seen in this cloth, such as- white, red, black, green, orange and blue (Plate 5.61).

d) ***Marei-pun* (Shawl):**

A cloth originally meant for young people of both sexes and this is very popular cloth amongst the age groups between twenty to forty years, because it is used for social as well as ritual purposes. The word *marei* means romantic and pun means cloth. Around twenty days are needed to weave this cloth. As well as artisans use various colours to compose this sophisticated dance costume, for instance – white, red, black, yellow and green. The side border start with a narrow white and black line followed by a broad red, yellow, black and white .A portion in the middle is left white. The end border contains interlacing of black, red, green and yellow colours respectively. The combination of two motifs are dominant, these are *piaw* and *khahiyak kathum*. *Khahiyak kathum* provides the visual, like rainbow and this cloth is very bright and gorgeous in all manner. Besides other colours black and white is more popular (Plate 5.62).

e) ***Renglan***:

This is a ceremonial lower costume for male; it is a good combination of stripped and red colour. It is used during the dance; this cloth is made up of four pieces which are joined together. In the lower and upper pieces there are horizontal lines interlacing throughout the length of the cloth. At the joining of the two side pieces, the interlacing hangs freely. It is very essential item along with *Marei-pan*, because both of these cloths provide the beautiful appearances to the *Rongmei* dancer and the dancers between twenty to forty years have to use this cloth. The weavers need forty days to produce a single *Renglan.* Five colours are very prominent, yellow, white, black, green, pink and orange and the price of this textile item is little bit higher than the *Marei-pan*. The designs like-*piaw* and *hootian*g are the combination of this cloth, in Barak valley *hootiang* is identify as insect and but it is might be different in other places (Plate 5.63).

f) ***Langshiyam* (Kind of cloth used on shoulder):**

This is made of cloths, which is actually modified and different than traditional *Langshiyam,* because, earlier it was made with threads only. This item needs seven days to complete and the value of this item is always varies. The colours are-white, red, green, yellow and black are normally seen to this cloth. On the basis of age the colours are applied by the weavers (Plate 5.64).

g) ***Pheiduam* (Tied on leg):**

This is used by the people aged between twenty to forty years. Price of this particular item is one hundred fifty only and the colours are mostly used by the weavers, such as-white, pink, green, yellow, black and red. *Piaw* and *Phailakhu* are used to this cloth, besides all colours; black is used as foremost colour to this cloth (Plate 5.65).

Female costumes:

a) ***Faingou phei-shoi***:

Phei means cloth; *shoi* means skirt or lower garment for the ladies. It is generally used by the age groups between twenty to forty years and this textile item takes around thirty days get completed. Commonly three colours are used by the weavers, such as- white, red and black. The price of this item is around two thousand, though it is a ceremonial dress but also used as daily purposes. The design such as- *piaw* and *phailakhu* are arranged with *talam.* The *talam* is recognized as butterfly in *Rongmei* community (Plate 5.66).

b) ***Baubanphei* (Muffler):**

This is the part and parcel of *Faingou phei-shoi. Khun* with *piaw* and *phailakhu* are the perfect combination of this muffler. *Khun* means various colours, such as-red, black, white, green and orange (Plate 5.67).

c) ***Hanglan*:**

This is also used by the same age groups, like *Faingou phei-shoi*. But its colour combination is diverse; these are- red, black, yellow, white and pink. Again the price is moreover same like *Faingou phei-shoi*. This is also made by the weavers with the combination *piaw* and *hootiang* (Plate 5.68).

d) ***Baubanphei* (Muffler):**

This is again part and parcel of *Hanglan*. *Khun* with *Piaw* and Phailakhu are the accurate combination to this cloth and *khun* means various colours, like-red, black, white, green and orange.

e) ***Langmu phei-shoi*:**

This is only used during the festivals and it is used by the females between twenty to forty years. This prestigious textile item of *Rongmei* needs sixty to eighty days to finish and price of this textile for a single piece is around five thousand. Total eight numbers of colours are used to produce this clot, such as-red, yellow, green, pink, lemon yellow, orange and sky blue. This particular female dress of *Rongmei Naga* is more ornamented and the motifs used by the weavers, like-*piaw*, *hootiang*, *hoora*, *hoopang* (like insect in large size), *hoopack*, *piawkuai* (double lines), *siankuaituan* (design looks like W) *apangban* (like monkeys hand) and *chiat* (head of an insect) (Plate 5.69).

f) ***Phang-phei* (Cloth covers the upper part of the body):**

It is a female dancing costume which is also used during ritual events. This cloth is more attractive. The end borders have lines of interlacing of various coloured yarns. The cloth is worn by placing it on the chest, which passes on the lack under the arms and then across. Lastly after the cross in formed the two free ends are brought over the shoulders and are allowed to hang freely on the chest. It is used by the age group between twenty to forty years old. This item takes forty to fifty days to complete and the price of this *Phang phei* is one thousand five hundred to two thousand. Apart from these colours the other colours, such as- pink, green and orange are common seen to this cloth as well as *piaw* is a dominant motif to this cloth (Plate 5.70).

g) ***Phei-laak* (Waist band):**

It is a kind of belt used by the boys and girls during ritual dance. It is white in colour side borders start with a narrow red stripe followed by yellow and green borders. The end of the belt has interlacing of numerous colours and contains two single rows of pyramidal design followed by one raw of triple sets of pyramidal design, coloured tussles are tied in two free border end of red and white threads. It is also used by the age group between twenty to forty years. Besides these above mentioned colours some other colours are also seen to this cloth, such as- black, orange, green, violet and pink. Weavers of *Rongmei Naga* of Barak Valley need thirty days to make this piece and the motifs which are seen this cloth are-*piaw*, *phailakhu*, *kawnahu* and *piawkuai* (Plate 5.71).

h) ***Langjain*:**

This cloth is used both for daily use and for ceremonial occasions. The red border contains interlacing of various colours. It is used by the girls of ten to twenty five years and the price of this textile is about two thousand. The motifs like-*piaw*, *hoora*, *chiatpi* and *talam* are used to this particular cloth. The colours like red and black are more gorgeous and along with this any colour might be used (Plate 5.72).

Some important *Rongmei* villages of Barak Valley known for its textile making, such as-Binnakandi Part-II, *Ragailnag*, *Duirenmun* (Sonai), *Luang-pi* (Kochudoram), *Namguipnancy* (Kochudaram), *Guang Guilnang* (Sabaspur near Medical College), *Nam-Thanluang* (In-between Medical and NIT), *Kagaluang* (Meherpur, Silchar), *Thangkim* (Motinagar), *Kaguilaung* (Gopalganj, Fatak Bazaar), *Henga* (Baskandy), *Raigailaung* (UjanTarapur),*Ngaselang* (Kalabill), *Namtanlaunng* (Lakhipur, near electricity board), *Puangsanlaung* (Phulertol), *Ramgaijeng* (Jirighat), *Namtailaung* (Jirighat), *Tungbung* (Rupaibali), *Atira* (Hatirhar, old Baskandy) and *Pantilaung* (Hailakandi).

5.5 TEXTILE OF ASSAMESE

Assamese is an Indo-Aryan language and it is developed out of the Sanskrit language about the 7^{th} century A.D (Bhatt and Bhargava, 2005). The fame of *Assamese* textiles has been recorded even in the *Harshacharita of Banabhatta* (7^{th} ct. A.D) (Das Gupta, 1982). During the *Barmese* attack in 1826, large numbers of *Assamese* people were come to Barak Valley and they were mostly belongs to the titles Kalita, Chutiya, Hazarika and Rajbangshi. Some important *Assamese* areas in Barak Valley are Rayghar (Silchar), Malugram (Silchar), Kumbhirgram, Harinagar, Borgul (Badarpur) and Hailakandi. Assam has a multiethnic society; around forty five different languages are spoken by different communities in Assam. Barak Valley is the part of South Assam, for the outsiders Barak is well known as anthropological garden. Here, the *Assamese* people are the part of that garden. *Assamese* people are very soft hearted and their style of living is very colourful in nature. Barak Valley is full of natural beauty and natural resources, all the aspects of nature are fully blossomed in Barak Valley, for instance-Hills, rivers, lakes and forests. So many *Assamese* people have been living in Barak Valley with their own culture and tradition (Baisya, 2006).

Folk beliefs of each community provide the chance to the historians about the scopes and prospects of the culture of a particular community, in such a manner folk principles of *Assamese* provide the related information about their cultural practices. Making textiles by the *Assamese*, acts as a transcriber and records of history (Roy, 1994). *Assamese* people of Barak Valley and other areas of Assam have some traditional beliefs regarding their weaving. Among them, Thursday is supposed to be the birthday of the Goddess of the art of weaving. The preparation of yarn for warping, the warping itself and looming are not done on the day of the full moon the day of the conjunction of the sun and moon and on the eleventh day of the lunar half of the month. They have a strong faith that the cloth woven under such situations will not be auspicious. Weaving is not done if there is death in the village. During the festival like *Bihu, Durga Puja* and *Vishwakarma puja* weaving is not commonly started. The weaver has to be in a state of ritual purity while weaving cloth for ritual uses. The *chaneki,* i.e., design catalogue is always considered auspicious. Even during their menstruation period, women are not permitted to do the design (Saikia, 2013).

