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A Study on Assamese Traditional Ornaments of Barpeta District of Assam

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Abstract

*Assamese Ornaments are one of the most important parts of Assamese Culture. It is generally made by Gold, Silver and Gold-Plated. Assamese Ornaments were originally used by **Ahom Kings and Queens** of Assam and from that period these Ornaments have occupied an honorable position in Assamese Society. 'Gold Washing' and 'Manufacturing of Ornaments' were two important ancient Industries of Assam. Assamese Traditional Ornaments (ATOs) are typically hand-made, and the design mostly depicts the Floral and Faunal treasures of the region. Barpeta District of Assam is recognized as one of the most important hub of manufacturing Assamese Ornaments. Therefore, the present study shows the History of ATOs, Manufacturing and Marketing of ATOs and the importance of ATOs as a Cultural Resource of Assamese people. Finally, the problem with sustainability of ATOs compared with the Branded Jewellery has become a big challenge as noticed during the study. The study is based on both Primary and Secondary data and have come to the conclusion that ATOs has good market potentiality for its unique design, shape, size and look. But need of the hour is to have effective marketing and Brand name for ATOs to make it acceptable for the local as well as other customers, and the researchers have suggested two Brand names like '**Gahana**' or '**Alangkar**' in this respect.*

Keywords: Manufacturing, Marketing, ATOs, Barpeta District, Design, Problems.

Introduction: The Beauty of Assam is Awesome. The legendry Bhupen Hazarika also expressed the beauties and diversities of Assam in his song, that lyricist as:

*Asom amar rupahi gunoru naai xexh.....
Bharatore purba dixor xurya uthaa dexh.....*

.....

Thus, the beauty of Assam is found in its culture, tradition, dresses, ornaments, festivals, foods, zapi etc. which reflects the rich heritage of Assam and that makes the various products of Assam as a unique piece in the country. And Assamese Traditional Ornaments

(ATOs) also reflects the beauties of Assam or it could be said that, the beauties of Assam makes the ATOs beautiful.

Ornaments are playing a very significant role in the day to day life of the Assamese women not only in the ancient times but also at the present times. Assam is not only famous for its Greenery, Wildlife, Bihu festival, One Horned Rhinoceros, Tea Gardens, Brahmaputra River, Hotted Chilli (also called Bhootjolokia), Eri and Muga Silk, and for Legendary Bhupen Hazarika, but it is equally famous for **Assamese Traditional Ornaments** (ATOs) or Jewellery for its unique Design and Making. Among all forms of Jewellery, Gold Jewellery is very famous in Assam. Barpeta is rich in manufacturing of Assamese Traditional Ornaments(ATOs). At present there are more than 35 no.s of ATOs manufacturing units, which are totally engaged and devoted for making ATOs and that covers around 155 Craftsmen in those units.

Assamese Ornaments is inspired by Flora and Fauna, surroundings objects such as Musical Instruments etc. Assamese Traditional Ornaments design is completely hand-made. In making of ATOs design, the mainframe is made of silver which is covered by thin gold covering. The ornaments designs are simple and gemstones such as Ruby, Pearls, Meenakari and Diamonds are also used. In fact, Assamese women are great lovers of ATOs. The most popular pattern used in Assam is black, green and red enameling which is done on Gold Jewellery. Some of the popular Assamese Traditional Ornaments include earrings with exquisite Lokaparo, Keru, Thuriya, Jangphai, Long keru, Sona or Makori;an array of necklaces including Golpata, Satsori, Jonbiri, Bena, Gejra, Dholbiri, Doogdoogi, Birimoni, MukutaMoni, Poalmoni, SilikhaMoni and Magardana and diversified rings including senpata Horinsakua, Jethinejia, Bakharpata and others and some designs are exclusively found in this region only.

The Manufacture of Gold Ornaments, as well as gold-washing flourished in medieval Assam during the reign of the Ahom dynasty. Gold dust was abundantly found in the sands of different rivers of the state, but mainly from the river Subansiri, one of the major tributaries of the Brahmaputra. During the rule of the Ahom kings, gold-washing on the banks of the Subansiri (meaning “flow of gold”)was a major profession of the sonowal kacharis.

Jorhat, Nagaon, Barpeta Districts of Assam are the main manufacturer of ATOs. Jorhat and Sonari in upper Assam, Nagaon in center Assam and Barpeta in lower Assam have been major the hubs of manufacturing of ATOs throughout the centuries. The Jewelleries are called ‘Sonari’ in Assamese language. Their technique of making Ornaments bears resemblances to the traditions of South East Asia, much more than to other nearby parts of India itself.

