

THESIS

MODERNIZATION AND CULTURAL IDENTITY: THE CASE OF RI-BHOI WOMEN
HANDLOOM WEAVERS

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ABSTRACT

MODERNIZATION AND CULTURAL IDENTITY: THE CASE OF RI-BHOI WOMEN HANDLOOM WEAVERS

The handloom industry is a vital part of the rural and semi-rural population of North East Region of India (NERI) providing these populations with a source of employment (Devi, 2013; Ramswamy & Kumar, 2013). Hand woven textiles are deeply associated with the culture of NERI weavers who practice the art of cloth making (Devi, 2013; Johnson & Wilson, 2005). In recent years, the traditional handloom industry has seen tremendous growth and change through initiatives intended to modernize the industry (Government of India, 2018). This evolution of the handloom industry due to modernization has impacted the people involved and their relationship to weaving (Karolia & Ladia, 2012; Singh, Singh & Adi women community, 2008). The purpose of this study was to understand how modernization has changed or evolved the traditional handloom industry of Ri-Bhoi, a district in NERI, and how women weavers in the Ri-Bhoi develop a sense of identity through weaving. The foundation of this research is based on cultural identity and modernization theories that suggest the conversion of traditional values to modern values, or the persistence of traditional values (Inglehart & Baker, 2000). A qualitative ethnographic approach was used, and data were collected from four villages in Ri-Bhoi district, Meghalaya, a north eastern state in India, using participant observation, interview, and field notes and journaling. The data were analyzed using open coding to develop a coding guide and to identify overarching themes. Findings from the analysis showed a change in the traditional handloom industry mainly in terms of loom technology and yarn type. Analysis revealed a

grounded theory model that presents five significant themes: (a) exchange of knowledge; (b) social support; (c) role of weaving in everyday life; (d) symbolizing tribe and culture; and (e) joy, pride and happiness that contributed towards developing a cultural identity for women weavers. The data also revealed that women weavers adapted their traditional ideals related to weaving to preserve and sustain their handloom industry and textiles to meet with social, economic, and political changes due to modernization. Understanding weavers' perception of change is vital in preserving cultural heritage. Implications of the study and future directions are discussed.

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CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

The North East Region of India (NERI) comprises eight states; Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura; and constitutes 8% of the country's geographical area with a population of 45 million, as per 2010 census (Dikshit & Dikshit, 2014). The handloom industry is an integral part of the NERI and employs nearly 3 million workers (Devi, 2013). As per the Handloom census 2010, 61% of total handloom weavers of India live in NERI, with a work force of 216,000 (Boruah & Kaur, 2015; Devi, 2013; Ramswamy & Kumar, 2013). Additionally, the NERI handloom industry is dominated by women weavers that make up approximately 78% of the labor force (Boruah & Kaur, 2015; Devi, 2013; Ramswamy & Kumar, 2013). The handloom sector has been, and still is, the major source of livelihood for rural tribal women in NERI (Devi, 2013; Ramswamy & Kumar, 2013).

Women dominate the NERI handloom industry because weaving is a traditional occupation that requires no formal training. Women find it easy to combine their weaving activity with their household chores, providing an easy source of income while attending to their family (Devi, 2012; 2013). Weaving is deeply rooted in the cultural heritage of NERI and knowledge of the art is transferred from one generation to the other usually from mother to daughter (Devi, 2012; 2013). Weaving skills are considered to be an important criterion for marriage where women with superior weaving skills are favored (Devi, 2012; 2013). Moreover, women who weave and are able to contribute to the household income hold a higher social status (Devi, 2013). Apart from weaving, women also play an active role in allied activities of the handloom industry, such as silk worm rearing, called 'seri-cultivation', and the cultivation of

indigenous plants to develop natural dyes (Karolia & Ladia, 2012; Ramswamy & Kumar, 2013; Singh, Singh & Adi Women Community, 2008).

In certain cultures, handwoven textiles, apart from fulfilling utilitarian needs of clothing individuals, also act as a visual marker to communicate various roles such as gender, social class, and status (Eriksen, 2005; Forney & Rabolt, 1986; Schofield-Tomschin & Littrell, 2001). For example, the ruffled collar of Trachten (the traditional dress of Black Forest, Germany) has historically symbolized age and religious belief of the wearer (Hughes, 2014). Additionally, such visual markers provide meaningful information that helps develop cultural identity, value, and attitudes of both the individual and the community as a whole (Forney & Rabolt, 1986). Cultural identity of women weavers in NERI as shaped by their interaction with other members of the society who may or may not be involved in the handloom industry of the region is not very well understood. As weaving plays a substantial role in the lives of the women in NERI, the foundation of this research is to understand how involvement in the handloom industry helps develop their cultural identity.

In recent years, the handloom industry of India has seen exponential growth. In the fiscal year 2017-2018, the Handloom Export Promotion Council (2018) announced an approximate \$250 million export value for Indian handloom products among its top 10 importing countries. Market research conducted by the National Handloom Development Corporation (NHDC) (2016) for promotion of Indian handloom brands revealed that handloom products are well appreciated by the young generation (ages 18-30) in India due to its superior fabric quality and symbolic representation of the Indian heritage, attesting to the potential growth of the industry. The capacity for growth in the handloom industry has led to widespread interest in developing and promoting traditional textiles of India. This has led to introduction of multiple schemes and

initiatives to modernize the traditional textile industry to meet with market demands (Niranjana & Vinayan, 2001; Srinivasulu, 1996). Pertaining to NERI, initiatives such as the North East Region Textile Promotion Scheme (NERTPS) and Cluster Development Projects have been introduced by the Ministry of Textiles to support local artisans. These initiatives provide various artisans with resources such as raw materials, seed banks, machinery, common facility centers, skill development, design and marketing support, with specific objectives to increase the value of textile production, to upgrade technology, to improve design capability, to diversify and add value to the product line, to provide better access to domestic and export markets, to improve labor productivity, and to improve market access and market promotion (Guidelines of NERTPS).

Government initiatives to introduce new forms of technology, replacing traditional looms with modernized shuttle looms, which is a type of frame loom, have aided in increased production quantity (Bortamuly & Goswami, 2015) and have been termed as ‘labor saving’, ‘time saving’, and ‘energy saving’ (Devi, 2013). Apart from the introduction of new production techniques, marketing and promotional practices have facilitated the growth and increased awareness of the handloom industry in both domestic as well as international markets (Srivastav & Rawat, 2016). The growing interest and demand in handwoven products worldwide has prompted businesses to pressure handloom weavers to produce more in less time (Goswami, 2006). Furthermore, modernization of the handloom industry has led to introduction of power looms, chemically dyed yarns, and non-sustainable ways of fiber production, hampering the sericulture and dyeing industry in NERI (Karolia & Ladia, 2012; Singh, Singh & Adi women community, 2008; Woods, 2011). This shift towards modernization of the handloom industry

may have impacted the meaning associated with weaving traditional textiles for the NERI women weavers.

Bronislaw Malinowski, followed a functional approach to culture and identity, where he argued that cultural identity was established through fulfilling basic psychological needs of individuals (Lindholm, 2001; Malinowski, 1944). He followed a school of thought that rationalized human behavior to seek and meet underlying basic needs with least possible effort (Malinowski, 1944). In NERI, the tradition of weaving has been associated with fulfilling the psychological needs of clothing, finding a suitable partner, and providing additional household income (Devi, 2012; 2013; Karolia & Ladia, 2012; Ramswamy & Kumar, 2013). However, modernization that brings along with it a shift in economic structure of the society may shift the psychological needs of women weavers. This could further have an impact on women weavers' identity in NERI. However, the shift in cultural identity and meaning associated with handloom weaving due to modernization has received less attention.

Statement of the problem

It is evident that the handloom industry, which is deeply associated with the livelihood of NERI tribal women (Devi, 2013; Johnson & Wilson, 2005; Schofield-Tomschin & Littrell, 2001), is undergoing a major shift due to modernization in terms of change in loom technology and use of raw materials (Karolia & Ladia, 2012; Singh, Singh & Adi women community, 2008; Woods, 2011). Textiles, which were once produced for local and in-home consumption, are now being promoted and developed through initiatives for markets outside the community. Weaving which was considered a traditional skill for the NERI women is now being commercialized, where women are inclined to adopt weaving as a profession to earn higher income (Devi, 2012; 2013). Weavers are more inclined to contemporize and adapt their products to meet increasing market demand by introducing new colors, motifs, and designs to satisfy the taste of non-local

costumers (Karolia & Ladia, 2012). It is evident that there is tremendous potential for growth in the NERI handloom industry that will help eliminate poverty, empower the women weavers, and elevate economic development of the region. However, changes due to modernization of the traditional NERI handloom industry have not been studied so far. Ri-Bhoi, a district in Meghalaya, a state in NERI, has received very little attention in terms of its handloom industry. Ri-Bhoi was of particular interest because government initiatives to modernize the handloom industry of Ri-Bhoi have only recently been incorporated (P. Tmung, personal communication, June 16, 2018). As the handloom industry is in its nascent stages of modernization, change in culture, meaning, and identity associated with weaving of traditional textiles was easier to understand. Over the past decade, the state government of Meghalaya, in collaboration with the department of seri-culture, has launched multiple initiatives and schemes to help the women weavers in different villages in Ri-Bhoi to develop and modernize the handloom industry (P. Tmung, personal communication, June 16, 2018). However, not all women are part of these endeavors. Some of the weavers continue using their traditional practice of weaving. This diversity of women weavers in the community provides sufficient data to study the change or shift in culture, meaning, and identity associated with weaving of the traditional textiles.

In order to fully support the development and sustenance of the Ri-Bhoi handloom industry, it is important to understand the significance of weaving to the women weavers in the community. Current literature in the field of handloom industry analyzes the potential for growth (Devi, 2012; 2013; Boruah & Kaur, 2015; Government of India, 2015; Niranjana & Vinayan, 2001; Ramswamy & Hmangaihzuali, 2016; Ramswamy & Kumar, 2013), but fails to look at the significance of the industry that is closely related to developing the identity of the people involved in it.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this research is twofold. Specifically, this research aims (a) to understand and document how modernization has changed/evolved the traditional Ri-Bhoi handloom industry and (b) to understand the significance of weaving to Ri-Bhoi women weavers and how their involvement in the handloom industry helps to develop their cultural identity. There is limited literature that has documented the handloom industry of Ri-Bhoi. Recording the traditions of textile weaving from these tribal regions is necessary to preserve and to continue the cultural heritage of the region and the country. It is also important to understand the perspective of the weavers in preserving the practice of weaving as they are the keepers of this art form.

Research Questions

This work was guided by the following research questions:

1. How has modernization changed/evolved the handloom industry in Ri-Bhoi?
 - a) How has the handloom industry changed due to introduction of modern techniques of production?
 - b) How has increased demand for handloom textiles changed the handloom industry?
2. How do Ri-Bhoi women weavers see traditional weaving as contributing to their cultural identity?
3. How do Ri-Bhoi women weavers see modernization changing/evolving their cultural identity related to weaving?

Definitions

Cultural Identity: Cultural anthropologists Ruth Benedict and Margaret Mead developed the configurationist theory of cultural identity, in the book *Patterns of Culture* (1934), where human nature is malleable and human identity is constructed through the culture one is conformed to. The society selects some segment within the arc of human behavior, which is then inherited by

the rest of society where each member must adapt to these social behaviors in order to survive in a specific ecological niche (Lindholm, 2001). Hence, identity is formed through socially and culturally constructed meanings and values.

Cultural heritage: Cultural heritage refers to the tangible and intangible aspects of a society that hold significant meaning and values. These are not just limited to specific physical elements such as monuments, sites and artifacts, but also covers the non-material, or intangible aspects of society that individuals pin their sense of identity to (Blake, 2000; Vecco, 2010).

Handloom: As per the Ministry of Textiles, a department of the federal government of India that is responsible for formulation policy, planning, development, export promotion, and regulation of the textile industry of India, handloom is defined as “any loom, other than powerloom; and includes any hybrid loom on which at least one process for weaving requires manual intervention or human energy for production” (Government of India, 1985, p. 1).

Modernization: Modernization is a process that leads to economic development, cultural change and political change in a society (Inglehart, 1997). Modernization theorists such as Karl Marx and Daniel Bell argued that modernization caused by economic development would bring pervasive cultural change that would converge traditional values. Modernization in the context of this research relates to the introduction of new technologies that replace traditional textile production techniques and growth in demand of hand woven products domestically and internationally.

NERI: North East Region of India. This region comprises of eight states; Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura.

Tradition: "a set of practices ... of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past" (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 2012, p. 1), and are deeply rooted in the local culture.

CHAPTER 2 - LITERATURE REVIEW

The following literature review is organized into four main sections. The first section examines the handloom industry of India. A brief introduction about the history of handloom textiles provide a foundation for its cultural significance. Further, a demographic account of the handloom industry provides information regarding potential for growth and development of the industry. The next section examines the handloom industry of NERI specifically, an analysis of its demography, persistence, and cultural significance providing a foundation for this study. The third section explores modernization of handloom industry, its benefits and detriments. This section further examines how modernization has affected the handloom industry of NERI. The final section explores the concept of cultural identity. Examining various theories and models will help guide the research to understand meaning associated with weaving that aid in establishing cultural identity related to weaving. The purpose of this literature review is to provide a foundation for the study, explore gaps in existing research, and inform the development of research questions.

Handloom Industry in India

India has a rich textile history, which was built over centuries of synthesizing traditional textiles from various invaders, explorers, indigenous tribes, and traders. The rich textile traditions drew traders from all around the world, Greek, Romans, Persians, Arabs, and Chinese to trade their precious metals for the rich silks and cottons from India. Until the European Industrial Revolution which began in Britain in the 18th century, India was the world's center for textile production (Gillow & Barnard, 2008). The Industrial Revolution introduced power looms that caused a shift in demand for handloom textiles to textiles that were mass produced. The

handloom industry also holds historic significance in India’s struggle for independence from the British rule. After independence, the handloom industry became organized with the state government agencies overlooking the production and marketing of the products (Devi, 2012). The Indian handloom industry is overseen by the Ministry of Textiles, and National Handloom Development Corporation at the national level. To help support and build the national handloom industry, the Indian government set up multiple organizations, schemes, and interventions under the Ministry of Textiles (see Table 1).

Table 1

List of Government organizations set up to support the handloom industry.

Organization	Year of Establishment	Purpose
Weaver Service Center	1956	Protect traditional skill of handloom weaving from power loom and mill made textiles
Indian Institute of Handloom Technology	1960	Provide technically qualified personnel for the development of the handloom industry
Handloom Export Promotion Council (HEPC)	1965	Promote exports of all handloom products
National Handloom Development Corporation (NHDC)	1983	Aid in the speedy development of the handloom industry
Association of Corporation & Apex Societies of Handlooms (ACASH)	1984	Coordinate and promote marketing in the handloom sector

Note. Adapted from “Note on Handloom Sector”, 2015, *Government of India, Ministry of Textiles.*

The handloom industry is one of the largest unorganized economic activities in India and contributes to supporting the livelihood of India’s rural and semi-rural population (Devi, 2013; Ghose, 2012; Government of India, 2015; Niranjana & Vinayan, 2001).