The *Neo-Vaisnava* movement of Sri Sankardeva was effective force for the development in the art of weaving, especially of figured cloth. The *Assamese* textile can be categorized according to three historical periods, such as, the Pre-*Vaisava, Vaisnava* and the present period. During Pre-*Vaisnava* and *Vaisnava period,* the *Assamese* costumes were known by the names *vastra* and *acchadana,* and they were both uncut and stitched. The common word used for dresses in *Assamese* is *Kapor,* which is thought to be variation of the Sanskrit word *Karpata.* Women appear to have worn two garments lower *adhovastra* and *upper uttaria-vastra.* The lower garment descended from the stomach to the ankles and was fastened by means of *nivi, bandha.* At that period both men and women wore *mekhela.* The *mekhela* is a kind of skirt in the form of an elongated sack open at both ends. It was proved by some literature that the *Assamese* women and of the time of the Pre-*Vaisnava* and *Vaisnava* period wear the sari also.

After Pre-*Vaisnava* and *Vaisnava* period, the changes were also happened in the period of *Ahom*-Kingdom. In the beginning of the *Ahom* rule the king also took interest in the development of the textiles craft. During the period of King Rudra Singha there are much more significant changes in the *Assamese* textiles in dresses. The days of Pratap Singha (1603-41 A.D.) witnessed an era of state patronage for the

textile industry. The king encouraged a modern touch in costumes. Godadhar's son and successor Rudra Singha sent different messengers to west Bengal and other places to learn about the art of weaving and accumulate samples of costumes (Das Gupta, 1982). Queen Sarveswari, the third wife of Siva Singh established weaving schools. Pratap Singha also settled several weavers at Sualkuchi from many places on the South bank of the Brahmaputra. Even today Sualkuchi on the opposite bank of Guwahati is the greatest Centre for weaving. The Mughals also respected *Assamese* silk textiles which were either sent as gifts to the Mughal court or were exposed for sale. *Assamese* textiles were known for the fine quality, brightness of colour and durability. On the other hand cotton goods were known for the bright colours, durability and the bold loom-embroidery designs, the motifs of which though taken from nature were given abstract and geometrical shapes (Das Gupta, 1982). Earlier the *Assamese* people originally wore loose clothes by both sexes. Later woman wore *mekhela, riha* and generally in the festivities a *chadar* was used over the *riha.* It is supposed that the *riha* and *mekhela,* these two pieces clothes came to Assam through the *Tibbeto-Burma* groups, the *Kacharis* and the *Ahoms.*

The contemporary situation of *Assamese* textiles is diverse than the earlier textiles. These changes are very normal, because so many different aspects are working behind this. The common dress of *Assamese* men is *dhoti* and *punjabi*. During summer and rainy seasons usually *ga-mosa* is only thrown over the left shoulder or a *ga-mosa* is tied round the stomach or head. The present day dress of *Assamese* women comprises of *mekhela, riha* and *chadar*. Now a day the blouse is also used by *Assamese* women. The popular collective is silk *mekhela,* blouse and a cotton *chadar* all in matching colours. After marriage *riha* is used to cover the waist. In some places the blouse is not used and thus tying the *mekhela* over the breast, the *chadar* is basically placed over the head. They use, *endi kapor* and *bar kapor* as a religious or sacred cloth in some districts of Assam. The colours which are mainly used in their cloths are influenced from nature. Nature has plenty of colourful items which always motivated human to develop his/her aesthetic senses. During the application of colours in their textiles, they try to maintain the colour balance and colour composition. In weaving, composition is such an important element which provides the visual language to the users as well as for the viewers. The designs were woven with a large variety of coloured threads like red, white, black, yellow and

green. The above colours are still popular in *Assamese* loom embroidery work of Barak region.

Concerning the designs there are two types of designs used by the *Assamese* weavers, such as-geometrical design and conventional design. The geometrical design is such an important element, which always provides the global dimension to any textile practices. The geometrical shapes are varying common visual language which can easily read by anybody in the world. Some common geometrical lines and shapes are- diagonal line, curved line, wavy line, zigzag line, twisted line, cross line, triangular shape, chevron shape, square shape, rectangular shape, rhombus shape, diamond shape, circular shape, oval shape and dotted shape. The meaning of conventional is very much familiar with everyone, conventional means what is done or considered acceptable by society in general, normal and ordinary. The term conventional is a kind of common communication medium for everyone. This conventional ideas and senses have come to the mind of the people from the surroundings. Sometimes it might be natural or manmade, but its essence is equally same in almost for everyone who are living in the society. Some important natural conventional items are- fruits, flowers, leafs, plants, creepers, birds, insects, animals, other living things, cosmic elements, spirituals and other motifs. Conventional are of two types, i.e., a) Natural: A natural form is used and treated in a manner to have a suitable ornamental feature of the texture on which it is to be displayed, natural motifs look like pictures usually of flowers, fruits, animals or scenes. Such motif or pictures are suitable for the decoration of utilitarian article. b) Abstract: In an abstract design, the form of an object is simplified. Some characteristic features being kept abstract, in a natural design, the most important are emphasized to give beauty of nature.

The *Assamese* weavers of Barak Valley are always involved themselves for making threads (Plates 5.73, 5.74 and 5.75) and dyes. The clothes woven by *Assamese* women artisans are most attractive and pleasing to the eyes. Colour in *Assamese* textile is moderate and mild compared with tribal tradition. One of the major features of *Assamese* fabric is the abundant used of creeper designs and *buta* one of another major design. The most fashionable flower design of an Assamese waver is the *guna-phutuki-phul.* This flower motif is considered to be the king of the motifs. The *Assamese* weavers borrowed motifs like diamond, triangle and square and the configuration of star motifs form tribal textile to decorate their own fabrics. One of

the commonly used motifs in *Assamese* textile is the plant design (Kalita, 2013). Most of the motifs and designs are used in *Assamese* textile of Barak Valley are derived from the environment. The *Assamese* weavers always try use flowers and creepers. Another special feature about *Assamese* textile weaving that is not confined to any particular artisan groups. Textiles' weaving is a woman's work and it is produced in every hoses of Barak Valley.

According to common belief, the muga silk of Assam was introduced by the *Bodo* tribes, who had travelled from central Asia. They carried the art of weaving and silk reeling with them (Pathak, 2011).The *muga* silk culture of Assam is as old on *Assamese* culture and it is also believed that the *Tai-Ahoms* introduced the *muga* culture into Assam and is a significant contribution of *Tai-Ahoms* to *Assamese* culture (Phukan and Chowdhury, 2006). In the state of Assam *muga* and *eri* are prominent as the common medium of textile weaving. Around the world the golden *muga* is only nurture in the state of Assam. The main quality of the clothes made by golden threads is after wash it always gives up more brightness (Roy, 2011). The term *eri* is originates from the plant which is locally identified as the *eragoch* in Barak Valley. Assam was superior in the cultivation of weaving materials; Assam alone can claim her ability in cultivation of *muga, endi* silk worm and in the craftsmanship of various textiles. Evidence is found in the historical writing of British offices of the early seventeenth century as well as in the *Ahom* Chronicles that silk fabrics of Assam were exported to Bhutan, Tibet and even to China. Craft tradition of *Assamese* people has glorious history and weaving is one of the most refined craft article in *Assamese* culture. *Assamese* textile of Barak Valley is very fine in quality and its colour and durability are also noticeable.

Having been fascinated by the craftsmanship and artistic sense of the Assamese women, the Mahatma, during his visit to Assam in 1921 made a statement by saying that every woman of Assam is a born-weaver and the weaves fairy tales in cloth (Saikia, 2013).

Loom:

The loom which is using by the *Assamese* weavers is very simple and this loom is made out of bamboo and wood. Especially essential parts of the loom are made with the help of wood and it is noticeable that the loom should easily moves

from one place to another place. During summer, they shift their loom to outside and set under the three (Plate 5.76). This possibility is available in their loom, because of its removable quality. Its manufacturing is very simple; therefore anybody can install this loom easily. The weaver's seat which is an important feature of loom is nearby seventy two inches long. Some stands which are used to construct a loom, for instance-Two number of back stands are around sixty six inches, two central stands are nearby sixty four inches and two front stands are about thirty six inches, these are the basic heights of stands are used in *Assamese* loom of Barak region. These stands are attached with joint bars, for instance-the back stands are fused with the bar is around sixty six inches long, central stands are joint with the bar is sixty six inches and the front stands are attached with each other with the bar is around again sixty six inches long. Simultaneously two side bars are also attached with back and middle stands together are around forty eight inches long, as well as two more bars, which are used on top of back and middle bars are around seventy two inches long. These are the preliminary stands and bars are seen in the construction of *Assamese* loom (Plate 5.77). The weavers take the loom and the supporting tools for weaving to be sacred resources and the weavers trust that the presence of Goddess behind the whole affair, i.e., from the spinning of thread to be completion of the weaving with great skill and craftsmanship. Before they start the work of weaving, they offer nuts and betel leaves to the Goddess *Bihkarami Ai* (Saikia, 2013).

Some Tools of Assamese Loom:

Maku- This is a weaver's shuttle.

Mahura- A piece of reed with wound thread for weaving.

Tolotha- One of the beams.

Hola- This is a slanting, woven part.

Putral- A bamboo stick keeping the cloth of a loom extended breadthwise.

Dupati- Balanced tool used in a loom.