Uses of Assamese Jewellery: Both Assamese men and women used to wear Assamese ornaments in different parts of their body. The female put a bracelets made of either gold or silver on the wrists of their hands is known as Gam-Kharu. Most of the neck ornaments (Hara) are made of Beads. The necklace with bigger beads called Matamani and larger bead

with drum shaped ornaments are called a madal. Ornaments which are put on arm called Baju or called Ujanti. They put on the nose by women is called Nakphul. An ornament which is used by women on their forehead just below the parting of the hair is called citipoti. Ornaments which are used as a necklace include-Jonbiri, Dolbiri, Silikha, Madali, Gejera, Bana, Kathal kuhia madali, Dugdugi, Sonahar, Galpata, Galakantha, Chandrahar, Rupadhar, Gajamatihar etc. Several types of ear ornaments are used which includes Lokapara, Thuria, Dighalkeru, Bakharnakeru, Ukakeru, Titakariakeru, Jangphaikeru, Karnaphul etc. Different kinds of Angathi includes-Jethineguri Angathi, PatiaAngathi, Babariphulia Angathi etc. (Saikia, 2016).

ATOs is completely handmade and can be made by only specialized hands. Assam ornaments have traditional designs, which are skillfully designed by jewelers of the Assam which make it unique and available only in Assam. The main frame of Assamese ornaments is made of silver and then it is covered with very thin gold covering. This particular kind of ornaments is very affordable and easy to maintain. Barpeta (Lower Assam) where the people wore ornaments that has intricate gold design with one or two stone. People of Barpeta mainly wear ornaments which are made of silver material with gold plating (assamsilkshopping.com/Assamese).

Objectives:

1. To study the history of Assamese Traditional Ornaments (ATOs).
2. To study the Manufacturing Process and changes in Design of Assamese Traditional Ornaments with the changes of time.
3. To study the Marketing of Assamese Traditional Ornaments in the study area.
4. To study the Problems with Sustainability of Assamese Traditional Ornaments Compare to the Branded Jewellery.

Methodology: The Study is based on both Primary and Secondary information. The Primary data was collected through field survey, interviewing the people who basically involved in ATOs business. For this study a Semi-Structured Schedule is prepared for collecting relevant information and the Secondary data have been collected from Report, Census, and Internet, Magazine and Books etc.

About The Area of the Study: Barpeta District, which is rich in ATOs not only in the State but also in other parts of the Country. The total Geographical area of Barpeta is 3,245 square kilometers, this District is bounded by International border i.e. Bhutan Hills in the North, Nalbari District in the East, Kamrup and Goalpara District in the South and Bongaigaon District in the west. The Barpeta District, headed by the Deputy Commissioner, has two sub-divisions–Barpeta and Bajali. Barpeta is located between 91 degree 'E longitude and 26 degree N latitude.

The Barpeta is thickly populated town and according to 2001 census, the population was 1,64,7201 with a density of population of 508 per sq. K.M which increase to 1,693,190 as per 2011 census. There are more than 35 no.s of ATOs manufacturing units, which are

totally engaged and devoted for making ATOs and that cover around 155 Craftsmen in those units (Field Survey).

Fixation of Sample: For the purpose of the study the craftsmen who engaged in ATOs are the population size. Ongoing through field survey and on consulting few ATOs units owners and craftsmen regarding the sources of others craftsmen engaged in this line it has been found that there are 155 craftsmen who are engaged in making ATOs out of these population size, the researchers have visited 60 respondents i.e. the craftsmen engaged in ATOs, that leads to 38.7 percent of the population of the study. Now, these 60 respondents again have been chosen by Multi-Stage Random Sampling Method. First of all ATOs units have been classified according to the nature of items manufactured by them and that counts to 5 sub-group i.e. some units are making only Gamkharu, Keru, Silver ATOs, Gold Plated ATOs, all types of ATOs. So the sample has been drawn from each sub-group of units of ATOs and the details has been given in following table to have a representative Sample.

Tables No-1: Showing Fixation of Sample:

| Sl No. | Types Item Manufacture | No. of Units | No. of Respondents | Sample size |
|--------|------------------------|--------------|--------------------|-------------|
| 1 | Gamkharu | 7 | 20 | 12 |
| 2 | Keru | 4 | 15 | 12 |
| 3 | Silver ATOs | 6 | 35 | 12 |
| 4 | Gold Plated ATOs | 7 | 35 | 12 |
| 5 | All Types of ATOs | 10 | 50 | 12 |
| | TOTAL | 35 | 155 | 60 |

Source: Primary data.