Table 2

Demographics of Handloom Industry of India

Description	Number of Workers			Per cent distribution		
	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total
Distribution of Handloom Workers Household Type						
Weaver Household	1,985,186	282,822	2,268,008	82.0%	78.1%	81.5%
Allied Worker household	316,009	75,116	391,125	13.1%	20.7%	14.1%
Idle loom household	78,495	2,761	81,256	3.2%	0.8%	2.9%
Others (households with no adult worker)	41,427	1,455	42,882	1.7%	0.4%	1.5%
Total	2,421,117	362,154	2,783,271	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Distribution of Handloom Workers Household by Purpose of Usage of Loom						
Domestic	768,743	17,091	785,834	31.8%	4.7%	28.2%
Commercial	1,168,058	309,683	1,477,741	48.2%	85.5%	53.1%
Both domestic and Commercial	405,821	32,619	438,440	16.8%	9.0%	15.8%
Idle loom	78,495	2,761	81,256	3.2%	0.8%	2.9%
Total	2,421,117	362,154	2,783,271	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Distribution of Adult (18 yrs and above) Handloom Workers by Gender						
Male	588,171	260,302	848,473	18.2%	42.4%	22.1%
Female	2,644,054	354,308	2,998,362	81.8%	57.6%	77.9%
Total	3,232,225	614,610	3,846,835	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Distribution of Adult (18 yrs and above) Handloom Workers by Type of Worker						
Weaver	2,522,121	386,659	2,908,780	78.0%	62.9%	75.6%
Allied Worker	710,104	227,951	938,055	22.0%	37.1%	24.4%
Total	3,232,225	614,610	3,846,835	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Distribution of Adult (18 yrs and above) Handloom Workers by Employment Status						
Independent Worker	2,173,343	178,279	2,351,622	67.2%	29.0%	61.1%
Under Master Weaver/ Private owner	907,855	391,146	1,299,001	28.1%	63.6%	33.8%
Under Institution	151,027	45,185	196,212	4.7%	7.4%	5.1%
Total	3,232,225	614,610	3,846,835	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Distribution of Adult (18 yrs and above) Handloom Workers by Nature of Engagement						
Full-Time	1,977,572	494,409	2,471,981	61.2%	80.4%	64.3%
Part-Time	1,254,653	120,201	1,374,854	38.8%	19.6%	35.7%
Total	3,232,225	614,610	3,846,835	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Note. Adapted from “Handloom census of India 2009 - 10”, 2010, *National Council of Applied Economic Research*.

Table 2 illustrates the demographics of the handloom industry of India retrieved from the Handloom Census of India 2009-2010. The handloom industry employs 4.33 million workers

across the country, out of which 3.84 million (88.8%) are above the age of eighteen. A total of 73.4 % of the handloom workforce belongs to classes of the society that are socially and economically disadvantaged, and hence the handloom industry provides a source of income and livelihood to the vulnerable and weaker sections of society (Boruah & Kaur, 2015; Government of India, 2015; Handloom Census, 2010; Ramswamy & Hmangaihzuali, 2016; Ramswamy & Kumar, 2013). This industry is less capital intensive, eco-friendly, uses less power, and has grown and sustained itself by transferring skills from one generation to the other (Government of India, 2015).

The Indian handloom industry is mainly decentralized, with majority of its production taking place within homes (Bortamuly & Goswami, 2014; Ghose, 2012). The production process requires low capital investment, with materials procured from natural resources within the community (Ghose, 2012). As the industry requires low capital investment, weavers prefer starting their own small-scale businesses (Ghose, 2012). The decentralized nature of the industry resulted in establishment of handloom co-operatives, of which majority members are weavers (Boruah & Kaur, 2015).

India is also the largest contributor to the global handloom textile market and accounts for 85% of the total 4.6 million global handloom production capacity (Boruah & Kaur, 2015). The exports of handloom products have seen immense growth, which almost doubled from 2010 to 2015, growing from \$169 million to \$303 million (Government of India, 2015). However, the export market requires higher regulation standards of production and quality, higher quantity and timely delivery of products (Niranjana & Vinayan, 2001). These standards have placed higher pressure on the handloom industry and its weavers. Even though the industry has seen growth over the last decade, there is a steady decline in the number of handlooms and associated

weavers (Mamidipudi & Bijker, 2012). The number of handloom weavers declined by 33% from 1995 to 2010 due to migration of handloom weavers to urban areas (Handloom Census, 2010).

The growth in demand for handloom products is not limited to international markets. There has been an increase in awareness and demand for the handloom products within the domestic market as well. In order to explore market opportunities, and promote handloom products, the National Handloom Development Corporation (NHDC), a government organization under the Ministry of Textiles, commissioned a market research study in 2016 to understand awareness and perceptions of handloom products among younger Indian consumers (age group of 18 –30 years). The findings of the report indicated that handloom products were highly valued by these consumers due to their unique traditional design patterns and superior fabric quality. Moreover, consumers of this age group developed a strong sense of patriotism associated with handloom products labeled “Made in India”. However, the participants conceded their preference for contemporized handloom products to suit their modern lifestyle. The participants were willing to pay higher prices for higher quality products, however, the purchase of handloom products was limited due to scarcity of contemporized designs in the market. The potential for growth of the handloom industry by diversifying and contemporizing its products has garnered interest of multiple stakeholders, such as government, designers, artisan welfare organizations, and other businesses.

Handloom industry of North East Region of India (NERI)

Weaving as a cultural activity has been practiced for a long time in tribal communities of NERI and is prominent even today (Dikshit & Dikshit, 2014). The art of weaving is one of the oldest traditional crafts that has penetrated even the most remote areas of NERI (Dikshit & Dikshit, 2014). Over 80% of the total NERI population is rural and lives across 40,000 villages, where agriculture is the most predominant occupation, pursued by men in the community. The

underdevelopment of basic infrastructure and low industrialization of the agricultural industry in NERI has compelled the rural population to rely on the handloom industry to support their livelihood (Das & Das, 2011). Hence, the handloom industry provides an additional source of income for the rural population.

NERI has the highest concentration of handloom units in India, which account for 69.28% of the 2.4 million total units in India (Indian Handloom Census, 2009-2010). Weaving in NERI is mostly manually operated and is dominated by the loin, pit, and frame looms (Devi, 2012). Most of the weaving is conducted within the household, where 99.7% of the working looms in NERI are situated within the homes of the weavers (Handloom Census, 2010). Figure 1 shows two women in Meghalaya working on their floor looms that are set up behind their homes. 67.2% of the total handloom workers are self-employed and work independently (Handloom Census, 2010). As the industry is predominantly home-based and weaving is considered a cultural activity, the weaving households in NERI reported a higher level of total annual income (₹57,232 in Arunachal Pradesh, ₹57,208 in Nagaland, ₹56,261 in Manipur, and ₹40,465 in Assam) as compared to the rest of India, where weaving households earned an average annual income of ₹38,260 (Handloom Census, 2010). Out of the total handloom units in NERI, 42.1% are used for domestic production, 24% are used for commercial production, 25% are used for both domestic and commercial production, and 9% of them are left idle (Handloom census, 2010). Although the Handloom Census (2010) recorded that NERI had the highest number of working looms, it had the lowest rate of production. On average, most women in NERI weave one meter of textile every day as compared to three to four meters in other states of India (Handloom Census, 2010). This means that there is untapped potential for growth of the handloom industry in NERI.



Figure 1. Women using the floor looms to weave ¹

Women weavers

In most parts of India, weaving is associated with men, except for spinning, winding and other preparatory activities (Devi, 2012). However, in NERI women dominate the handloom industry, providing employment and additional household income across several ethnic groups and cultures (Devi, 2012; Ramswamy & Hmangaihzuali, 2016). In NERI, 99% of the adult workforce in the handloom industry are women (Handloom Census, 2010; Ramswamy & Hmangaihzuali, 2016). Figure 2 depicts the distribution of women weavers across India. In NERI, weaving is largely considered a skill that is passed on through generations leading to women dominating the handloom work force (Boruah & Kaur, 2015). Within the social family

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structure of NERI, young girls learn to participate in pre-weaving activities (such as spinning, winding), which are taught by their mother or grandmother, so that they learn the art of weaving by the time they reach a marriageable age (Devi, 2012; 2013). Figure 3 displays a young weaver spinning yarn on her spinneret. The textiles are woven to depict local culture. Weaving skills are considered an important criterion for selecting a partner for marriage, where girls with advanced weaving skills are preferred as brides (Gailangam, 1997). In certain NERI tribes, girls express their love to their partners by weaving an intricate textile, the more intricate the textile, the greater the love (Devi, 2012; Paokoi, 1988). Today, weaving looms and tools are gifted to the bride by her parents to ensure that she contributes to the household income, as well as weave clothes for the family (Devi, 2012). The looms are usually located in close proximity to the weaver's homes to aid with convenience of conducting household chores as well as weaving (Ramswamy & Kumar, 2013).

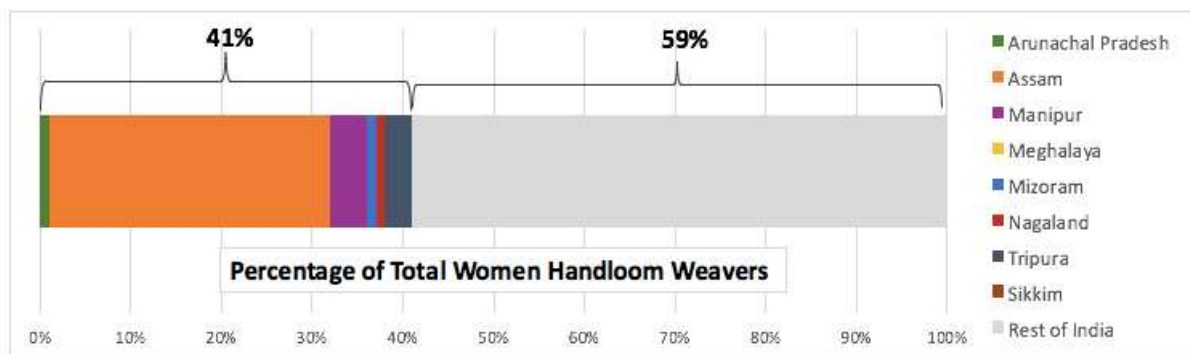


Figure 2. Distribution of Women Weavers in India. Adapted from “Handloom as a tool for empowering women of North East India,” by Swaniti, 2017.



Figure 3. A younger weaver uses a spinner to wind some cotton yarn before weaving ².

The women draw inspiration from their culture, history, nature, social and religious systems to create authentic, one of a kind products (Singh, Singh, & Adi Women Community, 2007). Figure 4 shows weavers explaining the significance of using certain motifs in their woven clothes. These garments are worn for special occasion, seen in Figure 5. However, some studies have revealed a lack of interest in weaving among younger generation women weavers (Devi 2012; 2013; Mamidipudi, B, & Bijker, 2012; Singh, Singh, & Adi Women Community, 2007). Moreover, a study by Singh, Singh, and Adi Women Community (2007) found that women today do not have enough time to engage in weaving as they participate more in agricultural activities, leading to increased purchase of readymade garments from retail stores. Furthermore, the introduction and promotion of foreign and domestic mill made cloth poses a great threat to the handloom industry and role of weaving among the NERI women (Devi, 2013).

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Figure 4. Two weavers explain the significance of motifs used in handwoven traditional textiles³

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Figure 5. Students from a school perform a traditional dance in their hand-woven traditional cloth⁴ for Meghalaya Day⁵.

The people of Ri-Bhoi, known as *The Bhois*, are a sub group of the Khasi tribe (Government of Meghalaya, 2019). The Khasi tribe are a matrilineal and matrilocal society, where inheritance, clan membership, residence, and title follow a female lineage through the youngest daughter (Gneezy, Leonard, & List, 2009; Nongbri, 1988). Women hold a prominent role in the family, where they are responsible for the nurture and care of their family, and are custodians of all family rituals (Nongbri, 1988). Most families follow a joint family structure where female siblings, once married, settle down in adjacent homes near their mother's home. The youngest daughter inherits her mother's land and eventually becomes the head of the household (Nongbri, 1988). Unmarried or divorced male siblings also reside in the same household. Men are considered protectors and providers to the female household even though they hold no authority and property (Gneezy, Leonard, & List, 2009). Even though women hold

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⁵ Meghalaya Day is the celebration of independence. The day Meghalaya was established as an independent state.

significant positions in the household, their roles outside the home are limited. Women do not attend or hold any political positions within the community (Nongbri, 1988).

Modernization

The statistics mentioned in the previous sections indicate the handloom sector to be of considerable size with scope for growth and expansion. The potential for growth has drawn multiple organizations, both from the government and private sector, to upgrade the handloom industry. For example, under the Technology Upgradation Fund Scheme (TUFS), initiated by the Ministry of Textiles, funding agencies finance artisans to replace their traditional looms with automotive ones (Government of India, 2015). Dastkar Andhra is a non-government organization that aims at improving livelihood of weavers by facilitating new technology adoption, financing, product diversification, and marketing (Mamidipudi, B, & Bijker, 2012). International organizations such as International Development Bank, the International Labour Organization, and UNESCO, have also shown special interest in helping the handloom industry (Liebl & Roy, 2004). However, the competition from the power loom industry has pressured the handloom industry to advance its products and production methods by diversifying its product line and introducing new technology for production (Government of India, 2015). The shift to modernize the handloom industry may have profound effects not just on the hand-woven textiles, but also on the culture surrounding the industry.

Recent research in the field of modernization and its effect on socioeconomic development has given rise to two schools of thought (Inglehart & Baker, 2000). One school of thought underlines the conjunction of value (traditional versus secular-rational values and survival versus self-expression values) as a result of modernization. This convergence of values will lead to the decline of traditional values and establish modern values (Inglehart & Baker, 2000). Social theorists, such as Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim, Ferdinand Tönnies, and to some

extent, Max Weber argued that modernization could lead to extinction of traditions and traditional ways of life (Hughes, 2014). The second school of thought underlines the persistence of values (traditional versus secular-rational values and survival versus self-expression values) despite economic and political changes (Inglehart & Baker, 2000). Traditional values are argued to be independent of economic conditions and hence support its persistence in the face of economic and political change (DiMaggio, 1994). However, the central claim behind modernization is economic development (Inglehart & Baker, 2000). These changes can lead to occupational specialization, rising education levels, rising income level, which can lead to a predictable change in social, cultural and political life (Inglehart & Baker, 2000).

In Indonesia, modernization of traditional textile industry into large, commercialized manufacturing process ruined approximately 410,000 traditional artisan jobs in weaving and associated crafts like dyeing (Scrase, 2003). Modernization of local arts can profoundly change not only the product but also the social and cultural structure of the community (Scrase, 2003). A study on the *Chikan* embroidery industry in Lucknow, India, revealed a transformation of social structure of the artisans from highly skilled male embroiderers to semi-skilled female embroiderers caused by an increase in demand and competition from machine made *Chikan* embroidery (Wilkinson-Weber, 2004). However, this is not always the case. There have been studies where diminishing communities have greatly benefited from the modernization of their traditional art. For example, the modernization of traditional textiles from Otavalo, Ecuador, helped revitalize the community by opening new markets and opportunities between artists, merchants and shopkeepers in the community (Collaredo-Mansfeld et. al., 2003).

Shifting our focus to NERI, studies have shown that the introduction of technology and increase in demand for products have led to alteration in the textile production process in few

northeastern states (Boruah & Kaur, 2015; Devi 2013; Karolia & Ladia, 2012; Khatoon, Das, Dutta, & Singh, 2014). Karolia and Ladia (2012), studied the traditional textiles and costumes of two tribes in Meghalaya and found that cotton, wool, and silk yarns, which were traditionally used for garment weaving are now being replaced by acrylic and viscose yarns. Even though spinning and rearing of silk and cotton is a known skill among the tribal people, the weavers currently use mill made yarns bought from local markets, for weaving their textiles. Figure 6 displays garment woven using market bought yarns (cotton polyester blend, 2 ply yarns). The traditional dress and textiles also have undergone rapid change in motifs and yarn structure (Karolia & Ladia, 2012). However, certain studies have found that female weavers in NERI are open to adopting new technology in the weaving practices to compete with other crafts and the power loom industry (Liebl & Roy, 2004; Singh, Singh & Adi women community, 2008; Woods, 2011). Figure 7 illustrates a woman weaver standing beside her shuttle loom that she received through a government scheme.



Figure 6. Textiles woven using cotton polyester blend yarns bought from the market⁶.



Figure 7. A weaver stands beside her shuttle loom that she received through a government established scheme⁷.

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Cultural Identity

Self-identity is the meaning developed from the relationship between an individual's personality and growth of self from participating in a society (Erikson, 1950; Gleason, 1983). Cultural identity develops from "participating in society, internalizing cultural norms, acquiring different statuses, and playing different roles" (Gleason, 1983, p. 914). However, constructs that define culture are not taught to children during their socialization, rather these constructs are "something to be gradually and gropingly discovered" (Dressler, 2017, p. 16). Cultural identity encompasses values, beliefs, and worldviews that are shared among a group of people (Weaver, 2001). Cultural identity is not a fixed construct, rather it constantly evolves through social, economic and political changes (Stone, 1962). This allows an individual to construct multiple identities, or sub-identities, that aid in forming the self (Forney & Rabolt, 1986; Stone, 1962; Weigert, Teitge, & Teitge, 2007).