Rash- The reed of an *Assamese* loom

Nasni- Wood or bamboo device used in a loom

Bow- Heralds, heddles.

Chiri- Bamboo tools.

Goroka- Treadles of a loom.

Bihu:

In Barak valley the *Assamese* people observe all the festivals such as *Durga puja, Holi, Kali puja, Janmastami, Shivaratri* and many others occasions. But, the most significant social and cultural festival of *Assamese* of Barak region is *Bihu* festival. There are three types of *Bihu* festivals are organized by the *Assamese*. In Assam, *Bihu* is such festival which does spread over spring and autumn and even on to winter. For the celebration of *Bihu* festival, weavers produced numerous clothes of different categories; it is commonly based on age, colour and shape. The dress wear by the girls called *muga karpor* as well as boys wear their traditional attire (Vasudev, 2007). *Bihu* is not only an important cultural festival of *Assamese* people of Barak Valley, but also it is equally important for whole Assam. It is clear that if anyone wants to study the textile of any community, so he/she must notice the different festivals of each community. In case of Assamese textile, the bihu song is the most motivating aspect of the socio-economic life of the *Assames*e people that describes the relationship existing between weaving and women (Saikia, 2013). It is a customary in *Assamese* society for a young woman to make a present of a self-woven *ga-mosa* (towel) to her beloved as a token of love and to elders as symbol of reverence. In hand-woven fabrics of Assam, cotton, *muga, pat* (mulberry silk) and *eri* (endi) are the basic raw materials (Saraf, 1982). *Bihu ga-mosa* is actually the token of love-given by young women to their lovers and husbands. But gradually these scarves came to be presented to other male members of the family like father-in-law, brothers and sons as a symbol of love and affections (Das Gupta, 1982).

Marriage:

Besides *bihu,* marriage ceremony is an important aspect in the life of *Assamese* people. Marriage is such a social event which is considered as a great event in every community and this ceremony provides the chance to learn about the textile practices of any community. In *Assamese* community no girls are not considered marriage worthy unless she could acquire the proficiency in the art of spinning, weaving and embroidery, therefore it has been seen that weaving and spinning are of marriage songs. Some marriage songs give description of the graceful dresses of the

bride and the bride groom. An *Assamese* girl now-a-days uses multicoloured *mekhela-chadar* in her day to day life, but when she appears as a bride in traditional marriage she wears *mekhela-chaddar,* which must be either a white or creamy silk white creamy coloured *pari* (Border), because this stands for serenity and peace. The inner meaning of such a symbolic value is assumed by each and every member of the traditional *Assamese* society (Roy).

Brides Dress: *Riha, chadar,* blouse and *mekhela* are the common dresses for *Assamese* brides. Luminous colours are always part of bride clothes, such as, golden-yellow, red, white, pink, and maroon .These are the basic costumes, which are generally used during the wedding ceremony of *Assamese* girls in Barak Valley.

Bride-grooms Dress: *Dhoti, Panjabi, Curta, Chadar* and sometimes turban is also part of bride grooms dress and *ga-mosa* is also used during wedding.

Assamese male costumes:

Dhoti, punjabi and paguri are the traditional *Assamese* dresses for men, *dhoti* covers the lower half of the body, *punjabi* is a loose shirt and *paguri* covers the head. These have been substituted by contemporary cloths, but on special occasions *Assamese* male they always put their traditional attire
(http://www.ignca.nic.in/craft254.htm : 2.9.2014).

a) ***Dhoti:***

Dhoti is used by male and it is generally worn around the waist. This dhoti is made of white colours. This piece of cloth is used on or below the knee. There are many types of dhotis are available in Barak Valley, such as- *muga,* silk and cotton made. The dhoti made of cotton is better than all other mediums; it is also used in all the seasons (Plate 5.78).

b) ***Paguri* (Turban)*:***

Turban is an important for many communities as the symbol of status. In *Assamese* community turban played a vital role in different ways. This *Assamese* turban is made out of cotton, pat and *muga.*

c) **Costume used in *Kirtan:***

***Dhoti*:** It is a readymade cloth which is easily available in the markets of this region and the white colour is mostly preferable.

Punjabi: *Punjabi* is also used by them readymade; during the performance of *kirtan* the white colour *punjabi* is used (Plate 5.79).

Chelang Kapor: This is also the part and parcel of *kirtan* dress and the designs like *kakori* and *achuri* are very frequently seen to this cloth. It is also not made by the weavers, because of its accessibility in the market of Barak Valley as readymade. Its long and breath are around eight feet to two and half feet. The colours like white, cream and violet are usually seen to this cloth (Plate 5.80).

Ga-mosa: But the *ga-mosa*, which is used in *kirtan* is made in the home and ornamented with many designs like *achuri*-flat horizontal space in both sides, *pari*-that is also into the both sides, *barga akriti*-means square, with flower petals and diamond spots are major the characteristic feature of *ga-mosa* used in the *kirtans*. The white and red is the best combination of this cloth (Plate 5.81).

***Assamese* female costumes:**

The female member of *Assamese* family can be identified by their traditional dress, known as- *mekhela, chadar* and *riha*.

a) ***Mekhela:***

It is a cylindrical garment and is stitched lengthwise to form the soak and it is tucked at the waist. But earlier the *mekhela* was not stitched, and was wrapped round the waist and then folded at the front. The stitched *mekhela* is similar in form to the *Sarony* of Sumatran women and to the *Lungi* of Burmese women. The unstitched variety was similar to the dress of women of Kerala, Ceylon, Thailand, Combodia, Laos, the Shans and Indonesia (Das Gupta, 1982). The word *mekhela* has its source in the *Sanskrit* word *mekhala*, means to cover around. Mostly the *mekhela* is made out of *pat, muga* or cotton. There are various kinds of *mekhela* which are popular in Barak valley as well as in the other part of Assam (Saikia, 2013).

Weavers wove the *mekhelas* for day to day uses as well as use for the rituals. The bridal *mekhela* is woven with pat; there they put the extraordinary ornaments through golden threads. *Mekhela* made out of colourful threads are also popular in day to day wears among the *Assamese* women of Barak region. *Mekhela* is mainly rectangular in shape; the colours which are used in *mekhela* are very bright, these are-red, yellow, orange, blue, and violet. The designs which are made on *mekhla a*re handmade and design motifs are as simple as, triangular, straight lines and curve lines.

Standard size of *mekhela* is lengthwise six feet and breadth wise three and half feet. Besides geometrical motif some other motifs are also very popular in use, like- images of animals, creepers, flowers and birds.

So many lines with *achuri* in light green and red surface are the best composition of *mekhela* for daily uses in this region. *Mekhela with* designs like, *guta fool*, *kakori*-means dot lines and *fool*-means flower with light green and orange are the best amalgamation commonly visualize by the weavers. *Mekhela* with *kakori*, *fool*-in black and orange and *guta*-in deep orange and black are the common combination made by the local weavers of this region and mostly made out of cotton threads and it is seen that cream colour surface is preferred by the weavers (Plates 5.82, 5.83 and 5.84).

b) ***Chadar:***

Chadar is made out of muga, pat and cotton and it is a female cloth. It is a cloth which is worn on the top of the *mekhela*. Along with *mekhela* and *riha*, *chadar* is such an important textile items which gives the fulfillment to the *Assamese* women. Various types of *chadars* are made by the weavers of Barak region. In compare to *riha,* the *chadar* is little shorter and cotton *chadar* is used by the *Assamese* women normally in winter season, as the cloth of everyday use. Chadar is mostly preferred by the *Assamese* women in off white colour. A bridal *chadar* woven by the local weaves are remarkable for the use of golden threads.

Some motifs and colours on *chadar:*

***Chadar* :** Motifs and designs which are seen on *chadar,* these are *kahori*- means dot line, *achuri*-flat horizontal space, *mayur*-peacock, *pari*-borders of *chadar* and some of the colours which are seen on *chadar*, these are–cream/white, blue and red (Plate 5.85).

***Chadar*:** The colours like white and brown are also very popular in *chadar* (Plate 5.86).

***Chadar*:** The motifs and designs like-*kahori, achuri* and *pari* with colours like yellow and green are very standard combination of *chadar* in Barak Valley (Plate 5.87).

Chadar: The design arrangement with *achuri, barfi (sweet)* and *pari* with white, black and sky blue are the best preparation of *Assamese chadar* made by the Assamese weavers of this region (Plate 5.88).

***Chadar*:** Dark green colour and design composition with *achuri, tara (star)* and *pari* the common shape usually seen to every household (Plate 5.89).