History of ATOs: The states Assam, is rich in manufacturing of Gold Ornaments dates back to several centuries. Some of the popular Assamese Traditional Ornaments include earrings with exquisite Lokaparo, Keru, Thuriya, Jangphai, Longkeru, Sona or Makori; an array of necklaces including Golpata, Satsori, Jonbiri, Bena, Gejra, Dholbiri, Doogdoogi, Birimoni, MukutaMoni, Poalmoni, Silikha Moni and Magardana and diversified rings including senpata Horinsakua, Jethinejia, bakharpata and others. Some designs are exclusively found in this region only.

The ATOs is typically handmade and the designs are mostly depict floral and faunal treasures of the region. Traditional designs of ATOs are simple but decorated with vibrant red gem stone, ruby or mina. Black, Red and Green colours on Gold Jewelleries are most favourites among the buyers, these colours also dominate the traditional dresses of tribes and communities of the northeastern states.

Some designs of ATOs are directly derived from the elements of tribal culture. These designs are motifs sometimes have found space in these ornaments directly, and sometimes by blending. The Jangphai, Keru and Gamkharu were originally tribal ornaments. Lokaparo, which is an ornaments with two sets of twin pigeons placed back to back in gold, mina or ruby was originally worn by high profile male dignitaries of the royal Ahom Dynasty.

Gamkharu, a part of gold bangle, originally used by male only, now has formed an essential ornament of the Bihu dance costume of girls.

The ATOs can be divided in two types:

- a. Traditional style of Assamese Ornaments.
- b. Modern style of Assamese ornaments.

Based on the use of raw materials used for manufacturing the ATOs can be categorized as:

1. Pure Gold Jewellery where gold is used as raw material
2. Gold plated Jewellery where gold is platted over silver
3. Gold imitation Jewellery

Manufacturing and Marketing of ATOs: In Barpeta (Lower Assam), different types of Assamese Traditional Ornaments are made. Now a days due to change in their culture in respect of their dress, people demand change upon the traditional style of Assamese ornaments. So they have made some modern style of Assamese ornaments according to demand of the customers. In Barpeta, where the people wore ATOs which has intricate gold design with one or two stone. People of Barpeta mainly wore ornaments which are made of silver material with gold plated.

The market of the Assamese ornaments is very good. It is a very respective business. The craftsmen of the Barpeta who are involved in this business get a heavy profit. They prepare the ornaments in their home and sell to the customer, at every district of Assam as well as other state of India. Now a day the demand of the Assamese ornaments are gradually increasing and they also occupied the National level market and craftsmen earns good amount of profit from this business.

Making Process: For preparing Assamese ornaments craftsmen are generally found to use manual method. These are very prestigious traditional ornaments of Assamese people and are mainly prepared by “Sonari” group of people of Assamese and Bengali community. In formation of this ornaments gold and silver both metal are generally used.

In case of gold metal 99% pure gold (24 carats) is generally used. For using pure gold these ornaments are generally known as “Kacha Sonar Gohana” or “Pat Sonar Gohana”. But in Barpeta ATOs are made of Silver with Gold Plated.

In this preparation process gold is generally through with the help of machine to smoother up. After smoothing the gold, it is cut into required size and packing by white paper and after packing the pieces of gold, there are hilted by haturi (hammer) and other two different types of small instruments used by the goldsmith. Then the pieces of gold will be ready to use in the preparation of ornaments.

In case of silver metal, different type of elements are mainly prepared by silver, such as “Tar”, “Vissile” and “Pat” which are the most important elements for the formation of ATOs. Without these three important elements, the ATOs cannot be made. From these three elements of silver, two must be used in the formation of ornaments to form a particular

design; 'Pine' is generally used. 'Pine' is a strong quality of paste which is formed the mixture of silver, tam and bronze. To enhance the quality and beauty of these ATOs items, here special colour is used which is generally known as 'Mina'. Besides these some of different types of colourful stones are also used here. After pasting or using the stones and 'Mina' through 'Nuoni' and Kanchani, the pure gold is generally used outside the 'Stone' or 'Mina'.

Some different types of colourful small size balls beads which are generally known as 'Moni' are also used in the ATOs items. According to size, colour and quality of the balls they are known as 'Bakharuamoni', 'Balmoni', 'Desimoni' etc. Here a very small plastic thread is used to stitch the balls and prepare the necklace. Some pictures of making process of ATOs:





ATOs Manufactured in Barpeta District: In Barpeta District, different types of ATOs are made. Now a days due to change in their culture in respect of their dress, people demand change upon the traditional style of Assamese Ornaments. So they have made some modern style of ATOs according to demand of the customers. The ATOs can be divided into two types.