Throughout history, textiles and clothing have catered to human needs for protection and adornment (Colchester, 1991; Geijer, 1979; Riley, 2011). Textiles that are woven in a particular society reflect attitudes and beliefs not just of an individual but also the society as a whole (Colchester, 1991). Moreover, textiles play an important role in establishing and expressing personal identity that signify social status and role that helps build cultural identity (Gale & Kaur, 2002). Studies have shown that people who weave imbue meaning into their hand-woven textiles. This meaning resembles the weaver's sense of identity within the social construct (Johnson & Wilson, 2005; Scholfield-Tomschin & Littrell, 2001). Furthermore, weaving is seen as a self-actualization process that symbolizes the weaver's abilities and appreciation for tradition and cultural heritage (Scholfield-Tomschin & Littrel, 2001).

A UK based study revealed that artisans working as a community developed a collective sense of self and belonging due to their participation in weaving, spinning, and dyeing, that in

turn also helped enhance their personal well-being (Riley, 2011). By working in a community, artisans have the opportunity to share their expertise and ideas from each other and maintain social relationships between themselves (Johnson & Wilson, 2005; Riley, 2011). Furthermore, another study conducted in Bloomington, Indiana, found that quilting artisans expressed their craft to be a symbolic representation of themselves with a level of personal history, and their participation in quilting helped integrate and establish a cultural identity (Williams, 1992).

The handloom industry contributes significantly to the social and cultural identity of the NERI weavers. Handwoven textiles visually communicate various roles such as gender, social class, and status (Eriksen, 2005; Forney & Rabolt, 1986; Schofield-Tomschin & Littrell, 2001). These textiles represent the culture of the tribes and contain elements of legends, rituals, myths, ceremonies, festivals and also the physical environment (Chakravorty, Dutta, & Ghose, 2009; Khatoon et al. 2014). For example, in some states of NERI like, - Tripura, all rituals or ceremonies begin with the worship of the *Riha*, the handwoven breast cloth (piece of clothing that covers the breast) of family elder, and in Assam, *Ghomsa*, a handwoven cotton shawl, is used to welcome guests on any occasion, a sign of respect and honor (Devi, 2013). Men of high status in *Kom* tribe of Manipur, adorn the *Paspan*, which bears the skin marks of the Python God. Women of the tribe weave this textile as a sign of love and respect for the men (Khatoon et al., 2014).

Edward Sapir's theory of culture and personality states that every individual in a society has varying degrees to which he/she absorbs different elements of the culture (Sapir, 1938). Hence, the meaning associated with the handloom industry in NERI would vary from person to person. Dressler (2017, p. 61) defines a cultural model as a "way of thinking about the world that is variably shared in the society that includes the elements that make up a cultural domain along

with both the semantic and functional relationships among those elements, and that often include causal relationships among the elements”. Building a description of the society from ground up by analyzing the variations and central tendencies among different members of the society is essential in identifying the cultural pattern within a community (Sapir, 1938). Sapir (1938) further argued that cultures can be understood best through perceptions and responses of various personality types within a cultural construct. Hence, in the context of women weavers of NERI handloom industry, to understand the cultural consonant meaning associated with weaving, it is essential to analyze the semantic and functional relationship of weaving among a diverse group of women in the society.

Bronislaw Malinowski, a trained psychologist and a professor of anthropology, had a very functional approach to culture and identity where he argued that individuals in a society are content with what they know, as long as they get along; that is, if their psychological needs are met (Lindholm, 2001; Malinowski, 1944). He reasoned that human behavior is driven to seek and meet underlying basic needs with least possible effort. Women weavers in NERI, may pursue weaving in order to fulfill certain psychological needs such as clothing and financial assistance. Moreover, these activities establish a role for women in the society that helps construct their identity as well (Devi, 2012; 2013; Karolia & Ladia, 2012; Ramswamy & Kumar, 2013). This correlates to Erving Goffman’s theory of human life as a theater, where self-identity is created through socially constructed roles (Goffman, 1949). Men and women in a society are motivated to perform certain roles to gain approval from other members of the society (Goffman, 1949). However, a shift in economic and political structure of the society due to modernization may shift the psychological needs of the women weavers, which may impact their cultural identity.

The hand-woven textiles have been studied to have significant implications to weavers' identity in a social setting, contributing meaning to their lives, and a symbolic representation of the self (Johnson & Wilson, 2005; Schofield-Tomschin & Littrell, 2001). The handloom textiles of NERI hold a deep resemblance to the socio-cultural life of the tribal communities and reflect not only their skills and techniques, but also represent a deeper cultural meaning (Chakravorty, Dutta, & Ghose, 2009). Hence, apart from serving the purpose of clothing, the handloom textiles play a significant role in constructing the social and cultural identity of the tribal community. However, the shift in cultural identity and meaning associated with hand weaving or the handloom industry due to modernization have so far not been studied. Based on Stone's (1962) idea that cultural identity is not a fixed construct, it is important to understand how social and economic changes due to modernization may have contributed to the evolution of cultural identity among women weaver's in NERI.

CHAPTER 3 – METHODS

The purpose of this ethnographic study was to understand the significance of weaving among the NERI women and how modernization of their handloom industry may have changed their cultural identity associated with weaving. As little research has been conducted to understand a change in cultural identity of NERI women, a qualitative approach was adopted. Three main methods of data collection – participant observation, interview, and field notes and journaling – were used to collect data from the field. This chapter also outlines the research design, case selection, and method of analysis for the research.

Research Design

Ethnography can be defined as a “design of inquiry coming from anthropology and sociology in which the researcher studies the shared patterns of behaviors, language, and actions of an intact cultural group in a natural setting over a prolonged period of time” (Creswell, 2007, p. 42). Ethnographic inquiries focus on values, attitudes, and beliefs of member in a social situation (Locke, Silverman, & Spirduso, 2010). As the focus of this research was to study the women weavers in NERI and their values and perceptions towards their traditional textiles, an ethnographic approach was used. Data collection for an ethnographic study often involves observations and interviews (Locke, Silverman, & Spirduso, 2010). Hence, a combination of informal and formal interviews, participant observation, journaling, and collection of field notes was used to gather sufficient information regarding the women and their weaving practices. Informal interviews can be characterized by a lack of structure or control where the participant and the researcher engage in simple conversations (Bernard, 2006). However, a formal interview

is where the participant is aware of the interview that takes place under a more formal setting (Bernard, 2006).

Using three methods of data collection (field observation, formal and informal interviews, and journaling) was useful in triangulation and helped reveal valid and verifiable data (Willis, 2007). Prolonged engagement in the field enhanced the scope of the study, persistent observation provided depth to the findings, and triangulation of the three methods enhanced the credibility of data collected. Moreover, a negative case analysis was incorporated to analyze competing evidence. A negative case analysis is the process of reversing hypothesis by purposely searching for data that conflict with researcher's expectations and assumption (Brodsky, 2012).

Case Selection

Out of the eight states in the NERI, the state of Meghalaya was selected as the main area of study. Handloom industry is one of the most important cottage industries of Meghalaya. Meghalaya and Sikkim are the only two states in India where handloom weaving is conducted only in rural areas (Handloom Census, 2010). The majority of the weaving in Meghalaya is for domestic consumption, with 6066 units utilized for domestic production and only 3547 used for commercial purposes (Handloom Census, 2010).

During a previous visit to the same region in the summer of 2018, the researcher met a local designer who worked with women weavers of Ri-Bhoi. At the time of case selection, the researcher contacted the designer and she recommended sites and villages to visit based on the research focus. The local designer also connected the researcher to a tribal chief of a region called Hima Khad Ar Lyngdoh, located within the north eastern district of Ri-Bhoi, Meghalaya. The tribal chief guided the researcher to 4 villages, Umjong, Korstep, Umtumur, and

Mawryngkang, marked in Figure 9, where weaving was prevalent. Figure 8 illustrates the districts in Meghalaya.

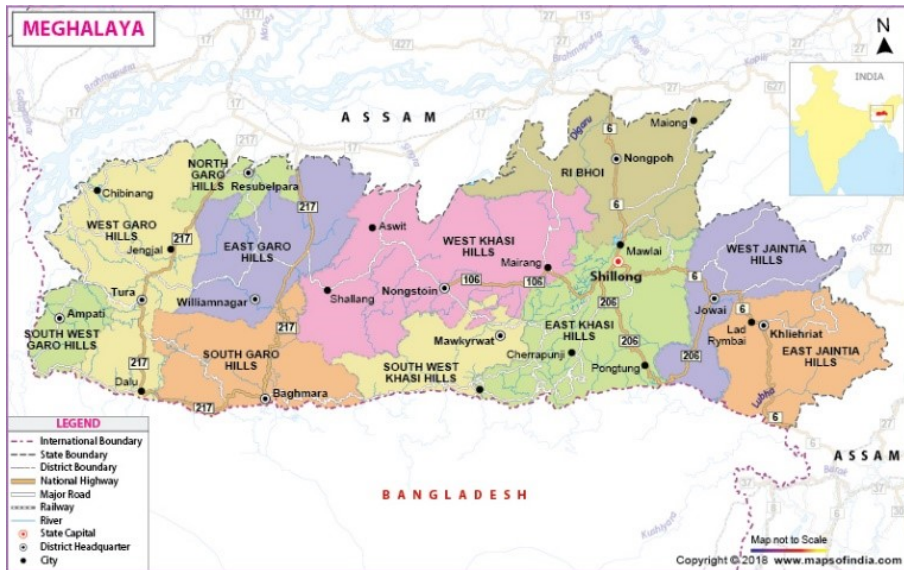


Figure 8. District map of Meghalaya. Reprinted from “Meghalaya district map” by Maps of India, 2016. Retrieved from <https://www.mapsofindia.com/maps/meghalaya/meghalaya.htm>

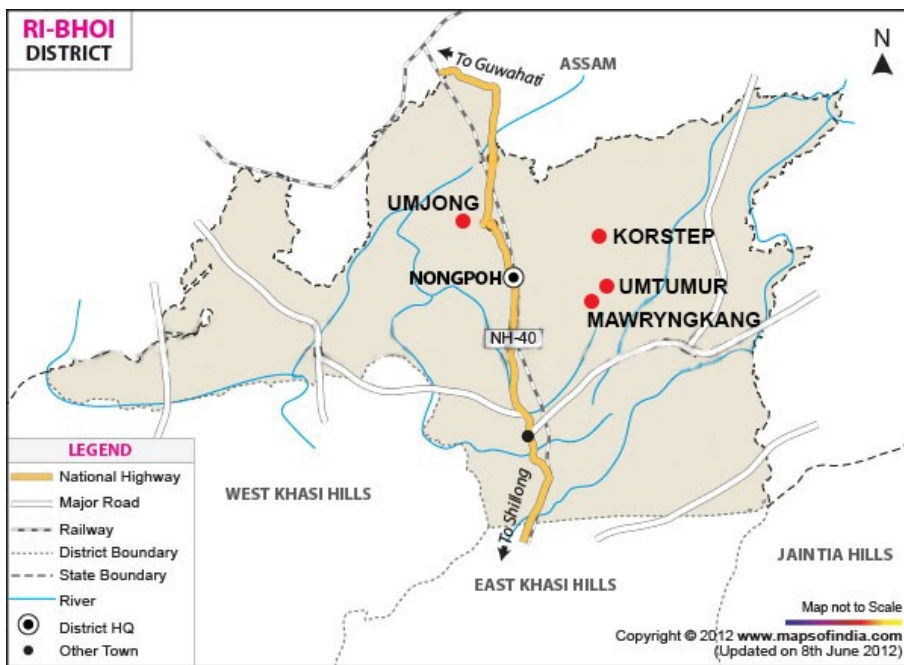


Figure 9. Map of villages visited in Ri-Bhoi district. Adapted from “District map of Ri-Bhoi” by Maps of India, 2013. Retrieved from <https://www.mapsofindia.com/maps/meghalaya/districts/ri-bhoi.html>

As weaving is a cultural activity associated with women (Devi, 2013) and 99% of the workforce in NERI handloom industry are women (Handloom Census, 2010), this study only focused on women weavers and male weavers were not included in the sample. Institutional Review Board approval was granted before the researcher traveled to the region of Ri-Bhoi for data collection. A purposive sample of 22 female weavers was recruited for semi-structured interviews by visiting the four villages. Participants were recruited based on their active participation in weaving, with an aim of encapsulating women across varying ages. Four translators, one in each village, assisted the interview process as researcher did not know the local dialect. All interviews were audio recorded after receiving oral consent from all participants. Participant confidentiality was maintained throughout the research process. All participants were asked not to write or say their names and pseudonyms were used during data analysis to identify participants. The data from this study were secured in a password protected computer, accessible only to the primary investigator of the study.

Data Collection Tools and Procedures

Data were collected over a period of 3 weeks. During the first week of data collection, the researcher stayed in Nongpoh, the capital of Hima Khad Ar Lyngdoh, and visited all four villages to meet the weavers and recruit participants for formal interviews. These visits included field observation and some informal interactions with women weavers. The informal interactions and observations helped to develop a close relationship and rapport with the participants in a non-obtrusive manner. Conducting informal interviews is important in an ethnographic study not just to develop rapport with the participants but also to uncover new topics of interest that may develop through the research process, which may be overlooked otherwise (Bernard, 2006). The primary objective of conducting observational research is to be able to observe a cultural group

in its natural environment (Creswell, 2007). This goal was achieved by observing participants during weaving hours and taking extensive field notes.

During the last two weeks of data collection, the researcher stayed in the villages over a period of 3 to 4 days each and conducted a total of 22 formal interviews and collected in-depth field notes. Semi-structured interviews were based on an interview protocol and data that emerged from initial interaction with participants during the first visit. Constant re-evaluation and reflexivity of theoretical and cultural assumptions helped shape the research process. Informal interviews helped build structure for the formal interviews. Semi-structured interviews helped better understand common viewpoints and perceptions shared by the weavers rather than individual perspectives that arose from conducting only informal interviews. Moreover, participant observation provided key details about certain practices that were not mentioned in the literature, hence guiding the research towards a richer interpretation. Observation of the weavers and their weaving practices were possible as the researcher stayed in the villages, along with the weavers. A reflexive journal served as a diary for the researcher and contained reflective insights from interviews and observations. Reflexive journaling included preparation of detailed notes about what was seen and heard as well as initial theoretical and methodological interpretive analysis. Journaling was used to support data collected from the formal and informal interviews.

Observational data collection. Immersing oneself in the field, provides the researcher with an opportunity to observe the social culture of interaction, language, rituals, and symbolic interactions within the context of a set environment (Glesne, 2010). The purpose of engaging in such analysis is to understand and describe social phenomena from the perspective of the participants. These forms of interpretive inquiry help provide significant meaning in the world that can not only inspire others to perceive, believe or act in different ways, but also help reveal certain truths about oneself (Glesne, 2010).

Weavers were observed over three weeks of immersion in the field. The researcher was invited to visit the homes of 28 weavers, where she observed them in their natural environment, watched them weave, interacted with them, and dined with them. She also stayed in the homes of 3 weavers. As majority of the weavers were farmers and worked in the fields during the day, weaving practices were observed only for a few hours in the morning and the evening. A few weavers' whose primary occupation was weaving were observed throughout the day. Observing women who practiced weaving as their primary occupation and women who were primarily farmers, helped understand how women weavers balanced their time between weaving and managing household chores. Apart from observation in the home settings, the researcher also witnessed a few special religious ceremonies and occasions that the tribal chief invited her to. Being a part of these celebrations helped understand how traditional textiles were used in a cultural context. Field notes were recorded during each of the visits with expansion of notes and journal entry done at end of the day.

Interview data collection. Informal interviews are widely used in the field of ethnographic studies to help build rapport and uncover new topics of interest (Bernard, 2006). This technique was incorporated to help understand the lifestyle of weavers and to build rapport.

The process of informal interview involved constant noting of information and exploring the villages by interacting with residents who were willing to talk. The informal interviews also helped identify an ideal sample group for the semi-structured interviews within each village.