Chadar: The shapes like diamond in red and blue colour with *achuri* and *kahori* are the elegant composition in *chadar* made by the *Assamese* weavers of every districts of Barak Valley (Plate 5.90).

c) ***Riha:***

It is a female costume; this is naturally worn in the upper part of the body, which one end is tucked in at the waist and the other thrown over head. Some scholar finds out its origin in *Vedic age*. Previously many of the women in *Assamese* community did not use a blouse and therefore the *riha* was the only cloth, which was used as breast cover (Saikia, 2013).

d) ***Ga-mosa:***

The *ga-mosa* is an article of great significance for the *Assamese* people of Barak Valley. Literally translated, it means *Ga*=body, *mosa*=to wipe. *Ga-mosa* is generally a white rectangular piece of cloth with red colour border and red woven motifs. It is used daily to wipe the body after a bath. Simultaneously, the farmers of *Assamese* community also used as a waist cloth. It is hung around the neck at the prayer hall and guests are welcomed with the offering of *ga-mosa*. *Bihu* dancer wraps it around the head and the elders are offered *ga-mosa. Ga-mosa* is one of the important symbolic elements in *Assamese* culture. It is not used by the *Assamese* alone, it also popular among the other communities. *Ga-mosa* is a common textile items for both male and female. It is basically utilities for bath and sometimes for keeping betel nut. Cotton is the most common material for weaving *ga-mosa* and in special occasion weavers made *ga-mosa* with pat silk. Significantly, the *ga-mosa* is used equally in religious as well as in day to day life. Standard size of *gamosa* is six feet length and two and half feet breadth. Pure white and red surface with designs like *kahori*-means dot line, *achuri*-flat horizontal space and *fool*-means flower of any kind, but specially marrygold flower motifs is mostly seen on *ga-mosa* made by the weavers in this valley (Plate 5.91).

Some other *ga-mosa* used for different purposes:

Another nice *ga-mosa* made for male with designs like, *pakhra*, *achuri*-means flat horizontal space and *pari*-means border with the base colour brown, is very common amongst the *Assamese* male of this valley (Plate 5.92). White with light green colour base, with *achuri*-flat horizontal space and both side *pari*-means border are generally seen in the *ga-mosa* uses for baby (Plate 5.93). *Achuri*-means flat horizontal space and both side *pari*-means border with the colour composition like white, yellow and red are normally seen in this *ga-mosa* used by the male and female in many purposes to their daily life. Another *ga-mosa* used by male and female; there we should note the designs like *achuri*, side *pari*, crow and lotus. The colour combinations which are normally seen in this *ga-mosa* are-white, red and golden yellow (Plate 5.94).

5.6 KANTHA OF BARAK VALLEY

Needlework has always been an essential part of the art of weaving in our country. The *kantha* making tradition of Barak Valley has connected with greater Bengal. The textile tradition of undivided Bengal goes back to remote antiquity. The small low-relief plaques of the Sunga period found at Mahasthan, Chandraketugarh and a few other places of Bengal, represent what is perhaps the earliest visual evidence of textiles designs since the 2^{nd} and 1^{st} centuries BCE. Further terracotta finds of subsequent periods from Mangolkot (Bogra), Mainamati, Paharpur, Savar and other archaeological sites, as well as other stone and bronze sculptures belonging to the *Gupta Pala*, *Chandra* and *Sena* periods (4^{th} to 13^{th} centuries) provide us with detailed representation of costumes with beautiful floral or striped designs that were either woven into, or printed upon textiles of various materials. Similar indication is available from the Hindu-Buddhist manuscript illustrations of the 10^{th}-12^{th} centuries C.E. (Haque, 2007). Many places were famous for *kantha* making, when Bengal was undivided, for example, Chobis Pargana, Madinipur, Bakura, Birbhum, Malda, Murshidabad in West Bengal. In East-Bengal, Dhaka, Joshohar, Khulner, Faridpur, Comilla, Kustiya, Rajshani, Pabona, Moimonshing and Shreehotts were famous for *Kantha* making (Ghosh, 2004).

Kantha is largely succeeded in East-Bengal and later it spread in the other places (Nayak, 2010). The *Kantha* is a unique creation in the folk art of *Bengalis.* The

name has various regional variations such as, *Kentha*, *Ketha*, *Kyantha*, *Kyata* and *Kyantha*. It is basically women's art and the women giving expressions to their desires and dreams through the designs they create with needle and thread. The word *nakshi* derives its origin from the word *'naksha'* or design. In Bangladesh the *Nakshi kantha* is popularly known as *Nakshi Kheta*, *Phulkanta Kentha*, *Sajer Kantha* and *Rakshi Kheta* (Basak, 2007). There are two types of *kantha* in Barak valley-*Sadharan Kantha* and *Nakshidar Kantha.* Earlier *nakshi kantha* was also popularly known as *fuler kantha,* but it was used rarely for the purpose of guest only (Basu, 2000). *Kantha* making is an art which is not taught in any school, but it is passed from one generation to another. The motifs are varied, ranging from mythological tales to contemporary events. The women also drew the lives they saw around them, thus reflects their social awareness .The world of the *Kantha* is essentially feminine; men played no part in it.

Traditional art is the expression of the aspirations and hopes of the people who generally lived in the rural parts of the country .The tradition of *Kantha* embroidery are very old, some references are found about *kantha* work in the *RigVeda.* It is mentioned in the definitive Sanskrit grammar written by Panini around the sixth century BC. The earliest mention of *kantha* in *Bengali* literature is found in the *Charyapadar* (Basak, 2007). During the period of *Mahabharata*, we found out the existence of *kantha* as well as seen in the period of Buddha (Chakraborti and Mitra, S, 1999). *Lord Chaitanya (1485-1533)*, the apostle and visionary also draped in a *kantha*. The art of *kantha* making still existing in Tripura, Assam, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab and Haryana. The art form has evolved over the centuries and continues to be made even today with the same sentiment and belief as a part of our living tradition.

Kantha was connected with the lives of *Bengali*, that demonstrated the different Sanskrit and *Bengali* literature as well as there are several references which are available in Bowl songs There are many references of *kantha* are found in *Chaitanya Charitamrita*, *Nath Gitika*, *Ramayana* of Chandravati, *Annada Mangal* and *Purba Banga Gitika* . Innumerable songs, puzzles, rhymes been created on the *kantha* (Basak, 2007). In *Nath* literature *Kantha* is mentioned in Gopinath's song (Akand, 2013). In the works of Rabindranath, *Kantha* found its place in many ways (Basak, 2007). Kabi Nazrul Islam had also mentioned about the *kantha* in his poem. The

renowned poet Jasimuddin had written a poem named, *'Nakshi Kanthar Maath'*, where he has given the elaborate description regarding all the aspects related to the *kantha*.

The *kantha* is commonly known with many names, because of the dialectical differences of the people. But the making procedure and mode of utilities are practically same. The motifs which are seen on the *Nakshi kantha* are the mixture of Indian and Portugej (Ghosh, 2013). There are so many marriage songs and other songs which are available in Barak Valley, which also describes the *kantha* nicely (Basu, 2001). The *Kantha* of Barak is part and parcel of this valley; *kantha* of this Valley is common for every people. Hindu and Muslim *Bengalis* of this valley are the masters of this work. The artisans who are involved in this work basically from the villages of this land and they mostly belong from poor family. This colourful works of great ingenuity and beauty are based on patch work. Needlework has always been a form of self-expression for the women of Barak region. It reflects their hidden desires and aspirations, and expresses the cultural traditions and religions attitudes of their society to which they belong. The name *kantha* signifies a poor man's wrap consisting of old used up cloth patched up and sewn into a single garment. There are *kanthas* of various designs and patterns, which are used for rougher purposes contain a minimum of spectacular and coloured designs, the entire attention being mainly given to securing strength and consolidation. The existing *kanthas* of Barak Valley are mostly used for rough purposes and which are very simple, rather than various designs and patterns (Dutt, 1995).

Kantha in Barak Valley is made only by the women; the manufacturing process of this *kantha* is very strange. After using the saris, woman of this valley preserved these all, but before that they wash these saris properly and then then saris placed one upon another, sewn and quilted, on which designs are embroidered with coloured threads taken from borders of old saris (Chakraborti and Bari, 1991). *Kanthas* of this valley are made for different purposes. In Barak Valley *kantha* is mainly used as the quilt in winter season. *Kantha* is used as bed cover when new born baby is going to sleep. All the process related to *kantha* of this valley is totally hand made. Earlier the women of this valley were more conscious about the utility of materials, they did not believe in use and throw process. Therefore, they were used discarded saris for *kantha* purposes. Their sense of utility of discarded saris provides

the new aesthetical utilitarian prospects in *kantha*. There are many differences which are found in the *kantha* of Barak Valley and the *kantha* of other places. The *kantha* of Barak Valley is not that much decorated, but positively conveys the essence of Barak Valley. The symbol, design pattern, colour combination and different motifs depict the crafty ability of the women of this region. These all the things made profuse differences between *kantha* of this valley with other places. *Kantha* is mostly distinguished for its considerable variety of stitches, its design motifs and their symbolic meanings. These are many types of *kanthas* (i) The *Lep-kantha* (Winter cover), ii) *Sujni-kantha* (Bed cover) iii) *Arshilata* (Mirror wrapper) iv) *Jainamaz* (Prya pad) v) *Dastarkhan* (Dining table pad) vi) *Tholi, Durjani or Batua* (Small bag) vii) *Ghilaf* (Quran cover) viii) *Oar* (Pillow slip) ix) *Rumal kantha* (Handkerchief) (Haque, 2007). These above mentioned *kanthas* are not the contemporary reality of Barak Valley. Because at present only two types of *kantha* is now using by the villagers of Barak Valley, these are i) *Lep-kantha* (Winter cover) and ii) *sujni-kantha* (Bed cover).