1. Traditional style of Assamese Ornaments.
2. Modern style of Assamese Ornaments.

Table No. 2: Some Popular Items of ATOs:

| Traditional style | Modern style |
|-------------------|---------------|
| Lokaparo | Sing set |
| Junbiri | Pipa set |
| Doogdogi | Square set |
| Galpata | Borfee set |
| Keru | Dhanseera set |

| | |
|----------|--------------|
| Thuria | Maduli |
| Gamkharu | Monimala set |

Source: Primary Data.

Pictures of Some ATOs:



Jun Dhansira Necklace



Paat Kolosi Necklace set



Dhanxeera Ring



Doogdugi Ring



Dice japi pendant set



Gamkharu



Match Box Necklace set



Barpetia Japi Necklace set



Junbiri Golpata Necklace Set



Necklace Set

Instruments used in the preparation of the ATOs: Haturi, Bhati, Niary, Daish, Phali, Karsani, Kati, Nuoni, Lap, Thina, Bhakhor, Lamp of candle, Flame of fire. Some of the pictures of instruments:



Marketing of ATOs: The market of the ATOs is very good and it is a very respective business. The craftsmen of the Barpeta who are involved in this business get heavy profit. They prepare the ornaments in their jewellery shop, home and sell it in every districts of Assam. They sale their products door to door in every towns and also sale their product through whole seller. They also sale their products to various showrooms of Assam like Jorhat, Sibsagar, Dibrugarh, Tinsukia, Golaghat, Lakhimpur, Tezpur, etc. The products

manufactured by the Barpeta craftsmen are also sale by the agents, these agents who act as middlemen are generally the friends or relatives of the cluster artisans and Guwahati is the largest market for the Jewellery manufactures in Barpeta.

The ATOs has an unprecedented demand during the marriage months of November to March. There is also a sufficient demand for jewellery during local festival of Bihu, Durga Puja and Eid.

Sustainability Problems: The Craftsmen/Artisans of Barpeta engaged in ATOs making and marketing are facing lots of problems owing to the competition with modern jewellery. The fastest growth of Branded Jewellery in the market is one of the major problems for the craftsmen as it has immense ill-effect on the manufacturing and marketing of ATOs. Thus create problems to sustain in the market and to earn for their livelihood for the craftsmen. There are certain other sustainability problems with ATOs such as- Raw Material, Machine, Unskilled Craftsmen, No Updated Design, Outdated Tools, Packaging etc. are the major issues of such problems. The popular Branded Jewellery like Gitanjali, Tanishq, D'dams are creating immense effect and challenges for ATOS to sustain in the market.

Suggestions: The researchers like to put-forward some suggestions to win-over the challenges:

1. Craftsmen involving in ATOs should be trained in the skill and design based workshop, so that, they can improve their skills to face and sustain the competition before them.
2. The Craftsmen should participate in the trade Fairs, National and International exhibitions to exhibits their products and to explore their business.
3. The Craftsmen should develop a particular *Catalogue* displaying the various model (depicting design/shape with products number for easy identification) and designs of ATOs, which will help the Craftsmen in making ATOs and for the buyer to get unique ornaments from different craftsmen and will restore the traditional looks of the ornaments.
4. To promote ATOs regular and proper advertisement is very important and only traditional marketing process will not served the purpose. Some *web-site* and other IT savvy techniques should be followed for the massive and cost-effective advertisement for ATOs.
5. As Brand plays an important role, thus Government should intervene into the matter and on discussion with Craftsmen regarding branding of ATOs can take some initiative in this regards, which will attracts customer towards ATOs and will gives lives for the sustainability of ATOs.
6. The Researchers like to suggest two Brand names in this regard for ATOs i. e. "*GAHANA*" and "*ALANGKAR*".

Conclusion: ATOs is one of the most prestigious and gorgeous handicraft of Assamese Culture. To study about the Barpeta ATOs is a great learning and enriching experience. From this study it is found that the craftsmen of Barpeta District are engaged in traditionally gorgeous Assamese Jewellery business. The Barpeta Jewellery faces stiff competition with

other cluster in Assam like Nagaon and Jorhat. Due to lack of new technology and modernization the craftsmen of Barpeta face problem as it required huge time in making the ornaments. The craftsmen are not skilled in training; there is a dearth of highly skilled craftsmen. The craftsmen should be trained in the skill and design based workshop so that they can give competition to other products. Craftsmen faces problem during the manufacturing of ATOs where they has to work in the open shed, tools are outdated and they work in smoke. For that to overcome this problem the development of new technology is required. With planned intervention, if we move together can build 'Barpeta Jewellery' into a Brand name, it will help to create new contemporary products. Further, State Government should take some measure to promote ATOs to the National and International level.

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