Using the interview protocol and by reflecting on the information collected from informal interviews and the field notes, semi-structured formal interviews were conducted during the last 2 weeks of the field visit. Most of the interview questions were open ended to elicit further answers from the participants. Conducting interviews that allow participants to remain in his/her environment can yield less “sanitized or idealized” results than those conducted in a formal setting (Murchison, 2010, p.104). Hence, most interviews were conducted in the homes of the participants. The semi-structured interviews were based on an interview guide which was developed from the literature review and informal interviews. The interview questions focused on the following topics: (a) meaning and significance of traditional textiles and weaving practices for the women in the community, (b) the process of developing or creating a traditional textile, (c) direct economic and social impact of modernization on the lives of the weavers, (d) impact of modernization on the meaning, significance and process of weaving traditional textiles.

Method of Analysis

Systematic textual analysis is a common form of analyzing data when it comes to interpretive studies, where the focus is to identify themes, deconstruct text, look for hidden subtexts, and identify multiple meanings of the text (Bernard, 2007). Some of the common traditions of text analysis include interpretive analysis, narrative and performance analysis, schema analysis, discourse analysis, grounded theory, and content analysis. Constant comparison using open coding, overall impression and comparing categories which can result in a deeper understanding of a culture (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) was used to analyze data . A systematic analysis of ethnographic data collected for this study revealed a grounded theory model. A

grounded theory method involves a systematic inductive means of analyzing data that helps explain the collected data by developing a theory that emerges from the data (Charmaz, 2000).

The interviews were transcribed verbatim in English and studied in depth and repeatedly to gain overall impression of the data set. Next, key concepts and themes were identified using open coding. These concepts and themes were cross referenced with the field notes from informal interviews and field observations. A coding guide was developed based on emerging themes and concepts. The transcripts were then analyzed to identify text that fit in with the coding guide. This process was repeated until a theoretical saturation point was reached. The identified themes were finally used to develop a grounded theory model that represented the story of the participants as viewed by the researcher. Atlas.Ti was used as a text analysis software. The researcher met regularly with two senior researchers with backgrounds in the Textiles and Apparel field throughout the coding process to explore the meaning and themes identified within the data set until mutual understanding was achieved to establish trustworthiness. To further enhance trustworthiness, another researcher with background in Textile and Apparel checked the author's application of coding guide to the data. After disagreements in coding application were negotiated, an interrater reliability of 96.37% was calculated by dividing number of agreements in coding decisions by total number of coding decisions made.

Researcher's Subjectivity

Interpretive research is used to understand a situation from a participant's perspective where the investigator is the primary instrument for data collection (Locke, Silverman, & Spirduso, 2010). As this approach relies on the researchers' interpretation of the subjects' reality, issues of subjectivity and pre-existing biases must be considered. By accepting one's assumptions and preconceptions, the researcher is able to reflect upon them throughout the

research process (Creswell, 2007). In the following paragraph, the researcher acknowledges her subjectivity and how it could have impacted her research.

My keen interest in the handloom industry can be traced back to a summer spent in the tribal villages of Hampi, Karnataka, India, as a part of my undergraduate design program, from National Institute of Fashion Technology, Bangalore, India. Although I showed little interest in handmade textile and traditional clothing during this visit, a seed of how humans can be integrally connected to their clothing was planted in me. It was almost a decade later, after I learned about the various negative impacts of the clothing industry, caused due to materialistic lifestyles and the explosion of the fast fashion industry, I realized and appreciated the impeccable and intricate connection handloom weavers had to the fabrics they wove, a glimpse of which I had during my first visit to the handloom industry of Hampi. Being from India, a land rich in textile culture, made me realize that I had a cultural connection to a vast variety of handmade products and their origins right at my fingertips. Moreover, the variety of textile traditions that still exist even today after centuries of invasion and evolution made me more inquisitive to understand the connection that makers of these textiles had to their art. This sent me on a journey with my husband, in the summer of 2018, to explore the tribal weavers and their textiles of Meghalaya, a land I had never visited before. With a keen interest to explore and understand a completely new culture that exists within the same national boundaries of the country that I was raised up in, opened my mind up to appreciate the multitude of realities that we share as a human species. However, I entered the field with a biased idea of experiencing a culture that appreciated their art and culture, where people involved would be driven to preserve traditional practices above all, as that was my aim. I failed to comprehend the impact modern ideas and values would have on these tribal cultures. I deemed modernization to be ‘the evil’ that was ruining cultural

traditions and my goal was to understand the challenges people in these regions faced due to modernization. Little did I know it was the contrary as we shall see in the next section.

CHAPTER 4 – MANUSCRIPT

Modernization and Cultural Identity: The Case of Ri-Bhoi Women Handloom Weavers

The Indian handloom industry has seen tremendous growth and change over the past decade. The recent evolution of this industry has impacted the women weavers and their relationship to weaving. The present work draws upon theories of modernization and cultural identity to gain understanding about the relationship women handloom weavers have with their textiles and how weaving helps establish identity for these weavers. A qualitative ethnographic approach was used. Data (observations and interviews with 22 weavers) were collected from four villages in Ri-Bhoi district, Meghalaya. Data were analyzed using grounded theory method. Findings are presented in relation to five themes and a grounded theory model. Analyses revealed that women weavers adapted their traditional ideals related to weaving to preserve and sustain their handloom industry and their textiles to meet changes in the industry due to modernization. Conclusions suggest that understanding weavers' perceptions of change is vital in preserving cultural heritage.

Key Words: culture, handloom, identity, India, modernization, textile, weavers,

Modernization and Cultural Identity: The Case of Ri-Bhoi Women Handloom Weavers

The North East Region of India (NERI) comprises of eight states – Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura – and constitutes 8% of the country's geographical area with 61% of total handloom weavers of India (Boruah & Kaur, 2015; Devi, 2013; Ramswamy & Kumar, 2013). The handloom sector has been, and still is, the major source of livelihood for rural tribal women in NERI (Devi, 2013; Ramswamy & Kumar, 2013). Seventy-eight percent of the NERI handloom industry workforce is dominated by women weavers (Boruah & Kaur, 2015; Devi, 2013; Ramswamy & Kumar, 2013). Weaving is culturally significant to NERI women, as women who weave contribute to the household income and hold a higher social status as compared to women who do not weave (Devi, 2013). Handwoven textiles, apart from fulfilling the utilitarian need of clothing the body, also act as a visual marker to communicate various roles such as gender, social class, and status (Eriksen, 2005; Forney & Rabolt, 1986; Schofield-Tomschin & Littrell, 2001). Additionally, such visual markers provide meaningful information that helps develop cultural identity, value, and attitudes of both the individual and the community as a whole (Forney & Rabolt, 1986). As weaving plays a substantial role in the lives of NERI women, the foundation of this research is to understand how involvement in the handloom industry helps women weavers from NERI to develop cultural identity.

In recent years, the handloom industry of India has seen exponential growth both domestically and internationally in terms of exports value and domestic demand (Government of India, 2010). Government, non-profit (e.g., Dastkar Andhra and Rehwa Society), and international (UNESCO and the International Labour Organization) organizations have facilitated this growth by providing schemes and funding to advance looms, provide raw

materials, and nurture skill development (Devi, 2013; Guidelines of NERTPS; Mamidipudi, & Bijker, 2012). Table 3 identifies selected government organizations that have facilitated the growth of the Indian handloom industry. However, there is limited research that explores changes in the handloom industry due to modernization and how these changes have impacted the women weavers involved.

Table 3

List of Government organizations set up to support the handloom industry.

Organization	Year of Establishment	Purpose
Weaver Service Center	1956	Protecting traditional skill of handloom weaving from powerloom and mill made textiles
Indian Institute of Handloom Technology	1960	Provide technically qualified personnel for the development of the handloom industry
Handloom Export Promotion Council (HEPC)	1965	To promote exports of all handloom products
National Handloom Development Corporation (NHDC)	1983	Aid in the speedy development of the handloom industry
Association of Corporation & Apex Societies of Handlooms (ACASH)	1984	To coordinate and promote marketing in the handloom sector

Note. Adapted from “Note on Handloom Sector”, 2015, *Government of India, Ministry of Textiles.*

As weaving is a culturally significant activity in NERI, this research aims (a) to understand and document how modernization has changed/evolved the traditional NERI handloom industry and (b) to understand the significance of weaving to NERI women weavers and how their involvement in the handloom industry helps to develop their cultural identity. This research further analyzes the connection between modernization and cultural identity to understand how cultural identity related to weaving may change or evolve through modernization of the handloom industry. The research is guided by modernization theories, which suggest that modernization could lead to either (a) extinction of traditions/replacement of

traditions with modern ideals or (b) persistence of traditional values, which are regarded independent of economic and political change (Hughes, 2014; Inglehart & Baker, 2000).

Literature Review

Handloom Industry in India

The handloom industry is one of the largest unorganized economic activities in India, employing close to 4.3 million workers and contributing to the livelihood of India's rural and semi-rural population (Devi, 2013; Ghouse, 2012; Government of India, 2015; Niranjana & Vinayan, 2001). Approximately seventy-three percent of the total handloom workforce belongs to classes of the society that are socially and economically disadvantaged, and hence, the handloom industry provides a source of income and livelihood to vulnerable and weaker sections of society (Boruah & Kaur, 2015; Government of India, 2015; Handloom Census, 2010; Ramswamy & Hmangaihzuali, 2016; Ramswamy & Kumar, 2013). This industry is less capital intensive, is eco-friendly, uses less power, and has grown and sustained itself by transferring skills from one generation to the other (Government of India, 2015). The Indian handloom industry also is mainly decentralized, with majority of its production taking place within private homes (Bortamuly & Goswami, 2014; Ghouse, 2012).

NERI has the highest concentration of handloom units in India, which account for 69.28% of the 2.4 million total units in India (Indian Handloom Census, 2009-2010). Weaving in NERI is mostly manually operated (Devi, 2012), and 67.2% of the total handloom workers are self-employed and work independently (Handloom Census, 2010). The industry is predominantly home-based, with 99.7% of working looms situated within weaver homes (Handloom Census, 2010). Out of the total handloom units in NERI, 42.1% are used for domestic production, 24% are used for commercial production, 25% are used for both domestic and commercial production,

and 9% are left idle (Handloom census, 2010). Although the Handloom Census (2010) recorded that NERI had the highest number of working looms, it had the lowest rate of production. On average, most women in NERI weave one meter of textile every day as compared to three to four meters in other states of India (Handloom Census, 2010). This means that there is untapped potential for growth of the NERI handloom industry.

Women weavers. In most parts of India, weaving is associated with men, however in NERI, 99% of the adult handloom workforce is dominated by women (Devi, 2012; Handloom Census, 2010; Ramswamy & Hmangaihzuoli, 2016). Weaving skills are passed on from mother to daughter and are considered an important criterion for marriage (Devi, 2012; 2013; Gailangam, 1997). In certain NERI tribes, women weave intricate textiles to express their love to their partners (Devi, 2012; Paokoi, 1988). Today, weaving looms and tools are gifted to brides by their parents to ensure that they contribute to their household incomes and that they weave clothes for the families (Devi, 2012).

Women's looms are usually located in close proximity to their homes, so that they can easily work weaving into their daily lives, fitting it into their schedule amongst household chores (Ramswamy & Kumar, 2013). However, some studies have revealed a lack of interest in weaving among younger generations of women who may be more inclined to participate in agricultural activities, leading to increased purchase of readymade garments among these women and families (Devi 2012; 2013; Singh, Singh, & Adi Women Community, 2007).

Modernization in the Handloom Industry

India is the largest contributor to the global handloom textile market and accounts for 85% of the total 4.6 million global handloom production capacity (Boruah & Kaur, 2015). In recent years, the exports of Indian handloom products have seen immense growth, almost

doubling from 2010 to 2015 and growing from \$169 million to \$303 million (Government of India, 2015). Handloom products also have seen increased demand and sales within domestic markets due to their unique traditional design patterns and superior fabric quality (National Handloom Development Corporation [NHDC], 2016). The potential for additional growth has drawn interest from multiple organizations and has prompted efforts to upgrade the handloom industry. For example, the Technology Upgradation Fund Scheme (TUFS), developed by the Ministry of Textiles, funds artisans to replace their traditional looms with automotive ones (Government of India, 2015). International organizations such as International Development Bank, the International Labour Organization, and UNESCO, have shown special interest in helping the handloom industry (Liebl & Roy, 2004). However, competition from the powerloom industry has pressured handloom industry to diversify its product lines and introduce new technology for production to meet market demands (Government of India, 2015). This shift to modernize the handloom industry may have profound effects not just on the hand-woven textiles, but also on the culture surrounding the industry.

Research in the field of modernization and its effect on socioeconomic development has given rise to two schools of thought (Inglehart & Baker, 2000). One school of thought points to the decline of traditional values and the establishment of modern values as a result of modernization (Inglehart & Baker, 2000). In this vein, social theorists, such as Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim, Ferdinand Tönnies, and Max Weber argued that modernization could lead to extinction of traditions and traditional ways of life (Hughes, 2014). The second school of thought suggests the persistence of values despite economic and political changes (i.e., modernization) (Inglehart & Baker, 2000). Here, then, traditional values are argued to be independent of economic conditions, supporting persistence in the face of economic and political change

(DiMaggio, 1994). However, the central claim behind modernization is economic development which can lead to occupational specialization, rising education levels, rising income level, and can lead to a predictable change in social, cultural and political life (Inglehart & Baker, 2000).

Modernization of local arts can profoundly change not only the product but also the social and cultural structure of the community (Scrase, 2003). In Indonesia, modernization of traditional textile industry into large, commercialized manufacturing process ruined approximately 410,000 traditional artisan jobs in weaving and associated crafts like dyeing (Scrase, 2003). However, modernization of traditional textiles from Otavalo, Ecuador, helped revitalize the community by opening new markets and opportunities among artists, merchants, and shopkeepers in the community (Colloredo-Mansfeld et. al., 2003). In NERI, studies have shown that the introduction of technology and the increase in demand for products have led to modifications in the textile production process in few north eastern states (Boruah & Kaur, 2015; Devi 2013; Karolia & Ladia, 2012); for instance, such changes have prompted the shift from hand spun cotton, silk, and wool yarns to mill spun acrylic and viscose yarns in two tribes in Meghalaya (Karolia & Ladia, 2012). These accommodations are perhaps not surprising, as research suggests that weavers in NERI are quite open to adopting new technology in their weaving practices in order to compete with other crafts and with the powerloom industry (Liebl & Roy, 2004; Singh, Singh & Adi women community, 2008; Woods, 2011).

Cultural Identity

Cultural identity develops from “participating in society, internalizing cultural norms, acquiring different statuses, and playing different roles” (Gleason, 1983, p. 914). It encompasses values, beliefs, and worldviews that are shared among a group of people (Weaver, 2001). It is not a fixed construct, rather it constantly evolves through social, economic, and political changes

(Stone, 1962). This allows an individual to construct multiple identities, or sub-identities, that aid in forming the self (Forney & Rabolt, 1986; Stone, 1962; Weigert, Teitge, & Teitge, 2007).

Textiles play an important role in establishing and expressing personal identity, which, in turn, signifies social statuses and roles that helps to build cultural identity (Gale & Kaur, 2002). Studies have shown that weavers imbue meaning that resembles a sense of identity into their hand-woven textiles (Johnson & Wilson, 2005; Scholfield-Tomschin & Littrell, 2001). Handwoven textiles in NERI visually communicate various roles, such as gender, social class, and status (Eriksen, 2005; Forney & Rabolt, 1986; Schofield-Tomschin & Littrell, 2001). These textiles represent tribal culture and contain elements of legends, rituals, myths, ceremonies, festivals and the physical environment (Chakravorty, Dutta, & Ghose, 2009). For example, in Tripura, a state in NERI, all religious ceremonies begin with the worship of the *Riha*, a handwoven breast cloth for family elders, and in Assam, *Ghomsa*, a handwoven cotton shawl is used to welcome guests on any occasion as a sign of respect and honor (Devi, 2013).