In India there are two types of set-up in society, for example, village life and urban life. Apparently, it is fact that valley of Barak is following the same social set-up. Here, cities like Silchar, Karimganj and Hailakandi are very much influenced by the contemporary life of globalization .So, the utility of *Lep-kantha* and *sujni-kantha* in urban areas are almost over, because a number of industries used to make winter cover and bed covers which are now-a-days available in every market of Barak Valley. These contemporary items are very costly, which are not affordable for the villagers, therefore the villagers of Barak Valley are the only bearer of this traditional *kantha*. Their consequent involvement and affection made this *kantha* as social identity of Barak.

a) ***Lep Kantha*** **(Winter covering):**

Kanthas used to cover the body in winter is popularly known as *lep kanthas*. This *kanth*a is comparatively larger in size and to cover the whole body just like quilts stuffed with cotton (Santra, 2011). This is about 6¼ x 4½ in size and is made heavily padded and thick so as to afford protection from the cold. This kind of *kantha* also embroidered with colour threads in various designs (Plate 5.95).

b) ***Sujni Kantha*** **(Bed spread):**

This *kantha* is usually used for seating. The size is generally large and rectangular in shape and is also used as bed covers in the villages and especially used by the poor villagers of Barak Region. Average size is 6′ x 3½″ (Plates 5.96 and 5.97) (Dutt, 1995).

In these two *kanthas*, the weavers simply work out their feelings nicely because both of these *kanthas* are big in size. The visuals which are represented by the artisans are like miniature of the social life of particular village. Sometime, it is also seen that, female in any particular family mutually provide their contributions on specific *kantha.* Stella Kramrisch observed: *"The design of the Kanthas provides wide margins for showing the contents of a woman's mind. Their figures and symbols are freely associated and rhythmically assembled".* Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya, *"Every Kantha is functional and founded on thrift, it is imbued with so much romance, sentiment and philosophy that it transcends the orbit of a mere craft as does a painting or sculpture"*(Basak, 2007).

Alpona **and its significant on Kantha:**

The *alpona* transmits the social character with cultural background of different areas through the rituals like *bratas, pujas* and marriages (Bhattacherjee, 2014). Word *alpona* is derived from the *Sanakrit* word *Alimpan*, which means *'to coat'* (Ghosh, 2004).The *alpona* of this valley represents many beliefs regarding social, cultural, philosophical, ritual and aesthetical. *Alpona* is demonstrates the different local leafs, flowers, creepers, and many other motifs related to the daily life of the people of this valley (Plate 5.98). The total composition of *alpona* bears many aspects of knowledge of women of this valley. The designs of *alpona* is very fluent, women have never require any preconception for *alpona*, only requirement is rice powder. They mixed rice powder with normal water, and convert it in a liquid. The motifs used by them are very simple, which imitates their knowledge or association with their surrounding and nature. The *alpona* of Barak Valley is somewhat similar with Tripua and West Bengal because of their cultural similarities (Tagore, 2013). In *alpona* the designs do not apparently have any links with each other; care is taken to ensure that symmetry is not disturbed. The same attitudes have shown by the women when they engaged in making *kantha.*

The eminent textile scholar Stella Kramrisch considers the inspiration for these textiles lies in the *'alpona'* designs, which are drawn out on the floor and door-step in *Bengal* at festival times (Gillow and Barnard, 1991). The *kantha* artists developed the convention of a many petal lotus medallion in the center, surrounded by floral border and *kalka* motifs in four corners, the *kalka*, possibly of *Mughal* origin inspired the Scottish paisley design. The *kantha* is an extension of the *Bengali alpona* in its use of the lotus derived from the symbolic mandala art suggests an outstanding folk memory of the widespread Tantric cults. The *kantha* motifs stemmed from local *Bengali* imagery (Mitter, 2001). The pattern of lotus is used on *kantha* made by the *Bengali* people, the same type of lotus is found in the seal of Mohenjo-Daro. The utility of motifs like-pots, banana trees and many others, these all represents the prosperous meaning of different believes (Chakraborty, 2011). Sometimes the name of the artist herself as well as of the person to whom the *kantha* is dedicated is embroidered on the body of the *kantha* itself, but more often the object of the loving dedication remains unmentioned by the artist and unknown to the world (Dutt, 1995). Regarding the *kantha* of Barak Valley two things, law of Repetition and geometrical pattern are very important. Some common stitches of *kantha* making, these are-running stitch, double running stitch, patch-up stitch, twisting stitch, back stitch, cross stitch, button hole stitch, stem stitch, chain stitch and leak stitch. Out of these some stitches are used by the women of Barak Valley.

a) **Repeated Stitch:**

This is the basic stitch used by the *Kantha* artisans of this region. In this stitching needle follows the same straight line. The significance of this type of stitch creates gaps within the lines. This line and gaps is follow in the both side of the *Kantha,* the gap between the stitches depends on the weaver.

b) **Double repeated stitch:**

This stitching method is also popular among the weavers and this stitching process also creates gaps, but these gaps are not so much of visible because of the double stitch. The gaps which are create in-between the two lines makes a compact looks on the *Kantha*, which is pleasing for the eyes.

c) **Cross stitch:**

Cross stitch is equally important for the *Kantha* makers of Barak region. In this process all the lines crossing to each other's at the Centre. This kind of stitching process gives more durability to the *Kantha* as well as creates a visual dimension.

d) **Chain Stitch:**

One of the earliest forms of stitching it is found in silk garments of China dating back to the pre-Christian era. Most of the motifs like flowers and leaves are done with the help of this stitching. Chain stitching are widely popular in this valley.

e) **Satin stitch:**

A few numbers of artisans are now using this stitching method in the *kantha* of this land. The basic application of this stitching to fills up the enclosed spare or a design. This mode of stitching is commonly used in China and also in India, Middle East, North Africa, Latin America and Europe.

The motifs which are commonly seen in the *alponas* as well as in the *kanthas* are:

Kalka: This motif is widely used on the *Kantha* of Barak Valley; this motif is believed to have originated in Iran. Even it was found on the shawls of Sultans and Mughals.

Sankha**:** Conch shell which is auspicious ritual element in this region. It is believed that the sound of conch shell has a benefit for the nature as well as it symbolizes the fertility. It is mostly seen in the hand of Goddess *Durga*.

Dhan gaach **(Paddy):** Symbol of wealth.

Narikel gaach **O** ***Narikel (*****Coconut tree and coconut):** Tree symbolizes long life and coconut has great significance in many rituals.

Bala **(Wristlet):** Symbol of pleasure and achievements. It is very common ornament among the *Bengali* women of Barak valley.

Kula **(Winnow fan):** Representation of prosperity and mostly seen in the windings.

Ghar (House): Sign of stability as well as unity.

Raaj haas **(Swan):** Mount of Goddess *Saraswati*.

***Prajapati* (Butterfly):** Mark of cheerful blending, this symbol is mostly seen in the *Kula*, which are used in wedding.

***Paakhi* (Bird):** Seen as conveying God's messages to the soil.

***Mayur* (Peacock):** Peacock is the mount of Lord *Kartikeya*

***Surja* (Sun):** Symbol of power and it is the oldest available evidence of needle work. The solar motif is seen in the *chakra* with the cross.

***Chandra, Tara (*Moon Star):** Companions of the Universe.

***Paddma* (Lotus):** The original symbol of creation, it signifies happiness and beauty.

***Swastik*:** Used as a symbol of good luck.

***Padachinha* (Footsteps):** It is the mark of good fortune and prosperity.

***Maach* (Fish):** Symbol of fertility.

Geometric patterns: Circles, squares, triangles and many others.

***Pataka* (Flag):** Flag or banner, used as motif since the Buddhist period.

***Singha* (Lion):** Mount of Goddess *Durga*, which gifted by Himalaya.

***Haathi* (Elephant):** Associated with royalty and wealth.

***Paan Supari* (Betel leaf and betel nut):** Considered auspicious at all religious and other events (Basak, 2007).

The contemporary commercial *Kantha:*

The recent contemporary commercial *Kanthas* are different than the traditional *Kanthas*. Because, now many Non-Government Organization's (NGO's) are actively providing their support to the artisans, therefore the consistency of traditional *kantha* are shifted from traditional uniqueness. These non-governmental organizations are trying to revive the traditional *kantha* artists. But, some of the fundamental differences are now accessible in the commercial *kanthas* of Barak Valley. For example, now old series are replaced by the new cloths and the old threads are also replaced by new one. Today *kantha* is made more as an art object enjoying commercial prospects. The *Kantha* today is used to make shawls, *saris*, *kurtas,* curtains, bags and such other items. In Barak Valley, although traditionally, *kanthas* are never made for sale and the craft is practiced by the women of rural Barak Valley

in general and not exclusively by any professional craft caste, rural women no longer have the leisure or inclination to make elaborate *kanthas*.

5.7 CONCLUSION

Craftsmanship is the labor intensive knowledge and extensively circulated all over the country controls the traditional skill of artisans and handed down from one generation to the other. The Indian textile productions are responding to the global economy and have explores strengths in order to build up a worldwide platform. Today, India is the second biggest manufacturer of textiles in the world, next to China. The hand woven textiles have occupied an important place in the culture and civilization of India since very ancient times. In Barak Valley diverse tribes have socio-cultural characteristics and which is advanced through different periods of time. The weavers living in Barak Valley are influenced from their physical environment as well as through the myths, legends, rituals, ceremonies, festivals, social organization and cultural norms. Textiles hold a place of pride in indigenous art and craft of Barak Valley and it has the immense possibilities in this region, the women of this region after completion of their domestic classes used to seat on the local looms to weave beautiful textile that are incomparable. This chapter has given focused on the textile of *Dimasa, Meitei Manipuri, Rongmei, and Assamese* and also emphasized the *kantha* of this region.

