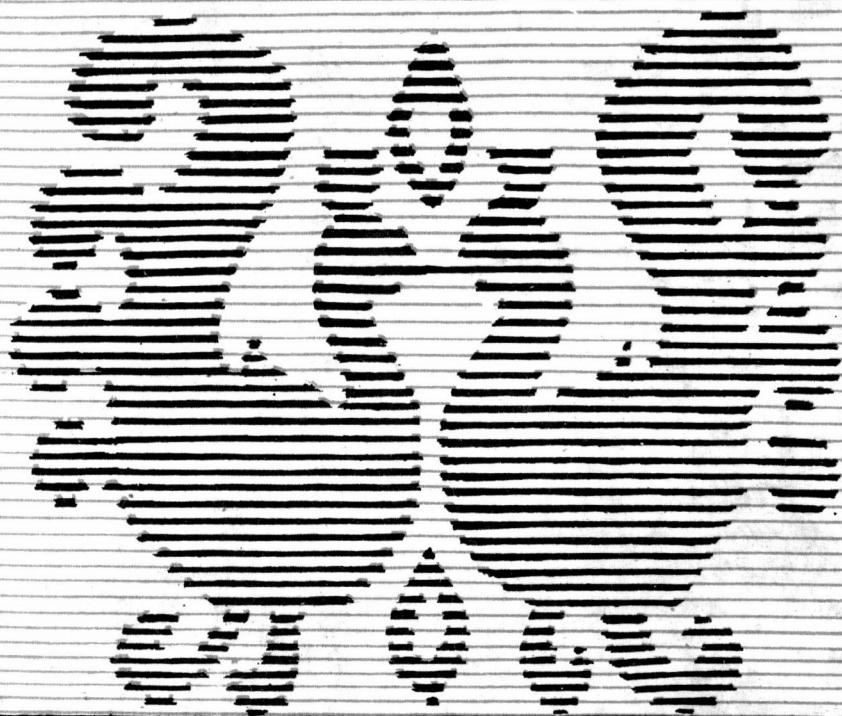


G. K. GHOSH
SHUKLA GHOSH

TEXTILES

OF NORTH EASTERN INDIA



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North Eastern India is a unique land fondly called the land of seven sisters representing seven unique states known for creativity, artistic genre and culture. Textile in this land is unique in the sense that all types of textiles technology from primitive to modern co-exist equally creating wonderful spectra of designs. What is most exclusive being every woman barring a few are the expert weavers and caste barrier or tribe barrier never comes on the way. It is in this land that all four varieties of silk is produced besides vegetable fibres like cotton, rhamie, nettle and so on, in addition to a limited extent wool also. The book also unique in its own way which deals with textiles of seven States in seven separate chapters covering technology, designs, materials and so on. It is all the more unique since it comes from authors who made detailed study on this region.

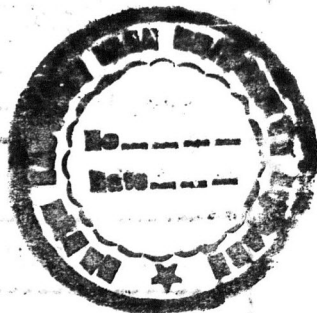
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Price : Rs. 250.00

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FIRMA KLM PRIVATE LIMITED
CALCUTTA * * * 2000

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PUBLISHED BY :

Firma KLM Private Limited
257-B, B. B. Ganguly Street
CALCUTTA-700 012
INDIA

NF
746.0954
GHOSH

First Edition : Calcutta, 2000

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Class by

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Transcribed by

10/1/02

ISBN 81-7102-095-X

COMPUTERISED

SV-10-11
F232-4606

Printed by :

AKSHAR MALA
85, Hari Ghosh Street,
Calcutta-700 006, INDIA



2000 * * * ATTACUTTA

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INTRODUCTION

Covering our body be due to style or as essential requirement started thousands and thousands years back either with hides of animals or with barks of various trees. We have a story of Adam and Eve who became naked when they consumed forbidden fruit offered by Satan and thereafter tried to cover their body first by hand then by leaves and finally with barks. Spinning the yarn from various natural fibres however started not for requirement of our fabrics but by fisherman who first spun yarn to knit fishing nets to catch fish. Therefore the two essential terms Roti and Kapda had linkage during ancient days.

North Eastern India, otherwise known as the land of Seven Sisters is a unique land which is home of various ethnic groups. It may be considered as mini world or a replica of our planet since almost all the world religions, culture, ethnicity and technology are existing here, obviously it is meant textile technology. Yet the land is facing unique problem of war and insurgency while the creativity and craft also flourished. Historically the land was never in peace and always used to have turmoil as we see today. The same situation prevailed even during epic era as described in various legends. Therefore concept of insurgency is never new to India's North East.