Edward Sapir's theory of culture and personality states that every individual in a society has varying degrees to which he/she absorbs different elements of his/her culture (Sapir, 1938). Sapir (1938) further argued that cultures can be understood best through perceptions and responses of various personality types within a cultural construct. Bronislaw Malinowski, on the other hand, proposed a very functional approach to culture and identity. Specifically, Malinowski argued that individuals in a society are content with what they know, so long as their psychological needs are met (Lindholm, 2001; Malinowski, 1944). He reasoned that people are driven to seek and meet underlying basic needs with least possible effort. Thus, Malinoski's functional approach to culture and identity would suggest that women weavers in NERI may pursue weaving to fulfill certain psychological needs, such as providing clothing and financial

assistance for themselves and their families. Moreover, these activities establish a role for women in the society that helps construct their identity (Devi, 2012; 2013; Karolia & Ladia, 2012; Ramswamy & Kumar, 2013). This conceptualization aligns with Erving Goffman's theory of human life as a theater, where self-identity is created through socially constructed roles (Goffman, 1949). Men and women in a society are motivated to perform certain roles to gain approval from other members of the society (Goffman, 1949). However, a shift in the social, economic and political structure of society due to modernization may change the role of weaving for women in NERI, which may impact their cultural identity.

Handloom textiles are entwined with socio-cultural life of NERI tribal communities and reflect not only women weavers' skills and techniques but also deeper cultural meanings (Chakravorty, Dutta, & Ghose, 2009). Beyond serving the purpose of clothing the residents of the NERI tribal communities, handloom textiles play a significant role in constructing the social and cultural identities of these residents. To date, however, researchers have yet to explore how the modernization of the handloom industry of NERI may set a context for shifts in meanings associated with hand-weaving and the handloom industry as well as shifts in the cultural identity of the women weavers. Based on Stone's (1962) assertion that cultural identity is not a fixed construct, it is important to understand how social and economic changes due to modernization may have contributed to the evolution of cultural identity among women weaver's in NERI.

Ri-Bhoi, a district in Meghalaya, a state in NERI, has received very little attention in terms of its handloom industry. Ri-Bhoi was of particular interest because government initiatives to modernize the handloom industry of Ri-Bhoi have only recently been incorporated (P. Tmung, personal communication, June 16, 2018). As the handloom industry is in its nascent stages of modernization, change in culture, meaning, and identity associated with weaving of traditional

textiles was easier to understand. Over the past decade, the state government of Meghalaya, in collaboration with the department of sericulture, has launched multiple initiatives and schemes to help the women weavers in different villages in Ri-Bhoi to develop and modernize the handloom industry (P. Tmung, personal communication, June 16, 2018). However, not all women are part of these endeavors. Some of the weavers continue using their traditional practice of weaving. This diversity of women weavers in the community provides sufficient data to study the change or shift in culture, meaning, and identity associated with weaving of the traditional textiles.

Thus, this research was guided by the following research questions: (a) How has modernization changed/evolved the handloom industry in Ri-Bhoi? (b) How do Ri-Bhoi women weavers see traditional weaving as contributing to their cultural identity? (c) How do Ri-Bhoi women weavers see modernization changing/evolving their cultural identity related to weaving?

Methods

As the focus of this research was to study Ri-Bhoi women weavers and their values and perceptions towards traditional textiles, an ethnographic approach was used. A qualitative approach was adopted using multiple methods of data collection, including participant observation, field notes/journaling, and formal and informal interviews. Using diverse methods of data collection was useful in fostering triangulation and helped to ensure the collection of valid and verifiable data (Willis, 2007). Prolonged engagement in the field enhanced the scope of the study as well as the credibility of data collected.

Case Selection

Ri-Bhoi, a north eastern district in the state of Meghalaya, a state in NERI, was selected as the main area of study. The researcher met a local designer from Meghalaya, who

recommended sites and villages in Ri-Bhoi as study locations based on the current study's research focus. The local designer also connected the researcher to a tribal chief of a region called Hima Khad Ar Lyngdoh, located within Ri-Bhoi. The tribal chief guided the researcher to four villages – Umjong, Korstep, Umtumur, and Mawryngkang – where weaving was prevalent.

Institutional Review Board approval was granted before researcher traveled to Ri-Bhoi. The researcher visited the four aforementioned villages in the northern district of Ri-Bhoi, Meghalaya, where she recruited a purposive sample of 22 female weavers to participate in formal, semi-structured interviews. Participants were recruited based on their active participation in weaving, with an aim of including women across varying ages. All interviews were audio recorded after receiving oral consent from participants. Participant confidentiality was maintained throughout the research process.

Data Collection Tools and Procedures

Data were collected over a period of three weeks. The first week of data collection involved daily visits to the four villages, field observation, and informal interviews. The informal interactions and observations helped develop a close relationship and rapport with the participants in a non-obtrusive manner. Conducting informal interviews is important in an ethnographic study not just to develop rapport with the participants but also to uncover new topics of interest that may develop through the research process, which may be overlooked otherwise (Bernard, 2006). Participants also were observed during weaving hours, and extensive field notes were taken to be able to observe the cultural group in its natural environment (Creswell, 2007).

During the last two weeks of data collection, the researcher stayed in the villages over a period of three to four days each and conducted a total of 22 interviews as well as in-depth field

notes. All interviews were conducted in Khasi, the local dialect, with the help of translators from each village. The interviews were semi-structured and based on an interview protocol that was developed from background research and data that emerged from initial informal interaction with participants during the first week of data collection. Constant re-evaluation and reflexivity of theoretical and cultural assumptions helped shape the research process. Informal interactions helped build a protocol for the semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews helped better understand common view points and perceptions shared by weavers rather than individual perspectives that arose from conducting only informal interviews. Moreover, participant observation provided key details about certain practices that were not mentioned in the literature, hence guiding the research towards a richer interpretation. Journaling was used to support data collected from the formal and informal interviews.

Observational data collection. Weavers were observed over three weeks of immersion in the field. The researcher visited the homes of 28 weavers to observe them in their natural environment. As majority of the women weavers were farmers and worked in the fields during the day, weaving practices were observed only during some hours in the morning and the evening. Observing women weavers helped the researcher to understand how weavers balanced their time between weaving and managing household chores. Apart from observation in home settings, the researcher also witnessed a few special religious ceremonies and occasions in the village. Being a part of these celebrations helped the researcher to understand how traditional textiles were used in their cultural context. Field notes were recorded during each of the visits with expansion of notes and journal entry completed at end of the day.

Interview data collection. Informal interviews are widely used in the field of ethnographic studies to help build rapport and uncover new topics of interest (Bernard, 2006).

The informal interviews also helped identify an ideal sample group for the semi-structured interviews within each village. Using the interview protocol, semi-structured interviews were conducted during the last two weeks of field visits. Most of the interview questions were open-ended, and participants were encouraged to be candid. They were reassured that there were no “right or wrong answers.” Conducting interviews that allow participants to remain in their own environment can yield less “sanitized or idealized” results than those conducted in more formal settings (Murchison, 2010, p.104). Hence, most interviews were conducted in the homes of the participants.

Data Analysis

Systematic textual analysis is a common interpretive method of analyzing data, where the focus is to identify themes, deconstruct text, look for hidden subtexts, and identify multiple meanings of the text (Bernard, 2007). Given the focus of the work, specific attention was given to the expressions of culture that could be extracted from the textual data collected as well as to the search for interconnections among themes (Bernard, 2007). Interviews were transcribed verbatim in English and studied in depth and repeatedly to gain overall impression of the data set. Next, key concepts and themes were identified using open coding to develop a coding guide. These concepts and themes were cross referenced with journal entries and data from field observation. The transcripts were analyzed to identify text that fit in with the coding guide. This process was repeated until a theoretical saturation point was reached. Atlas.Ti was used as a text analysis software. Data analysis revealed a grounded theory model.

Several measures were taken to establish trustworthiness and dependability of data analysis. The researcher met with senior researchers in the textiles and apparel field throughout the coding process to explore meanings and themes identified within the data set until mutual

understanding was achieved. Additionally, another researcher with background in textiles and apparel checked author's application of the coding guide, and disagreements in coding application were negotiated. Interrater reliability was 96.37% and was calculated by dividing total number of agreements in coding decisions by total number of coding decisions made.

Results & Discussion

The people of Ri-Bhoi, known as *The Bhois*, are a sub group of the Khasi tribe (Government of Meghalaya, 2019). The Khasi tribe in Meghalaya are a matrilineal and matrilocal society, where inheritance, clan membership, residence, and title follow a female lineage through the youngest daughter (Gneezy, Leonard, & List, 2009; Nongbri, 1988). Women hold a prominent role in the family, where they are responsible for the nurture and care of her family, and are custodians of all family rituals (Nongbri, 1988). Most families follow a joint family structure where female siblings, once married, settle down in adjacent homes near their mother's home. The youngest daughter inherits her mother's land and eventually becomes the head of the household (Nongbri, 1988). Unmarried or divorced male siblings also reside in the same household. Men are considered protectors and providers to the female household even though they hold no authority and property (Gneezy, Leonard, & List, 2009). Even though women hold significant positions in the household, their roles outside the home are limited. Women do not attend or hold any political positions within the community (Nongbri, 1988).

The researcher interacted with a total of 31 women weavers who ranged in age from 18 to 90, with a mean age of 45. Formal semi-structured interviews were conducted with 22 women weavers. These data were used for data analysis. All participants identified their primary occupation as farmers or cultivators except for four women, who mentioned weaving as their primary occupation. All four women engaged in weaving full-time as they were diagnosed with

some medical conditions that prevented them from working in the fields. The participants who identified as cultivators, spent most of their day in fields with their husbands and sons, while their daughters stayed at home to care for the elderly and the young. Ri-Bhoi women start working in fields from a young age (on average 15 years). Apart from working in the fields, they also undertake most household chores, such as cooking, cleaning, caring for the young and old, gardening, and even collecting fire wood (used mainly for cooking and heating the homes). Men are engaged in farming, selling their produce in the markets, and local political activities. Although, Ri-Bhoi women engage in conversations to discuss local politics, their involvement in political decision making is generally minimal. Based on researcher observations, women's roles seemed to be limited to their homes. Even though these tribes are a matrilineal and matrilocal society, men seemed to have more authority in the community and in making important household decisions. Table 4 presents the demographic information of all women weavers with whom the researcher interacted. Informal interactions were documented in field notes. In Table 4 and throughout the Results section, participants are referred to by numeric code identifiers to protect their identities.

Analysis of data revealed a shift from the traditional methods of handloom production, that is, the evolution of the handloom industry steered by modernization. Evolution of the handloom industry also supported adaption of traditional ideals that related to weaver identity. The results are presented in the three sections. The first section describes the evolution of the handloom industry due to modernization. The second section explores how women weavers in Ri-Bhoi develop an identity from participating in the handloom industry. The third section describes five themes that emerged from cross case analysis of data, exchange of knowledge,

Table 4

Demographic information of all participants

Participant	Age	Began weaving at (approx) age	Village	Type of loom	Average time spent weaving	Loom Location	Data Collection Method
P1	56	Young. Age unknown	Umjong	Frame loom	All day	Frame loom in shed outside home	Informal Interviews
P2	38	36	Korstep	Floor loom	Unkown	Dismantled	Informal Interviews
P3	32	Young. Age unknown	Kostep	Floor loom	Unkown	Dismantled	Informal Interviews
P4	43	27	Korstep	Frame loom	All day	Frame loom in shed outside home	Semi-Structured Interviews
P5	28	18	Mawryngkhang	Frame loom	6 hrs/ day	Frame loom in shed behind home	Semi-Structured Interviews
P6	39	Young. Age unknown	Umjong	Frame loom	Unkown	Frame loom in shed behind home	Informal Interviews
P7	45	Young. Age unknown	Umjong	Floor loom	4 hrs/day	Dismantled	Informal Interviews
P8	80	Young. Age unknown	Korstep	Floor loom	6 hrs/ day	Dismantled	Semi-Structured Interviews
P9	58	10	Korstep	Frame loom	Unkown	Frame loom in shed outside home	Semi-Structured Interviews
P10	28	26	Korstep	Floor loom	Unkown	Outside	Informal Interviews
P11	23	13	Umjong	Frame (share with P29)	1hr/ day	Frame loom in shed outside home	Informal Interviews
P12	29	27	Korstep	Floor loom	1hr/ day	Floor loom behind home	Semi-Structured Interviews
P13	67	27	Korstep	Floor loom	weaving at night	Floor loom behind home	Semi-Structured Interviews
P14	38	18	Korstep	Frame loom	Few hours. Not everyday	Frame loom in shed outside home	Semi-Structured Interviews
P15	26	25	Korstep	Frame loom	4 hrs/day	Uses a friend's frame loom	Semi-Structured Interviews

Table 4 (continued)

Participant	Age	Began weaving at (approx) age	Village	Type of loom	Average time spent weaving	Loom Location	Data Collection Method
P16	68	15	Korstep	Floor loom	Few hours. Not everyday	Dismantled	Semi-Structured Interviews
P17	28	10	Korstep	Frame loom	Few hours / day	Frame loom in shed outside home	Semi-Structured Interviews
P18	41	Young. Age unknown age	Umtumur	Frame loom (3 looms)	4 - 6 hrs/ day	Frame loom in shed outside home	Semi-Structured Interviews
P19	46	15	Umtumur	Frame loom	2hrs/ day	Frame loom in shed outside home	Semi-Structured Interviews
P20	29	23	Mawryngkhang	Frame loom	2 - 3 hrs/ day	Frame loom in shed outside home	Semi-Structured Interviews
P21	63	Young. Age unknown age	Mawryngkhang	Floor loom	1 - 2 hrs/ day	Floor loom in front of home	Semi-Structured Interviews
P22	60	20	Mawryngkhang	Frame (2 looms)	Few hours / day	Frame loom in shed outside home	Semi-Structured Interviews
P23	40	35	Mawryngkhang	Frame loom	1 - 2 hrs/ day	Frame loom in shed behind home	Interviews
P24	43	12	Mawryngkhang	Frame loom	4hrs/ day	Frame loom in shed outside home	Informal Interviews
P25	37	24	Mawryngkhang	Frame loom	4 - 6 hrs/ day	Frame loom in shed outside home	Semi-Structured Interviews
P26	85	14	Mawryngkhang	Floor loom	All day sometimes	Floor loom in front of home	Semi-Structured Interviews
P27	90	15	Mawryngkhang	Floor loom	All day sometimes	Dismantled	Interviews
P28	36	10	Mawryngkhang	Frame loom	4 - 6 hrs/ day	Frame loom in shed behind home	Informal Interviews
P29	18	11	Umjong	Frame loom (share with P11)	5 hrs/ day	Frame loom in shed outside home	Semi-Structured Interviews
P30	22	18	Umjong	Frame loom	All day	Frame loom in shed outside home	Semi-Structured Interviews
P31	49	20	Umjong	Frame loom	All day	Frame loom in shed outside home	Semi-Structured Interviews

social support, role of weaving in everyday life, symbolizing tribe and culture, and joy, pride and happiness. At the conclusion of this section, the interactions among these themes are considered in the form of a grounded theory model that explores how Ri-Bhoi women develop a cultural identity surrounding weaving in the midst of modernization and change.