Chapter also disclosed some of the cultural significances; different cultural activities of these people. Like any other culture, the culture of these communities expressed the sense of beauty in tangible forms as it justified in various pattern of design, embroidery and appliqué works, colour combination and the various modes of weaving dresses. The material cultures of these communities have the functional values in the existing weaving tradition of Barak Valley. Material culture is inseparable fact of human life and it constantly satisfies the biological live hood of man. The raw materials of material culture dissimilar from place to place and depends on the natural situations. Simultaneously it satisfies the aesthetical aspects of intellectual and the social needs of human society.

The weavers of Barak Valley are capable in dying, even in contemporary days, when the synthetic dyes are accessible in the market of Barak Valley; some of the weavers are using their traditional natural dyes along with the ready-made dyes,

which are made by chemical industries. There are countless motifs which are available in each community and these all motifs signify the different aspects of ritual or non-ritual purposes of their life. Depictions of these all motifs on the clothes are not same for each community, but these motifs highlight their fundamental understanding about their universe.

In the development of civilization, the contributions of females are enormous in every field. Weaving is a primary qualification for the weavers' community. Textile manufacturing in Barak region is basically dominated by weaver not only from the idea of economic necessity but also from the sense of social tradition. At a tender age, young girls of weaver's community are initiated with this art. Not only they supplies attire to their family members but also make it a source of family industry and the textile making culture of these communities functioning efficiently like the other parts of India. It is observed that the weavers of these communities have mythological description about the introduction of the art of weaving. It is compulsory in the society of these communities; every female should be trained in the textile making. It is their belief that, females without the knowledge of the textile making do not possess the quality of women-hood. Therefore textile making is unavoidable activity of these communities. At least one set of weaving looms is must every household. Even during marriage, the some parents provide a set of weaving apparatus to their daughter as indispensable item of marriage gift. Instantaneously it is also noticeable that at the time of selecting a daughter-in-law the parents provides priority on the potential brides' excellence in the textile making. Textile making is a very prominent household industry in the existing tradition of these communities.

The *Dimasa* rule was very important period for the economy, the social and the cultural life of Barak Valley. The every girls of *Dimasa* learn making clothes in their house from their babyhood and in course of time they become skillful in this activity. Home is the best institution and mother is the best teacher in respect of *Dimasa* people. During the age of five/six the small girls of *Dimasa* starts practicing of weaving as their part of a playing game. In their society, if women having no knowledge of spinning then weaving is considered to be impossible. All women are expert weavers and most of the domestic necessities of cloths are met from the family looms. The important aspect of *Dimasa* weaving which may be mentioned here that it is not yet commercial, the women weave cloths only for domestic uses. When there is

no surplus production, the question of commercialization also does not arise. Dying is similarly important job around the people of *Dimasa* tribes.

Dimasa people are reviving their own cultural identity through their textile making; more or less seventy thousands of *Dimasa* people of this valley are associated with this revivalism. This revivalism is against the growth of industrial costumes which are creating identity crises within the practice of *Dimasa* textile. In contemporary times loom is not gifted by the parents to their daughter during marriage as every house-hold has their own loom. Yellow colour is auspicious in the rituals of *Dimasa,* therefore the clothes made out of yellow colour are common gift to the seniors and this auspicious cloth is made first by the newly married girl. Instead of yellow some time the white colour is also used, but customarily yellow colour is more preferable. The *ga-mosa* of Barak Valley and North-Cachar-Hill is different from each other. The *ga-mosa* made by the weavers of North-Cachar-Hill is longer, but the breath of that *ga-mosa* is comparatively short, which is just opposite in case of Barak Valley. The people of north-Cachar-Hill used their *ga-mosa* like *dhoti* as well as they use flower motifs on *ga-mosa,* which is absent in Barak region. The durability of *ga-mosa* made by the *Dimasa* is more than the *ga-mosa* made by the other tribes, because their *ga-mosa* is thicker than the others. In the wedding ceremonies of *Dimasa- Rigu, Rikhaosa* and blouse are important, now sari is also used by the *Dimasa,* which mainly inspired from the *Bengali* tradition. Many costumes are associated with agricultural festival known as *Busu.* This festival observed in the harvest season where the young boys, girls and children wear different traditional costumes and they performed different dances in this occasion.

Manipuri culture of this region is a montage of ancient traditions and rich cultural outlines. In the field of art and craft, *Manipuri's* are signifies by their customary textile. The clothes made by the *Meitei* weavers of this region are unique in many ways, because they are only focusing on some textiles of their tradition. Cachar district of this land is more prominent than Hailakandi and Karimganj regarding the *Meitei* textile. Like Ima market of Imphal (Manipur), Lakhipur of Cachar district is also well-known among the valley, because of its market place. The *Manipuri* villages of Barak Valley emphasis weaving as their way of earning money and most of the *Manipuri* weavers have some limitation to produce cloths. Their weaving process needs time for final production and it is not possible to produce more clothes at a

time. But, it does not mean that their production is not fulfilling the demands of local buyers. Designs are very normal phenomena in *Manipuri* textile, but some time they also made cloths without any design. The *Manipuri* women are considered as very hard working and the *Manipuri* women have retained an almost monopoly over their traditional skills of weaving. Each aspect of *Meitei* life, either of cultural value or of social establishment has been well reflected through their material culture. The values of morality, aesthetic and ideology of the cultural history of the *Meitei* are expressed in terms of the colour combination, pattern, design and texture of fabric. *Meitei* of Barak Valley has enriched their patterns, colour schemes and motifs, which have deep root into their mythology and religion. Colours are associated with their seasons and festivals. Traditional *Meitei* male loincloths are mostly in plain design of varying colours but more commonly in white. Traditionally dress of the *Meitei* women is quite diverse from the women in other parts of India and the most common loin cloth known as *phanek*. In Barak Valley a cycle of festivals are performed by the *Manipuri* weavers in every year which is the result of the fusion of the ancient and modern cultures.

Rongmei Naga community is one of the major textiles making community of this valley. *Rongmei* people have their indigenous loom and every household producing multifarious cloth as per their requirements. The *Rongmei's* are widely dispersed community. The *Rongmei* recognized popularly as a single tribe called *"Zeliangrong". Naga* women are superb artists and produce numerous cloths with intricate designs. The *Nagas* have abandoned variety of patterns and motifs that have come down through the ages. These designs have become deeply rooted in the tribal consciousness and become a part of their rich heritage. The art of weaving made the village society a self-contained and which is a characteristic of *Rongmei* villages too. The execution of this craft is not taken as a compulsion but a sacred duty by the *Ronmei* weavers of this valley. Unlike the other weaver's community of Barak Valley, spinning and weaving in *Rongmei* villages are the exclusive monopoly of women.

Rongmei women, weave for the entire family. In their tradition a young girl has to know weaving before she got married. Her skill in weaving determines to great extent her popularity amongst eligible bachelors of *Rongmei* community. *Rongmei* weavers produced cloths for the market. Mostly they prepared cloths only for their daily consumption as well as for different festivals. The loin loom is used exclusively

by *Rongmei Naga* weavers of this region, which is used inside as well as outside of their own houses. *Rongmei* textile reflects the philosophical and cosmological relationship between the *Rongmei* and the Universe. Their profound knowledge about their textiles has provides them a constructive social organization, the artistic and aesthetic consciousness. The women's positions in *Rongmei* villages are more valuable. In *Rongmei* community the uses of textile items are prominent in their live as well as different textile items are used on their graveyard, which have different significant meaning in their customary belief. The *Rongmei* dances with their colourful costumes are well-known tribal form of performing art. The *Rongmei* dress is categorized on the basis of gender (male and female) and through age gradation.

The *Assamese* people of Barak Valley have the significance role in the cultural activities of this region. The textile practices of *Assamese* people of Barak have their own glorious past. *Assamese* people have some traditional beliefs with respect to weaving. Transformation is a natural phenomenon and this is also happens in various cases of *Assamese* culture and distinguished fact is that it come through their textile practices. The *Assamese* weavers of Barak region have taken their inspiration from all the natural resources. *Assamese* weavers are very skilled in designs and motifs and their weaving has so many layers of the artistic genius. Their designs and motifs provide the chance to the viewers and the users to avail the knowledge of different folk art. The geometric and non-geometric motifs are closely resembled with the textile making of *Assamese* weavers and that is not confined to any particular artisan groups. Textiles' weaving is a woman's work and it is produced in every hoses of Barak Valley. *Assamese* textiles are known for the fine quality, brightness of colour and durability. The contemporary situation of *Assamese* textiles is diverse than the earlier textiles. These changes are very normal, because so many different aspects are working behind this.

The loom which is using by the *Assamese* weavers is very simple and this loom is made out of bamboo and wood. The manufacturing is very simple; therefore anybody can install this loom easily. The weaver's shift their loom to outside and set under the tree during summer. This possibility is available in their loom, because of its removable quality. For the celebration of Bihu festival, weavers produced so many costumes of different categories; it is generally based on age, colour and shape. Festival of any community has the ability to reflect the textile of their tradition.