In respect of textile technology the land has unique features. Starting from raw material angle it gives us cotton and ramie the two unique vegetable fibres that gives us superior fabrics. The land also produces cloth with varies counts. Though upto limited extent it also gives us woollen garments with highest degree of quality. It is the only land in entire world where all four varieties of silk viz, Mulberry, Muga, Endi and Tassar is available. There are also unique types of bark fibres found in this region which are not available elsewhere.

Technically too, the people of this land could develop the technology in their own way with varied degree and as on

today we find various forms of textile technology are found in these seven tiny states. It is despite the fact that the land was neglected both by British rulers as well as Government of Independent India, no matter what has been claimed. In respect of cotton right from hand picking of seeds to traditional roller gin, upto modern gin have been found in various places of North Eastern India.

Similarly technology of spinning rights from drop spindle, spinning wheel, ambar charkha, six spindle charkha and modern spinning mills exists. In respect of rhamie they continue with retting method and decortification and finally spun into yarn in their own way. In respect of silk spinning, drop spindle, improvised chowdhury charkha, new model charkha and modern spinning mill co-exists. Though filature reeling yet to arrive, traditional reeling and modern basin reeling has been adopted and co-exists. Unique features of textile technology in this land is in respect of weaving. Traditional loins loom (Indonesian tension loom), pit loom and country loom co-exists with equal honour with improvised frame loom, Nepali loom and even semi automatic loom. In some cases it is observed, the people are intelligent enough to combine two diverse technologies to form new type of loom viz, Barua loom, Manipuri loom etc. to give a new concept. What is unique being none of these implements are declared obsolete and continues with equal enthusiasm.

If any scholar therefore wants, to study range of various textile technology including its stages of development he can succeed only if he studies North Eastern Indian. Even in respect of dyeing and printing this region gives the ready answer. Even the concept of Vegetable dye which has been forgotten elsewhere this region still preserved it. When demand of global market is reversing back to tradition it is further necessary to develop textile of this region.

Further more, unique feature of this region being there is no class distinction among those who are involved in this trade. Every woman except those of Khasis of Meghalaya and Ben-

galees are weavers, spinners and reelers. Even a princess has to weave her own cloth. Thus when we encourage textile technology in this region, we also encourage women development. The textile technology here represents concept of socialism in true sense.

It was therefore felt necessary to go for a brief study on textiles of North Eastern India. The book deals with textiles of Seven States in Seven different chapters since each State has their own unique features in respect of technology, style and design. It is hoped this humble attempt may help future scholars who shall in their own way open up the Pandora's box.

25th August, 1997

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Ramie thrives well on sandy loam or loam soils with pH 5.5 to 6.5 and likes humid climatic, rainfall ranging from 2600 to 3000 mm. The crop is much sensitive to frost, hail storm and water logging conditions. The temperature of summer should vary between 25°C to 31°C and that of winter above freezing point.

In Assam it grows wild in plenty since it has favourable soil and climatic condition for its growth. Traditionally this fibre was used in Assam by blending with endi or spun silk from mulberry waste but rarely pure ramie cloth was produced. In spite of its quality and lustre it remained as a neglected plant due to complicated method of extraction and as on today ramie tradition is becoming decaying tradition since ramie growing areas has been encroached by tea gardens which has commercial importance.

Harvesting is done when lower parts of the plant becomes coppery in colour, lower leaves become yellow and start shed.

CONCLUSION

In India it is normally believed that mostly Western Zone comprising of Gujarat and Maharastra, is primely textile region followed by Coimbatore belt of Tamil Nadu and some places in North. But truely speaking North Eastern India should have been considered as primary textile zone where every women is involved in some form of textile operation with every house having a loom.

After going through textile tradition of various states in previous chapters one may feel he or she has passed through a textile wonder land. Excellency lies with this zone being almost all materials are put to use and yarn and cloth of various counts are being provided. Every stages of technology co-exists in this small piece of wonder land. Even certain material used in this region are not found anywhere else.

When world market is gradually moving more towards ethnicity and tradition with ecofriendly products perhaps this zone can give us a ready answer.

In the golden year of independence, let us take a pledge not to neglect this zone further and go for all out effort to develop it since it is this zone that shall help us to capture global market if its textile be developed further retaining its spirit. It shall give us many solutions including insurgency since present day law and order problem is basically an off shoot of sense of neglect.

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