Modernization: Evolution and adaptation of the traditional handloom industry

The Ri-Bhoi handloom industry has seen a wide range of changes since Christian missionaries invaded the region dating back to the early 20th century (Dikshit & Dikshit, 2014). These missionaries eventually converted the majority of indigenous tribal people from their native religions to Christianity. This conversion almost completely wiped out weaving from Ri-Bhoi, as the majority of traditional woven clothes were used to perform religious rituals. However, a few women persisted in their weaving. Participant P27 who was identified to be the oldest weaver among the four villages, and who was acknowledged as the guardian of traditional weaving, described her account of the vanishing traditional weaving practices and her journey to revive them:

For some time, we stopped completely. Then me, I am still continuing. [I weave] once [in] a while, like...once a year, twice a year like that...Then, [our] King, he start[ed] reviving the culture, dress and all. So, [now] everybody [is] interest[ed] to weave...so I [am] teaching whoever [is] interest[ed] to do it. (P27, age 90, village Mawryngkhang)

Over time, more women were interested in being a part of reviving and restoring weaving as a traditional activity. Moreover, support and encouragement from other community members seem to have played an important role in inspiring more women to follow in weaving, as P27 described,

For some time, I feel bad because nobody [is] continue[ing]. Only I am doing [the weaving]...after some time, I used to tell [them], “Don't stop!” We have to continue to revive our culture, dress and all. [Even] if we become Christian[s] also, we can still put on [our traditional] dress. So then, some [women] are supporting [*sic*]... before that...one priest was there from Ri-Bhoi, Father Si, ... He used to go around in Ri-Bhoi and he would tell...don't stop our own culture, our own dress, we have to continue....So because

of him, somehow, I am [still] continuing and revive[ing] that tradition. (P27, age 90, village Mawryngkhang)

Participating in government schemes. Under the Directorate of Sericulture and Weaving, the government of Meghalaya launched multiple schemes to help support weavers all around Meghalaya (Directorate of sericulture and weaving, n.d.). Weavers enroll in these initiatives by establishing cooperative groups called, “Self-Help Groups” or SHGs. Working as a cooperative society seems to be helpful in identifying and establishing groups of women as weavers. The SHGs help the weavers by providing them funds to purchase new looms and other weaving equipment (e.g., spinning wheels and warp drums) and to build sheds for their looms. Additionally, the SHGs may provide weavers a yearly supply of yarns. Most women weavers who are a part of the SHGs received at least one of these benefits. Two weavers explained the benefits they received through SHGs:

We want [the] Self-Help Group because of the scheme[s]. The scheme[s] proposed will not come personally! If I have a Self-Help group, then I'll get something. (P4, age 43, village Korstep)

We got this umm, thread. Thread also, through SHG. And this umm.. loom also, and this shed (P25, age 37, village Mawryngkhang)

The women who are a part of these groups find membership beneficial as it provides them with basic raw materials to continue weaving and can help them upgrade their existing looms, which are mostly floor looms, to frame looms that can help with faster production:

This one, the floor loom, it takes time. That one, the shuttle loom, is a little bit faster. That's why...it's good to have that. (P26, age 85, village Mawryngkhang)

Moreover, participants also shared that such incentives have encouraged other women in the community who do not know how to weave to learn and engage in weaving. Over time, these government initiatives seem to have contributed to the evolution of handloom industry from a traditional industry (i.e., one that used very basic floor looms and handspun, home-grown cotton

yarns) to a more modern industry (i.e., one that uses shuttle looms and mill spun, fine synthetic yarns). Ri-Bhoi women traditionally grew cotton in their own gardens and farms, spun cotton by hand into yarns, hand-dyed the cotton yarns, built make-shift looms by propping up bamboo shoots in their front yards, and wove textiles by spending hours sitting on the floor, hunched over the looms. Weaving traditional textiles was a tedious, time-consuming process, but the women engaged in weaving as it was considered necessary to create the traditional textiles, not just for special occasions such as weddings, funerals, religious ceremonies, but also for daily use. Moreover, as these tribal populations did not have access to outside markets, buying mill produced textiles was not even considered an option. However, after colonization, women stopped weaving, which led to the near demise of hand weaving in Ri-Bhoi and dependence on mill produced garments increased. As women stopped weaving, they stopped growing cotton, as well. This eventually led to the decline and extinction of that species of cotton completely. After about three decades of no cotton, no dyeing, and no weaving, women had to rely on buying mill spun yarns from outside markets to be able to weave and revive weaving. This however, gave weavers the flexibility and ease to pick yarns of different composition, thickness, and colors that pleased them rather than limiting their options to the cotton they grew and dyed. With the introduction of government initiatives, SHGs started supplying yarns on yearly basis for women who registered as weavers under their scheme. The government also provided financial assistance to buy frame or shuttle looms. Weaving on floor looms was limiting, as women could only weave during winter, when there were no rains. But frame looms or shuttle looms could be placed inside their homes, which provided the ease of weaving throughout the year and increased the speed of weaving as well. A piece of cloth that would take two months to weave on the floor

loom could now be produced in two weeks on the frame loom. P14 describes why she prefers the shuttle loom over the floor loom in the following quote:

...because previous, [the floor loom,] it's very slow, and then this...[the shuttle loom] is fast. So, maybe two, [or] four piece[s]...we can finish even [in] one week...But, before, even one piece...to finish [it would take] two-three months (P14, age 38, village Korstep)

This increase in production meant that weavers were making more textiles than they needed for their own consumption. Soon after, women engaged in selling the excess textiles they made to other members in the community who did not know how to weave.

Changing intention/purpose to weave. Participants shared that, in the Ri-Bhoi cultural context, weaving was traditionally undertaken to fulfill basic needs of clothing oneself and one's family or for special occasions such as religious ceremonies, weddings, and to produce gifts (e.g., baby carriers to be given to daughters on the occasion of their daughter's wedding) (Field notes, Jan 18, 2019). However, with the introduction of new and faster loom technology, weavers were able to increase their rate of production which created a surplus of traditional textiles. Women who did not learn the art of weaving, did not practice weaving, and did not have exceptional skill of weaving, placed orders with their favorite weavers to weave special traditional textiles for themselves and their families. This created a market within Ri-Bhoi villages for weavers to sell their surplus traditional textiles.

...people they want, they want to wear this type of cloth[s] because...they don't know how to weave. So, they want to get this type of traditional clothes. [My customers] asks me to weave and then they give [me] money...money [is] also important, sharing [is] also important. (P16, age 68, village Korstep)

Another forms of exchange between women weavers and non-weavers were observed during the researcher's visit. Weavers sometimes sold their textiles for financial profit, but also traded their textiles for services offered by customers. Some women offered to work in the weavers' fields in exchange for some woven textiles. Some women provided yarns for weaving

and offered the weaver a few pieces of the woven textiles in exchange for the service of weaving (Field notes, Jan 22, 2019). This newfound purpose of trading their traditional textiles provided the women weaver households with an additional form of functional benefit either by providing additional income or reducing household expenditure of buying clothes from the market.

However, most weavers wove textiles for themselves, first, before trading outside, as it was important to for them to own their own traditional clothes:

Authenticating changes in traditional textiles. A key aspect that needs to be considered while analyzing change in traditional textiles is the concept of authenticity. The persistence of weaving among Ri-Bhoi women was fostered by change. However, change is not easily accepted, especially change pertaining to traditional values, beliefs, and behaviors. According to Harari (2015), for change to be accepted within a cultural context, it has to be accepted among all members of the community. Harari (2015) further argues that change is inevitable, and cultures are constantly evolving by reconciling different contradictions brought on by change. This reconciliation from the context of traditional products can be understood as authentication.

Authenticity is established when certain attributes of a product are “culturally recognized, widely used, and collectively agreed upon by a set of people” (Carrol, 2015, p.3). Several changes in Ri-Bhoi weaving have facilitated its evolution and its authentication. The first prominent evolution is the shift of loom technology from floor looms to shuttle looms. The floor looms were traditionally made from bamboo shoots, foraged from nearby forests by husbands, and hand built for their wives (Field notes, Jan 22, 2019). However, making the floor looms in this was a very time-intensive process, and the productive capacity of these looms was meager compared to that of shuttle looms. Younger weavers who grew up working on shuttle looms found them to be superior in ease of use and productive capacity compared to the floor looms. Soon, even older,

master weavers in Ri-Bhoi accepted and supported the use of shuttle looms. P18, a middle-aged weaver, described her experience using both floor loom and shuttle loom:

Making clothes on the floor [loom] means it [will] take time, and it's difficult. We have to collect [the different piece, and], we have to put [it] here and there. And this one [i.e. the shuttle loom] remain[s] like this...we can make many clothes here [on the shuttle loom], and that one is [i.e. the floor loom], we cannot. We can, but it take[s] time. (P18, age 41, village Umtumur)

P26, one of the older weavers in Mawryngkhang, expressed her interest in the shuttle loom:

I don't know how to weave on the shuttle loom...my daughter learned to weave on the shuttle loom, then I feel very happy and I too want to learn to weave on the shuttle loom. (P26, age 85, village Mawryngkhang)

Another prominent change in the NERI weaving tradition is change in yarns and colors used for weaving traditional textiles. As mentioned before, women weavers formerly engaged in growing their own cotton and silk, hand spinning and hand dyeing the yarns before weaving their traditional textiles. However, now, women prefer buying their yarns from the market. Buying mill spun yarns from the market works out to be more efficient as women choose from a variety of colors and yarn types. Out of the 22 weavers interviewed, only three grew some cotton and used it for weaving. Participant P16, who used to grow and spin cotton earlier, explained the benefits of buying yarns from the market, as follows:

No, I feel [it is] difficult to grow [that] again, that cotton. It is better to buy from the market. Because...with that cotton we have to spin. Yeah, it's take[ing] [a lot of] time...But from [the] market, [the] yarn, it's ready made. (P16, age 68, village Korstep)

In spite of recent changes in weaving methods and materials used for weaving, the participants in this study regarded the textiles they wove to be culturally "authentic." Here, authentication was tied to maintenance of the motifs used in the traditional textiles. Thus, seemingly, so long as the motifs remain the same, weavers have the opportunity to experiment with yarn quality, yarn color, and placement of designs. Such a practice reflects Healy's (1994) argument that total accuracy in resemblance of a traditional product is not necessary, but rather, a

belief in authenticity carries more value. In this spirit, two participants explain how clothes they weave today are still considered authentic:

Design you will see many clothes [*sic*], the design remain[s] the same. But...the picture, what they put, they can change, even color also. But their...old [design], [will] remain like that. So, [in] the old one, [you will] see just line [i.e. stripes], you can take out that line, [and] put this small small [i.e. motif] one. But the triangle [border motif] one, that is the old style. It should be there. (P31, age 49, village Umjong)

[There is] no change from before till now. It is the same. But only the colors of the clothes and thread is different. (P21, age 63, village Mawryngkhang)

This sort of sustaining of authenticity through use of traditional motifs also has been observed in other cultures (Asplet & Cooper, 1999; Maynard, 1999).

Cultural Identity in the context of Ri-Bhoi weavers

Cultural identity is meaning developed by an individual by participating in a society and internalizing culturally shared values, beliefs, and worldviews (Dressler, 2017, Gleason, 1983).

For Ri-Bhoi weavers, cultural identity relates to a shared understanding that weaving is an important part of a woman's life. Although most women in Ri-Bhoi identify themselves as farmers or cultivators, the importance that weaving plays in their lives cannot be ignored.

Women weavers are considered guardians of traditional cloth; without women weavers, no one would have the traditional dress and the art of weaving would die. Thus, knowledge and practice of weaving traditional textiles is considered an important role and a duty for women in the NERI society. All members within Ri-Bhoi, village elders, men, women, and children alike, share and value the art of weaving and consider weaving an important activity for women to pursue.

Women develop an identity of being guardians of their traditional cloth, which is gradually instilled in every woman through shared values and beliefs.

Modernization and its impact on cultural identity

Maintaining tradition of weaving through exchange of knowledge. Exchanging knowledge of weaving from one weaver member to another played a key role in preserving weaving skills within the Ri-Bhoi cultural context. Participants shared that, in the Ri-Bhoi context, women traditionally learned how to weave by observing their mothers, grandmothers, and/or siblings. Young girls would sit beside their elders and watch how they wove intricate designs on textiles. When these girls got married, they were entrusted with the duty of weaving clothes for their families. This cycle of exchanging knowledge ensured the continuity of weaving within Ri-Bhoi. Participant P13 describes her experience learning weaving,

She learned [weaving] by herself...[When she was of] young age, her mother used to weave. Then...her mother[’s] thread [she] used to take...and then [she] used to weave...Just making you know. Just playing... (P13, age 67, village Korstep)

Post colonization and after conversion to Christianity, women stopped weaving and stopped teaching weaving as well. However, with the introduction of SHGs, the department of Seri-culture took initiative to encourage women to engage in weaving. They also provided the weaver with newer raw materials. This fueled an interest to learn weaving among women in Ri-Bhoi. With very few women teaching their children how to weave, women who were interested but did not know how to weave had to rely on new techniques of learning. A spike in interest and the quest to learn weaving fueled women to explore beyond their home to learn how to weave from other elders in the community. Instead of watching their mothers and grandmothers, they observed and watched neighbors and friends, asking them questions and slowly teaching themselves how to weave:

Since I was a small child, I didn’t learn weaving. But umm, after I started teaching in Riopathi Christian Secondary School, from there I learned. I used to watch. I used to see while others...weave. I used to see. I used to watch. (P15, age 26, Korstep)

...watching others weaving and I saw and I learned from there...No, nobody is teaching me [to weave], but just she see [*sic*]. I see from others [*sic*]...My mother, she never weave. (P19, age 46, Umtumur)

I learned by myself only. I taught myself. No one taught me. (P23, age 40, Mawryngkhang)

As such, observing others in the community and teaching the self became the new means of exchanging knowledge about weaving. This was how women established modern ideals by adapting their traditional ideals related exchange of knowledge.

Securing social support from family and community. Social support is defined as “an individual’s perception of general support or specific supportive behavior (available or acted on) from people in their social network, which enhances their functioning or may buffer them from adverse outcomes” (Malecki & Demaray, 2003, p. 232). There are multiple forms of social support, (a) emotional support, which consists of providing some form of trust and love, (b) instrumental support, which consists practical support, such as spending time with someone in need and/or providing materials or money, and (c) informational support, which consists of providing knowledge and guidance (House, 1981; Langford, Bowsher, Maloney, & Lillis, 1997; Malecki & Demaray, 2003; Tardy, 1992). Social support from family, friends and other community members seems to play an important role for Ri-Bhoi weavers. Traditionally, weavers received informational support through exchange of knowledge from their family elders during the learning process. As weaving was primarily associated with clothing the family, informational support was the most prominent form of support received from family elders (mothers and grandmother) to teach and continue weaving within the family. However, post modernization, family, friends, and community members adapted their traditional ideals of informational support to also provide emotional and instrumental support to weavers. This shift in social support was necessary to ensure the survival of weaving among women in the

community. Family and community members emotionally supported the weavers by recognizing and appreciating their work, as seen in the quotes below.

Yeah, my mom, she said, “Ahh, how do you know?” She used to appreciate me [*sic*]. Yeah, I learned from others because I want[ed], because no one in my family know[s].” (P15, age 26, village Korstep)

Yes, they encourage me. Not only to earn, but at least somehow, someone is interest[ed] in weaving in that household. (P30, age 22, village Umjong)

The emotional support encouraged weavers to continue their weaving practices and motivated them to develop new weaving skills. Apart from emotional support, most family members practically supported weavers by buying them yarns and raw materials needed for weaving. Sometimes, weavers received help from their husbands to build the frame looms they received from government schemes:

He used to make that one also [i.e. the shuttle loom]. He built the loom for me. I told him that I wanted a loom and he built it for me. (P17, age 28, village Korstep)

Appreciation from other members sometimes led to special orders, leading to sales and additional income for the weaver households. Participant P15 briefly describes the support and encouragement she received from her colleagues:

Out there, my teacher also, my colleagues also said "AHHHH!!! You are a very smart girl. If you get little time also, how can you manage?" ...so you make [clothes] for me, [and] you make [clothes] for me...sometimes, for my colleagues, I used to gift them also. (P15, age26, village Korstep)

Role of weaving in everyday life. Before the influence of Christian missionaries, weaving was an activity all women in Ri-Bhoi participated in. As noted, traditionally, the main motivation surrounding weaving was to support clothing needs of family members and self. However, post colonization, women stopped weaving and hence, families had to rely on outside markets to buy clothes, which added to their household expenses.

When I was young, we never buy [*sic*] [i.e. clothes from market]. We make [it]...ourselves, this lungi [i.e. cloth warped around the waist like a skirt]... We never buy from [the] market. (P27, age 90, village Mawryngkhang)

With the implementation of government support groups that provided weavers with new loom technology and differing varieties of yarn, women revived the art of weaving. Even though most women spent much of their time farming or cultivating, increased support from family and community members, introduction of new production techniques, and increased passion and interest to weave, women were able to establish weaving as an important activity in their daily schedules. All combined, women today are weaving at a faster rate and producing more clothes than needed for their family. Appreciation from friends and family also has encouraged weavers to sell excess textiles to other members in the community. Selling traditional textiles not only brings in additional income for the family, but also ensures the existence of traditional textiles within the community.