Because, during the festival all the communities are like to use their traditional cloths. In *Assamese* community girls are not considered for marriage worthy unless they acquire the proficiency in the art of spinning, weaving and embroidery, therefore it has seen that weaving and spinning are the main part of marriage songs. Some marriage songs give description of the graceful dresses of the bride and the bride groom. In *Assamese* community male commonly use *Dhoti, punjabi and paguri* and *Assamese* female can be easily identified by their traditional dress, which is known as-*mekhela-chadar* and *riha*. The *ga-mosa* is an article of great significance for the *Assamese* people of Barak Valley and it is used by male as well as female in daily life and in the festivals.

Needlework has always been an essential part of the art of weaving in our country. The *Kantha* is a unique creation in the folk art of *Bengalis* and *Kantha* making is an art delivered from one generation to another. The motifs are varied, ranging from mythological tales to contemporary events. The *kantha* of this Valley is common for every person and the *Bengalis* of this valley are the masters of this work. The artisans who are involved in this work basically from the villages of this land mostly belong to the poor family. The idea being to utilize from cloths and rags by sewing them together with close stiches and embroidering them for house hold purposes, so that not even a single piece of rag in the house gets wasted. All the process related to *kantha* of this valley is totally hand made. Earlier the women of this valley were more conscious about the utility of materials, as they did not belief in use and throw process. Therefore, they were used discarded saris for *kantha* purposes still village women of Barak Valley maintaining this process. The winter cover and bed covers of contemporary items made by industry are very costly, which are not affordable for all the villagers, therefore the villagers of Barak Valley are the only bearer of this traditional *kantha*.

The domestic activity like *alpona* (floor design) has many influences on the *kantha* making of Barak region. *Kantha* of this valley is such an activity which never needs any special institution, where mother of the house always plays a very important to teach this creative attitude to her girls.

Plate 5.1: *Dimasa* weaving centre, Jibangram

Plate 5.2: *Dimasa* weaver

Plate 5.3: *Shamphor*

Plate 5.4: *Gongphang*

Plate 5.5: *Risha* (Towel)

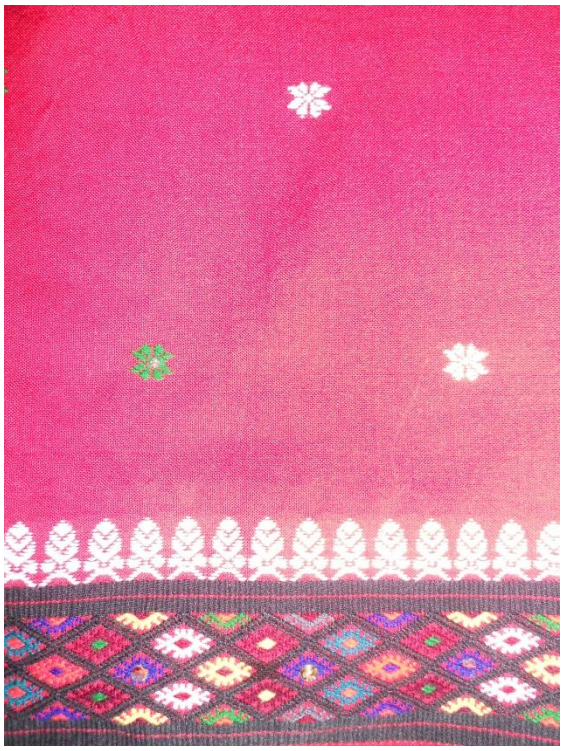

Plate 5.6: *Rigu*

Plate 5.7: *Rikhaosa*

Plate 5.8: *Rigu*

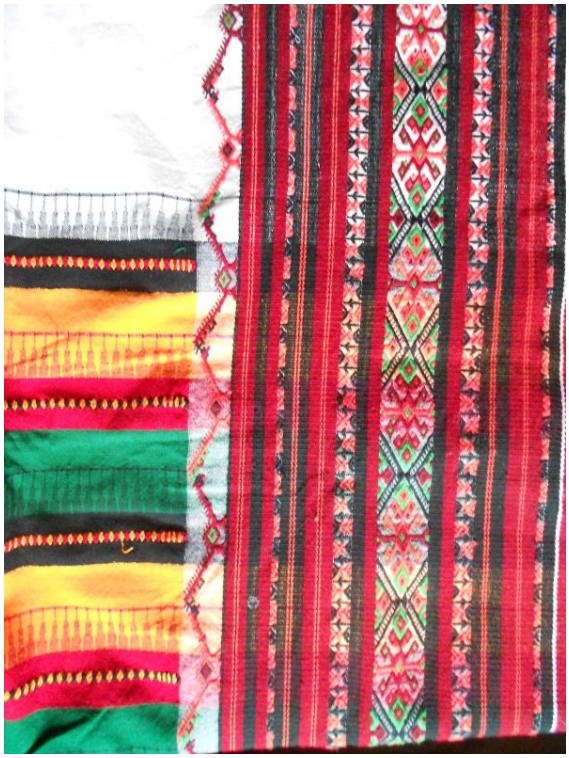

Plate 5.9: *Beran*

Plate 5.10: *Romei*

Plate 5.11: *Rigu*

Plate 5.12: *Rijamphai*

Plate 5.13: *Rigudung* (Shawl)

Plate 5.14: *Rimsaw*

Plate 5.15: Lakhipur market

Plate 5.16: *Tareng*

Plate 5.17: Loom (I)

Plate 5.18: Loom (II)

Plate 5.19: *Samjet*

Plate 5.20: *Pangtem* (Shuttle)

Plate 5.21: *Phihau Keirak*

Plate 5.22: *Phihau Keirak* (Detail)

Plate 5.23: *Khudei* (I)

Plate 5.24: *Khudei* (II)

Plate 5.25: ***Pheijom (Dhoti)***

Plate 5.26: ***Mayek Naibi*** **(I)**

Plate 5.27: ***Mayek Naibi*** **(II)**

Plate 5.28: ***Mayek Naibi*** **(III)**

Plate 5.29: ***Mayek Naibi*** **(IV)**

Plate 5.30: ***Moirang Kabi Phanek***

Plate 5.31: ***Moirang Phi***

Plate 5.32: ***Khudei Matek***

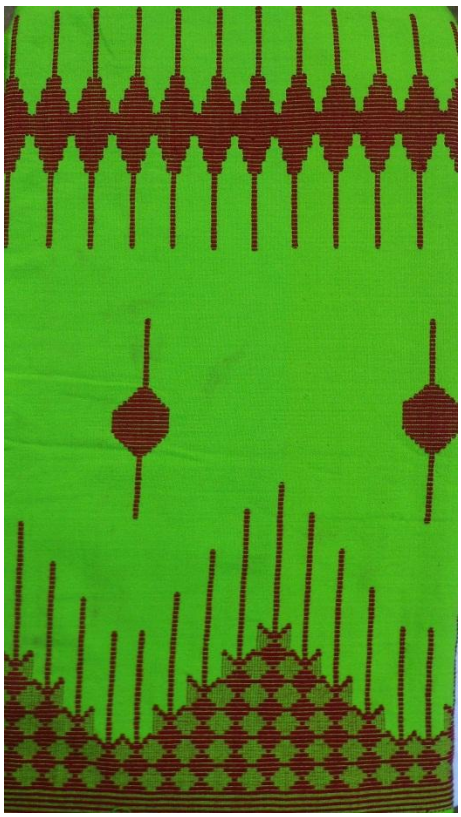

Plate 5.33: ***Mapak Phidik***

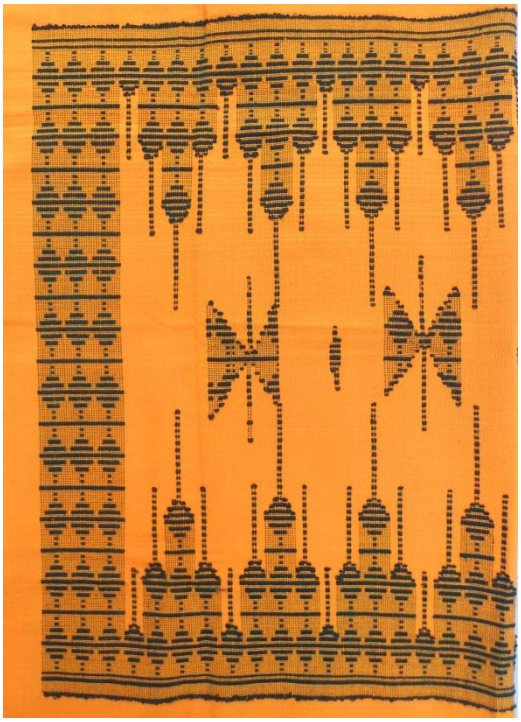

Plate 5.34: ***Mongum Phi***

Plate 5.35: *Poloi*

Plate 5.36: Sarogini Singh and Baburen Singh, well Known *poloi* makers

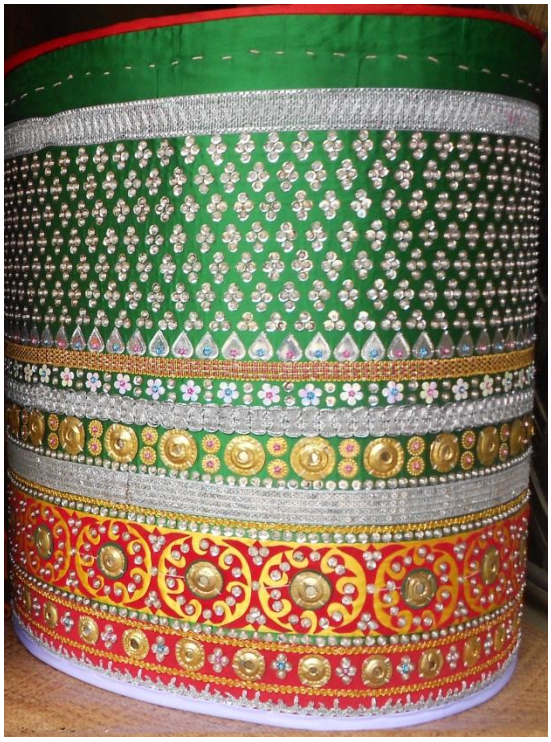

Plate 5.37: *Radha Poloi*

Plate 5.38: *Radha Poloi,* (Detail-I)