...if we are weaving all the time then, if we keep it all at home, there are too many clothes...that's why I started selling. (P26, age, 85, village Mawryngkhang)

Weavers sometimes sell their textiles for monetary benefit and sometimes trade textiles for other goods and services. All these benefits related to weaving have attracted more women in the community to take interest in weaving. However, to fulfill these requirements, women needed to establish weaving as an activity in their day to day lives. They needed to allocate enough time on daily basis to weave as well as to fulfill their other duties as a wife, mother, caretaker, and a farmer. Women were observed allocating a couple of hours in the morning and in the evening every day for weaving, after completing other chores. Establishing weaving as a daily activity provided the right foundation for women in Ri-Bhoi to adapt a fruitful life around weaving.

Before, only the old[er] people are weaving...now everyone needs that traditional cloth...So, everyone in the community, start taking interest [*sic*]. They get interested. (P5, age 28, village Mawryngkhang)

In one day, maybe half an hour or one hour. But yeah, every day. Because I have to look after my.. house and children...[I] have to collect firewood. It is difficult to find time to weave. In evening time also, if I can see, I used to weave. (P12, age 29, village Korstep)

However, not all women are able to sell their textiles outside. Some women still find it hard to balance their duties with weaving as P17 mentioned,

I want to sell, but I don't have time to weave, yeah...if I got the better things [*sic*], like shuttle and all, I can, I can make maybe many clothes [*sic*]. Then I want to sell outside... to gain benefit[s], little to survive my own family. (P17, age 28, village Korstep)

Maintaining tradition of weaving through creation of textiles that symbolize tribe and culture. Weaving as an activity served the purpose of visually representing a tribe and its people. Participants P5 and P13 explained how motifs and colors used in their garments were representative of which region and tribe they belong to:

Main thing is, by this cloth, that is the identity for us. We are from whom [*sic*], which particular tribe, from particular kingdom [*sic*]. We have got our own style of weave[ing], ... design, so and so. That depict[s] us, that we are from that particular area. (P5, age 28, village Mawryngkhang)

By [wearing] these clothes also, if we go to Shillong⁸... peoples will recognize that we are from Ri- Bhoi, that we are Khasi⁹, from here. (P13, age 67, village Korstep)

Handwoven garments that were culturally representative of the tribe were worn for special occasions, such as weddings, funerals, religious celebrations and other cultural celebrations. One participant mentioned a cultural celebration called '*Sajer*', where people from different tribes in neighboring villages gather to demonstrate their cultural traditions that include tribal dance, food, and clothes.

There is some function [i.e. celebration]... we call that umm, *Sajer*. We used to dance once a year. Yeah... in that occasion also, we used to wear only this, our own cloth only. (P8, age 80, village Korstep)

For me it's, weaving for our culture, and for some program, for dancing and all. (P23, age 40, village Mawryngkhang)

⁸ Shillong is the capital of Meghalaya. Weavers sometime travel to Shillong for state festivals.

⁹ Khasi are an indigenous ethnic group from Meghalaya. Most weavers in this study belong to Khasi tribe

Women who wove traditional textiles also took pride in their weaving skills by gifting their textiles to close friends and family. Gifting a hand-woven textile to a close family member or friend was considered a precious offering:

...I want to learn because umm, if somebody died... that clothes I [can] give... Yeah, I used to give. It's a great, umm, honor! (P8, age 80, village Korstep)

[The] special meaning for me...those clothes, I can give someone. Maybe [my] daughter, my son. If they need, I can give them. (P9, age 58, Korstep)

However, these hand-woven textiles are equally important to own as they symbolize the weaver's tribe and culture. One participant mentioned how she kept her best work for herself, as it was very expensive to buy in the market:

...before it's very, it's very precious, those clothes. So, we didn't want to sell. Because umm, even [in] one year also we can weave only two or three clothes. So [it's] very difficult for us. So, we don't want to sell. We want to keep it for ourselves only. (P8, age 80, village Korstep)

An increase in the number of weavers coupled with the growing demand for traditionally woven cloth and a low supply of authentic traditional textiles has prompted weavers to start concentrating on preserving traditional textiles as one of the main foci of their weaving.

According to the participants' accounts, traditional textiles are representative of a tribe only if all or at least most people in the tribe dress themselves with their particular traditional cloth.

Participant P4 talked about how important preserving culture was to her,

...we are trying just to restore the culture. Because until date we don't have that umm, the loom and technique that can provide each and every one cloth[s] in the market. So that is the weakness for us. So now...we are just...restore[ing] the culture. (P4, age 43, village Korstep)

Preserving weaving traditions also meant ensuring younger generations learned how to weave. Weavers today actively engage in teaching traditional weaving practices to their children and other young children in the community. Teaching the next generation of girls how to weave

also ensures growth and continuity of weaving within the Ri-Bhoi community. Weavers from all villages expressed the importance of teaching weaving:

The main thing is to not stop weaving. We have to continue it. And for the children... we have to teach them, so that our tradition will be remain, and develop. Not to stop. – (P25, age 37, village Mawryngkhang)

The future is... to encourage people here to weave... So, my main objective is to restore the culture, the mindset in the people that they should love to weave. (P31, age 49, village Umjong)

...after ten years, maybe all of them, they are...improving. They will improve and then most of them, especially young ladies also, they will learn. They will learn how to make this Khad Ar Lyngdoh pattern. (P14, age 38, Korstep)

Previous research identified weaving as a criterion for marriage, where women with superior weaving skills had higher prospects of receiving marital alliances (Devi, 2010; Gailangam, 1997; Paokoi, 1988). However, no participant in the four villages from Ri-Bhoi mentioned the importance of weaving for marriage. The main motivation for weaving among the Khasi-Hima women weavers was related to clothing self and family, financial benefits, and cultural representation of their tribe. This is an important finding of this study, as it suggests that tribal affiliation of NERI women may set a context that shapes motivations to weave.

Most women in Ri-Bhoi villages could not afford to complete their education due to poverty, and inevitably ended up working in fields to support other family expenses. Engaging in weaving benefited weavers by providing employment, providing opportunities to earn an additional income, and reducing household expenses at the same time. Moreover, weaving is also considered to be a noble profession as it entails preserving tradition. Two participants P15 and P5 explain how engaging in weaving can be beneficial:

Especially this young ladies [*sic*]...they don't have a job. Those who drop out from school. Many of them [are] here because, since it's a village...they don't have, they cannot afford to go to school also. So, they simply, they are like umm, like farmer. And they [get] used to grow[ing] crops... But, it's not good for them. So, if they have a

chance to do this one [i.e. weaving], it's very very, maybe its [of] great benefit for them. (P15, age 26, village Korstep)

Those children who don't have a chance to go to school, they [should] involve [themselves] in this particular job. So that they will, by themselves, they are working. By themselves they will stand on their feet. (P5, age 28, village Mawryngkhang)

Achieving a sense of fulfillment (joy, happiness, and pride). Women weavers from all four villages shared a common ideal of love and passion for weaving which encouraged and motivated them to establish weaving as a daily activity.

Sometimes they are against me weaving [*sic*]... But since I love to weave, no one can stop me. I keep on doing with that [i.e. using the shuttle loom to weave][*sic*]. Even my husband, sometimes he get[s] hot [i.e. angry], with what I am doing, but still he [is] trying to help me [by] making this thing [i.e. shuttle loom]. (P4, age 43, village Korstep)

Participants' initial drive to weave began by watching their mothers or grandmothers weave. In their eyes, however, weaving was not just a duty for women; rather it carried a sense of pride. Weaving established a sense of responsibility within participants, as they regarded themselves keepers of the tradition. They sensed that they contributed to the society by creating garments that their family and others could wear to depict their culture. The capacity to symbolize their cultural traditional through clothing brought immense joy and pride to the participants:

I feel satisfied doing this because it depict[s] my culture, our own culture. So, I feel proud that I know how to weave. (P4, age 43, village Korstep)

I am very proud. They are asking, my friend and all, how [do] you know? Without nobody teaching you [*sic*] to weave. They appreciate me. You [have] no mother, no father, but I know how to weave. (P22, age 60, village Mawryngkhang)

Modernization, which introduced faster modes of production and easy access to raw materials helped promote weaving among women in Ri-Bhoi. As more women engaged in weaving, traditional textiles became more easily available. Weaving, which carried with it a sense of pride and joy, could now be used to promote their culture outside their village

boundaries. This was accomplished by selling traditional textiles to other members and outside markets where people of Ri-Bhoi and the Hima tribe could be represented.

I feel very happy if people will wear. And not only happy, I will keep a good smile for what I have done [*sic*]... when [I am] going for wedding[s], I see people wear my clothes. So, my nose become[s] big! [i.e. she becomes proud]. I feel happy! (P31, age 49, Umjong)

Yes! Yes! Since it is our traditional, our traditional dress...if other people also, if other people buy, then, when they use that, then we feel umm, happy and proud. This is our Khad Ar Lyngdoh dress! (P15, age 26, village Korstep)

...but when I see everybody putting and they [are] use[ing] for function and all, I feel very proud, I'm happy! (P27, age 90, Mawryngkhang)

Weavers developed a sense of pride, joy, and happiness from selling their hand-woven textiles to others. Seeing other community members adorn and appreciate their hard work further enhanced participants' happiness. The pride and joy associated with weaving traditional textiles and the ability to represent culture through textiles motivated weavers to teach younger generations to weave as well. A few weavers specifically noted feeling extremely happy and proud to see their children weave and continue the tradition of weaving.

I feel happy. This is our cloth. When I sees it in the market, I feel happy. I feel good....That they too know how to make the clothes. Not just the mother[s] know. All the children, they also know. That's why I feel happy. (P21, age 63, Mawryngkhang)

...I am happy to see my children, still uh, knowing, take[ing] care, [and] then...restore[ing] our culture. That we will never forget our identity, who we are. And I am [very] much happy that this should be done uh, generation to generation. (P31, age 49, Umjong)

Grounded theory model of construction cultural identity through preserving and adapting different aspects of the core elements

Analysis of the five themes presented in the previous section (i.e. exchange of knowledge, social support, role of weaving in everyday life, symbolizing tribe and culture, and, joy, pride, and happiness) revealed a connection between each theme and construction of a cultural identity related to weaving among women handloom weavers in Ri-Bhoi. The five

themes are characterized as core elements within the socio-cultural environment that contributed to developing a cultural identity. Each core element consisted of traditional ideals and modern ideals. Traditional ideals are aspects of the core elements considered to hold historic value and passed on from one weaver generation to the next. However, modern ideals are segments of the core elements that were adapted to suit social and economic changes. In the context of this study, social and economic changes are studied from the perspective of modernization.

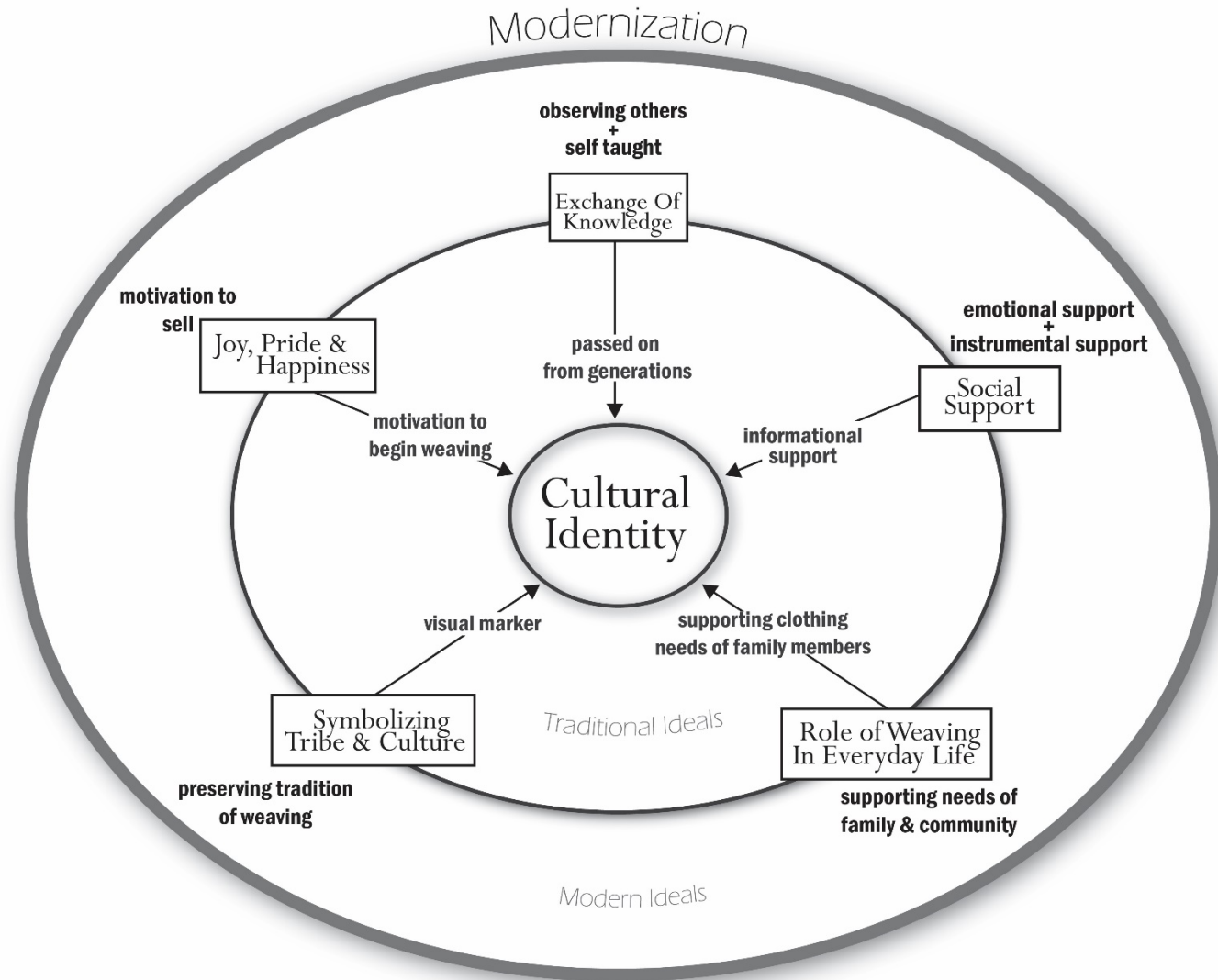


Figure 10. Constructing cultural identity of weaving through preserving and adapting core elements

Figure 10 represents the grounded theory model developed to depict how women weavers in Ri-Bhoi develop an identity around weaving and how modernization influences this development. At the core of this figure is Cultural Identity. On the periphery of the first circle surrounding the core, lie the five core elements - exchange of knowledge, social support, role of weaving in everyday life, symbolizing tribe & culture, and joy, pride & happiness, discussed in the previous section. The area within the first circle denotes traditional ideals associated with the five core elements. Modernization lies beyond the outer most circle as it is an external force that acts on each core element to influence cultural identity. The area within the outer circle depict modern ideals, i.e. how Ri-Bhoi women weavers adapt aspects of their core elements, creating modern ideals to reconcile changes introduced through modernization. The core elements are located on the periphery of the first circle to show its association with both traditional and modern ideals. All three aspects, i.e. the core elements with traditional and modern ideals, work together in developing a cultural identity for Ri-Bhoi women weavers.

From a theoretical perspective, social theorists suggest two outcomes as a result of modernization; the convergence of traditional values leading to modern values, causing a decline and maybe extinction of traditional values, or the persistence of traditional values (Inglehart & Baker, 2000). In the context of this study, modernization supported the development of certain modern ideals associated with the core elements. For example, in the case of social support, the traditional ideal associated with social support revolved only around informational support. With the influence of modernization, elements of social support also included emotional and instrumental support. In line with DiMaggio's (1994) modernization theory, where traditional values continue despite socio-economic changes, modernization in Ri-Bhoi did not lead to the decline or extinction of information support, which is a traditional ideal. In the context of this

study, both modern and traditional ideals related to social support were necessary for weavers to develop an identity around weaving. This is indicative of all five themes or core elements. The weavers supported the persistence of certain aspects of the core elements (i.e. the traditional ideals) while adapting other aspects of these elements (i.e. modern ideals) to reconcile changes brought on due to modernization. Hence, findings from the present study support Inglehart & Baker's (2000) modernization theory that suggest change in certain cultural values and persistence of certain traditional values due to modernization. Therefore, for Ri-Bhoi women weaver, both traditional and modern values play an important role in developing cultural identity.

Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to understand the evolution of traditional handloom industry in Ri-Bhoi due to modernization and how women weavers develop their identity by participating in this industry. Findings from the study showed a change in the Ri-Bhoi traditional handloom industry, mainly a shift from floor loom to shuttle loom, and type of yarns from hand dyed cotton, silk and wool to synthetic yarns, due to implementation of government initiatives that aim at improving current handloom production practices and weaver livelihood. The changes seem to have benefitted weavers in Ri-Bhoi, improving their production capacity, ease of weaving, and encouraging more women to engage in weaving.

Literature on modernization theories suggested, the decline and maybe extinction of traditional values due to establishment of modern values, or the persistence of traditional values, as an impact of modernization (Inglehart & Baker, 2000). Analysis of data from Ri-Bhoi indicated that weavers adapted traditional values to meet with social, economic, and political changes due to modernization. This adaption did not lead to extinction of traditional values, as all weavers shared ideas about preserving traditions and appreciation for traditional values. It

also did not lead to complete persistence of traditional values either. The process of adaption can be understood from the five themes identified during data analysis: (a) exchange of knowledge, (b) social support, (c) role of weaving in everyday life, (d) symbolizing tribe and culture, and (e) joy, pride, and happiness. These five themes have attributes that are considered traditional as well as those that have been adapted to suit women weavers in a changing societal context – that is, a society influenced by modernization. Overall, the five themes contribute towards developing an individual weaver identity, and as these principle values are shared, they can be understood as cultural identity of women weaver of Ri-Bhoi. Changes in weaving practices are validated among community members through authentication. However, authenticity has been studied to be a culturally constructed concept that is original to its creator or possessor (Handler, 1986), negotiating meanings that range from “geniuses and originality to accuracy and truthfulness” (Theodossopoulos, 2013, p.339). Ri-Bhoi weavers considered their adapted products to be authentic by maintaining the use of traditional motifs, even though yarns, colors and placement of motifs have changed.

It is important to note the limitations of this study. The first major limitation was a language barrier. As the researcher was not well versed in the local dialect of Khasi, she had to rely on translators throughout data collection process. This posed a barrier to communicate original ideas and thoughts as both researcher and participants were limited by the translator’s fluency in both languages. Second, data were collected over three weeks. Longer immersion in the field or a longitudinal study may be beneficial to understand an evolving handloom industry and the people involved in it, as most regions are constantly evolving through influence of economic change. Further, because cultural identity is established through shared values and beliefs among all member of the community (Sapir ,1938), it will be important that future

research on Ri-Bhoi weaving include the perspectives of male members of the community. Moreover, understanding how the local political and economic systems could influence the weaver community could further add valuable insight. Future studies also may examine other tribal communities in NERI to compare and contrast cultural diversities among tribes in the region, as findings related to the weaving traditions of one tribe cannot be generalized to other tribes. Additional research could provide deeper understanding of these tribal communities and their traditional values.

From a broader perspective, documenting changes in the NERI handloom industry is important to catalog a historical timeline of traditional handloom cultures and their practices. There is little research that focuses on people in tribal communities in NERI, and most work that has been undertaken has focused upon initiatives that have been put in place to support and help weaver and handloom workers (Bortamuly, & Goswami, 2015; Boruah & Kaur, 2015; Chakravorty, Dutta, & Ghose, 2010; Devi 2012; 2013). However, there is a lack of information that investigates the weavers' perspectives. Although work highlighting these initiatives is important in that it provides support for the NERI handloom industry, understanding the weavers' perspective is equally important, as weavers are the backbone of the handloom industry. This study is one of the first empirical studies that analyze women weavers' identities and their experiences with weaving in NERI. Considering weavers' perspectives can provide important information regarding initiatives that may be most effective to support as well as preserve their cultural traditions. In an economy that is constantly evolving and changing, with large scale and cheaper production methods, it is essential to understand how clothes are a representation of who we are and where we come from.

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APPENDIX I - RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

In this study, I am interested in understanding (i) the significance of weaving to women weavers in Ri-Bhoi, and how involvement in the handloom industry helps them develop their cultural identity, and (ii) to understand and document how modernization has changed/evolved the traditional handloom industry in Meghalaya. The questions that I ask may not address everything that you would like to discuss, so please feel free to add any information from any facet of your experience that you find pertinent. Also, if there are questions that you would prefer not to answer, please let me know.

How do Ri-Bhoi women weavers see traditional weaving as contributing to their cultural identity?

- What does weaving mean to you?
- When do you weave?
- Where do you weave?
- How much time do you spend in a day weaving?
- How long have you been weaving?
- Why do you weave?
- Do you satisfy any psychological or basic needs by weaving?
- What motivates you to weave?
- Do other members of your family weave? Who?
- How did you learn to weave? Who taught you?
- Do you have friends that weave?
- Is weaving valued in your community? If yes, how?
- Is weaving valued in your family? If yes, how?
- Are there any special meaning associated with textile that you weave? If so, please explain.
- Do you work independently or are you apart of any co-operative society?
 - If working with a co-operative

- Who do you work with?
- Why do you work with the co-operative?
- What benefits to you get by working with the co-operative?

How has modernization changed/evolved the handloom industry in Ri-Bhoi?

- Do you weave for domestic, commercial or both purposes? Why?
 - If purpose is commercial
 - Why do you weave textiles for commercial purposes?
 - What are the pros of weaving for commercial purpose?
 - What are the cons of weaving for commercial purpose?
 - How do you feel when you see others wearing your traditional textile?
 - What motivated you to weave for commercial purposes?
 - Where do you sell your products and how?
 - What motivates you to weave and sell products to other people?
- Has your intention to weave changed over time? If so, how?
- What does weaving mean to you today? Has it changed from the past? If so, how?
- What are the biggest challenges concerned with weaving that you face today?
- Do you engage in teaching the next generation to weave? If so, how and who do you teach?
- How important do you consider carrying forward the tradition of weaving? Why?
- How do you think the next generation should learn weaving?

How has modernization changed/evolved the handloom industry in Nongthlu?

- How has the handloom industry changed due to introduction of modern techniques of production?
 - Have the methods of weaving changed from when you learned it? If yes, how?
 - Where do you get the raw materials to weave from?
 - Have the raw materials used for weaving changed over time? If so, how?
 - How long does it take for you to weave?
 - If you are using new technology to weave, how much do you weave in a day? Has this changed over time? If so, how?

- Have you purchased any new technology for weaving?
 - How has using the new technology changed your weaving process?
 - Why did you buy the new technology?
 - Did you self-finance your purchase or did you receive some funding for it?
- What future (in terms of new technology) do you see for the handloom industry of our community?
- How has increased demand for handloom textiles changed the handloom industry?
 - Do you take part in any events that promote your hand-woven textile? If so, which ones and why?
 - Where are your products being sold now? Where would you like them to be sold in the future?
 - Who do you weave for?
 - Can anyone buy your woven textiles?
 - Based on the market that you sell your products to;
 - How much do you weave in a day? Has this changed over time? If so, how?
 - How do you procure the raw materials needed? Has this changed over time? If so, how?
 - How does it change your weaving practice? Has this changed over time? If so, how?
 - How has the demand for your product changed over the past 10 years?
 - What future (in terms of demand for your handloom products) do you see for the handloom industry of our community?

APPENDIX II - VERBAL CONSENT FORM

VERBAL RECRUITMENT/CONSENT TEMPLATE: No Identifiers Collected

In conversational style, ...

Hello, my name is Rebecca Maria Dias and I am a graduate student from Colorado State University in the Design and Merchandising department. We are conducting a research study on the handloom industry of NERI. Specifically, the purpose of this study is to understand how weaving is significant to developing your identity (personal and cultural), and how changes in the handloom industry, i.e. modernization by introduction on new technology and increase in market demand has changed or evolved your association with weaving. The title of our project is Modernization and Cultural Identity. A case of Meghalayan women handloom weavers. The Principal Investigator is Dr. Sonali Diddi, from Colorado State University in the Design and Merchandising department, and I am the Co-Principal Investigator.

We would like to ask you a few questions about your weaving process and how significant weaving is to you. Participation will take approximately one to one and a half hours. Your participation in this research is voluntary. If you decide to participate in the study, you may withdraw your consent and stop participation at any time without penalty.

Would you like to participate?

If yes: Proceed.

If no: Thank you for your time.

We will not collect your name or personal identifiers. When we report and share the data with others, we will combine the data from all participants. There are no known risks or direct benefits to you, but we hope to gain more knowledge on how involvement in the handloom industry helps shape the cultural identity of weavers, and how modernization might bring about a change in the cultural identity associated with weaving. Understanding these effects can help preserve certain aspects of the handloom industry that is vital to sustaining cultural heritage.

Offer to give the participant your contact information and the Participant's Rights contact information (If you have questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact the CSU IRB at: RICRO_IRB@mail.colostate.edu; 970-491-1553.). This could be verbally or in the form of a study summary sheet/cover letter or contact card.

APPENDIX III. CONSENT FORM

Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Colorado State University

TITLE OF STUDY: *Modernization and Cultural Identity. A case of Meghalayan Women Handloom Weavers*

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:

*Sonali Diddi, Ph.D., PI, Assistant Professor, Department of Design & Merchandising, Colorado State University
sonali.diddi@colostate.edu*

CO-PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATORS:

*Rebecca Maria Dias, Graduate Student, Department of Design & Merchandising, Colorado State University,
rmdias@colostate.edu*

WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH? *You were recruited as a study participant because you are at least 18 years of age and are a handloom weaver in Meghalaya.*

WHO IS DOING THE STUDY? *This project is conducted by a research team consisting of faculty and students of Colorado State University.*

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY? *(i) To understand the significance of weaving to women weavers in Meghalaya, and how involvement in the handloom industry helps them develop their cultural identity, and (ii) to understand and document how modernization has changed/evolved the traditional handloom industry in Meghalaya.*

WHERE IS THE STUDY GOING TO TAKE PLACE AND HOW LONG WILL IT LAST? *This study will take place in a private location of your choosing (e.g., your home). The total time commitment expected is approximately 1-1.5 hours.*

WHAT WILL I BE ASKED TO DO? *You will be invited to participate in a face-to-face interview. Face-to-face interviews will take place in a location of your choosing (e.g., your home). Interview questions will focus upon topics such as your current weaving techniques and practices, significance of weaving to you and your community, changes you have overserved in weaving practices over time, and your perception of the future of handloom industry in Meghalaya. With your permission, we also may take digital photographs of your handloom textiles and your weaving activities.*

ARE THERE REASONS WHY I SHOULD NOT TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY? *You should not participate in this study if you do not meet the inclusion criteria or do not feel comfortable with the research procedures described above.*

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS? *It is not possible to identify all potential risks in research procedures, but the researchers have taken reasonable safeguards to minimize any known and potential, but unknown, risks.*

ARE THERE ANY BENEFITS FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY? *There will be no direct benefit to you. However, through this research we hope to gain more knowledge on how involvement in the handloom industry helps shape the cultural identity of weavers, and how modernization might bring about a change to cultural identity associated with weaving. Understanding these effects can help preserve certain aspects of the handloom industry that is vital to sustaining cultural heritage.*

DO I HAVE TO TAKE PART IN THE STUDY? *Your participation in this research is voluntary. If you decide to participate in the study, you may withdraw your consent and stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.*

WHO WILL SEE THE INFORMATION THAT I GIVE? *We will keep private all research records that identify you, to the extent allowed by law. For this study, you will select a pseudonym (i.e., a fictitious name) to be used in reports of this research, so that the only place your name will appear in our records is on the consent and in our data spreadsheet which links you to your pseudonym. If necessary, the Colorado State University Institutional Review Board (CSU IRB) and the study investigators may inspect these records. In addition, for funded studies, the CSU financial management team may also request an audit of research expenditures. For financial audits, only the fact that you participated would be shared, not any research data. All original data will be stored in the PI's research file storage and destroyed after three years of the study completion.*

CAN MY TAKING PART IN THE STUDY END EARLY? *If, for any reason, you wish to end your participation early, feel free to request the study investigator to make arrangements.*

WILL I RECEIVE ANY COMPENSATION FOR TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY? *No, you will not receive any compensation for taking part in this study.*

WHAT ELSE DO I NEED TO KNOW?

The researchers would like to audiotape your interview to be sure that your comments are accurately recorded. Only our research team will have access to the audio recordings, and they will be destroyed when they have been transcribed. Do you give the researchers permission to audio record your interview? Please initial next to your choice below.

- Yes, I agree to be audio recorded _____ (initials)
- No, do not audio-record my interview _____ (initials)

NOTE: Since the researcher will be visiting North Eastern Region of India where a language unknown to the researcher is spoken, this script will be translated to the local language before the interviews are conducted with the help of local contacts in the region. We will only audio-record the interview if both participant and translator give consent.

The researchers would like to seek your permission to digitally photograph your handwoven textiles and some textile weaving processes that you share during your interview. These images will be used for presentation of the research (e.g., included in academic presentations or publications). If photos are used for presentation purposes, participants' faces will be blurred so that participants cannot be recognized. Do you give the researchers permission to digitally photograph your weaving activity and textiles, and to use them in research publications/presentations?

- Yes, the researchers may digitally photograph my weaving activities and my textiles _____ (initials)

- Yes, the researchers may use my weaving activities and my textiles in research presentations/publications _____ (initials)
- No, the researchers may NOT digitally photograph my weaving activities and my textiles _____ (initials)

WHAT HAPPENS IF I AM INJURED BECAUSE OF THE RESEARCH? *The Colorado Governmental Immunity Act determines and may limit Colorado State University's legal responsibility if an injury happens because of this study. Claims against the University must be filed within 180 days of the injury.*

WHAT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS? *Before you decide whether to accept this invitation to take part in the study, please ask any questions that might come to mind now. Later, if you have questions about the study, you can contact the investigator, Rebecca Maria Dias at rmdias@colostate.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact the CSU IRB at: RICRO_IRB@mail.colostate.edu; 970-491-1553. We will give you a copy of this consent form to take with you.*

Your signature acknowledges that you have read the information stated and willingly sign this consent form. Your signature also acknowledges that you have received, on the date signed, a copy of this document containing 3 pages.

Signature of person agreeing to take part in the study

Date

Printed name of person agreeing to take part in the study

Name of person providing information to participant

Date

Signature of Research Staff

APPENDIX IV - IRB APPROVAL



Research Integrity & Compliance Review Office
Office of Vice President for Research
Fort Collins, CO 80523-2011
(970) 491-1553
FAX (970) 491-2293

Date: January 9, 2019

To: Sonali Diddi, Ph.D., Design & Merchandising
Rebecca Maria Dias, Design & Merchandising

From: IRB Coordinator, Research Integrity & Compliance Review Office
(RICRO_IRB@mail.colostate.edu)

Re: Modernization and Cultural Identity. The Case of Meghalayan Women Handloom Weavers

Funding: NA

IRB ID: 101 -19H **Review Date:** January 9, 2019
This project is valid from three years from the review date.

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) Coordinator has reviewed this project and has declared the study exempt from the requirements of the human subject protections regulations with conditions as described above and as described in [45 CFR 46.101\(b\)](#):

Category 2 - Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless: (i) information obtained is recorded in such manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and (ii) any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

The IRB determination of exemption means that:

- **This project is valid for three years from the initial review.** After the three years, the file will be closed and no further research should be conducted. If the research needs to continue, please let the IRB Coordinator know before the end of the three years. You do not need to submit an application for annual continuing review.
- You must carry out the research as proposed in the Exempt application, including obtaining and documenting (signed) informed consent if stated in your application or if required by the IRB.
- Any modification of this research should be submitted to the IRB through an email to the IRB Coordinator, prior to implementing any changes, to determine if the project still meets the Federal criteria for exemption.
- Please notify the IRB Coordinator (RICRO_IRB@mail.colostate.edu) if any problems or complaints of the research occur.

Please note that you must submit all research involving human participants for review by the IRB. **Only the IRB or designee may make the determination of exemption**, even if you conduct a similar study in the future.