Plate 5.39: *Radha Poloi,* (Detail-II)

Plate 5.40: *Radha Poloi,* (Detail-III)

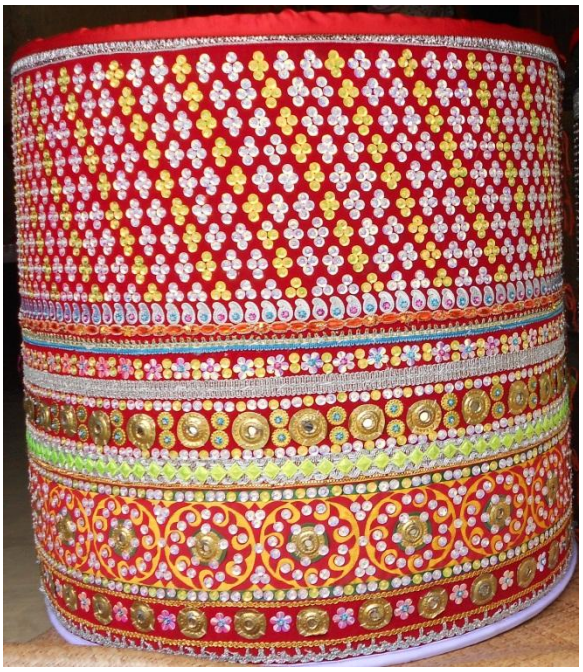

Plate 5.41: *Gopi* Poloi

Plate 5.42: *Gopi Poloi,* (Detail-I)

Plate 5.43: *Gopi Poloi,* (Detail-II)

Plate 5.44: *Gopi Poloi,* (Detail-III)

Plate 5.45: *Rongmei* weaver

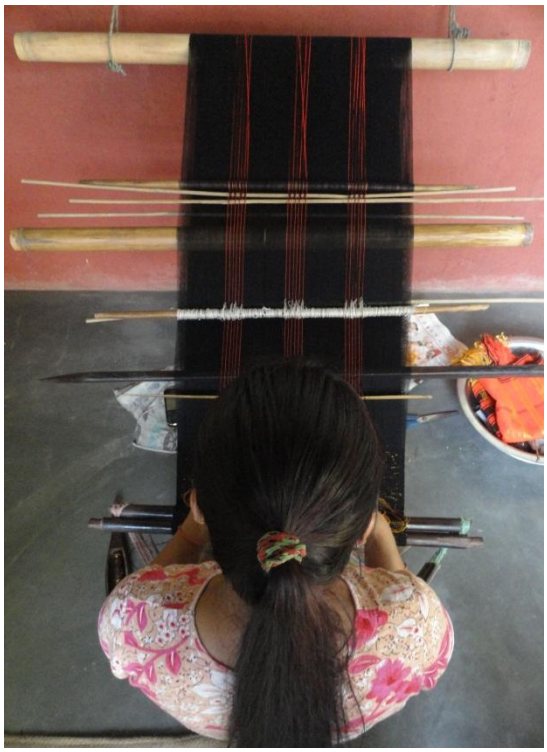

Plate 5.46: *Loin loom*

Plate 5.47: *Tangnam* (Back strap)

Plate 5.48: *Hoigammei* procession of *Gaan-Ngai* festival

Plate 5.49: Girl's dormitory

Plate 5.50: Girls performed in front of boy's dormitory

Plate 5.51: Dance in honor of the dead

Plate 5.52: Graveyard

Plate 5.53: Day of Hill Trekking (I)

Plate 5.54: Day of Hill Trekking (II)

Plate 5.55: Day of Hill Trekking (III)

Plate 5.56: Day of Hill Trekking (IV)

Plate 5.57: Day of Hill Trekking (V)

Plate 5.58: Old ladies with traditional cloths

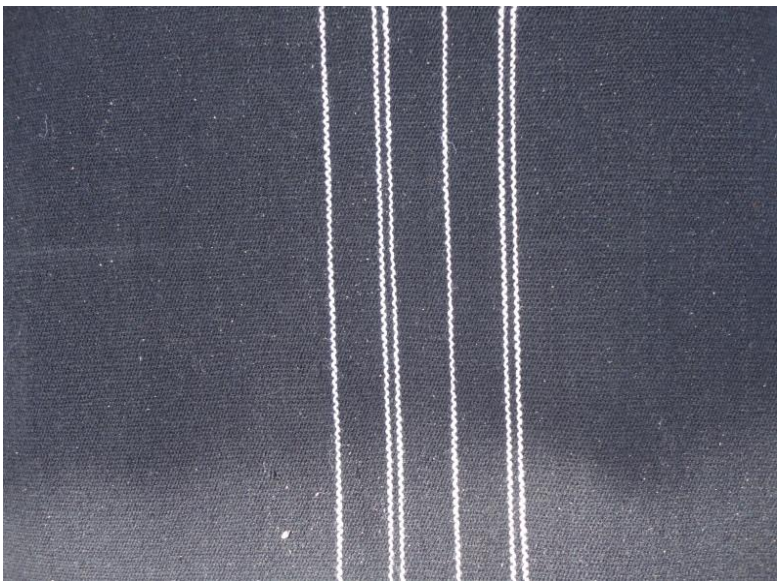

Plate 5.59: *Kharam-pheipong* (Shawl)

Plate 5.60: *Masin-pheipong* (Kind of shawl)

Plate 5.61: *Phaingao* (Shawl)

Plate 5.62: *Marei-pun* (Shawl)

Plate 5.63: *Renglan*

Plate 5.64: *Langshiyam* (Kind of cloth used on shoulder)

Plate 5.65: *Pheiduam* (Tied on leg)

Plate 5.66: *Faingou phei-shoi*

Plate 5.67: *Baubanphei* (Muffler)

Plate 5.68: *Hanglan*

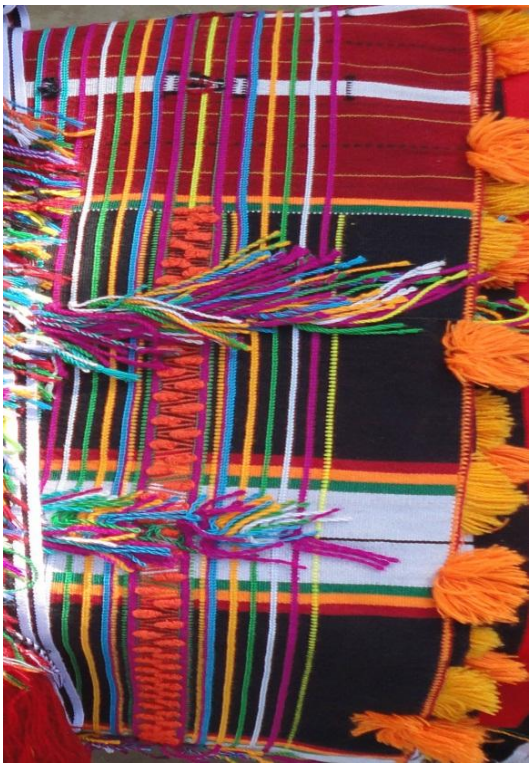

Plate 5.69: ***Langmu phei-shoi***

Plate 5.70: ***Phang-phei***

Plate 5.71: *Phei-laak* (Waist band)

Plate 5.72: *Langjain*

Plate 5.73: Fabric

Plate 5.74: Thread

Plate 5.75: Thread

Plate 5.76: *Assamese* weaver

Plate 5.77: Loom

Plate 5.78: *Dhoti*

Plate 5.79: ***Punjabi***

Plate 5.80: ***Chelang Kapor***

Plate 5.81: ***Ga-mosa***

Plate 5.82: ***Mekhela*** **(I)**

Plate 5.83: *Mekhela* (II)

Plate 5.84: *Mekhela* (III)

Plate 5.85: *Chadar* (I)

Plate 5.86: *Chadar* (II)

Plate 5.87: *Chadar* (III)

Plate 5.88: *Chadar* (IV)

Plate 5.89: *Chadar* (V)

Plate 5.90: *Chadar* (VI)

Plate 5.91: ***Ga-mosa***

Plate 5.92: ***Ga-mosa***

Plate 5.93: ***Ga-mosa***

Plate 5.94: ***Ga-mosa***

Plate 5.95: *Lep Kantha* (Winter covering)

Plate 5.96: *Sujni Kantha* (Bed spread)

Plate 5.97: *Sujni Kantha* (Bed spread)

Plate 5.98: *Alpona*