

Media Communique

Indigenous Karbi Weavers Showcase Karbi Handlooms to Promote Cultural Heritage and their Nature-Culture relationship

Kohora, August 24: Assam's leading biodiversity conservation organisation Aaranyak, Community-Based enterprise Pirbi, Chandrasing Rongpi Memorial High School and local communities, in collaboration with Orient, Guwahati, organised a vibrant Karbi Handloom Exhibition on Wednesday at Chandrasing Rongpi Village, Kohora, Karbi Anglong.

The Karbis are one of the significant ethnic communities of Assam, with strong cultural tradition and cultural ethos towards nature stewardship. Their Handloom practices is one of the signifiers and metaphors of the Karbi cultural system and represents the Karbi Community. Karbi women are proud weavers as they weave their own attire and also for the family. The purpose of the exhibition was to showcase traditional Karbi handloom products weaved by the women of the Kohora and Diring area, and to identify weavers and assess their product for quality improvement, product diversification and subsequently plan for capacity building and market linkage of suitable products.

“As many as 49 Karbi weavers from ten villages of Kohora and Diring area of Karbi Anglong with up to 300 pieces of artistic handloom items participated in the exhibition. In addition, a group of three expert Karbi indigenous weavers from around Diphu also joined the event to demonstrate their special Eri silk (*Hon-ki* in Karbi) products as well as skills associated with it. Ms. Kave Engtipi, Ms Sang-et Killingpi and Ms Mirbon Teronpi demonstrated various traditional handloom products using Eri silk and also skills of Eri textile spinning using both traditional drop spindle method and modern tabletop spinning machine. The local weavers expressed their happiness to observe such skills and also expressed their desire to adopt those skills.”, Aaranyak stated through a press release.

During the inauguration ceremony, Mrs. Sashikala Hansepi, an entrepreneur and a renowned Karbi singer, Diphu, officially cut the ribbon on the exhibition in front of other dignitaries and attendees, including members of the Karbi community of the host village and nearby villages as well as traditional attire connoisseurs from the area. She addressed about the intricate relationship of the Karbis and nature which are reflected upon the different motifs and design of the Karbi handloom and textiles. "The Karbi community has a rich handloom and textile tradition," said Ms. Sashikala. "Every occasion calls for a different set of attire, starting with different age groups, gender and social customs and status in a Karbi society and these are identified through different motifs and textiles design" She added.

Joshna Terangpi, Project Officer with Aaranyak, detailed the background and purpose of the Handloom Exhibition, and the role of women in preserving the handloom heritage of Karbis.

Mr Dilip Kathar, Tribal Culture Research Officer of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council, Diphu, spoke on the occasion about the cultural significance of various motifs used in Karbi handloom as well as taboos associated with it. Mr Kathar also referred to the Karbi folklore about the origin and practice of weaving among the Karbis.

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Mr. B Mili, Sr. Assistant Director (H), from the Office of The Development Commissioner (Handicrafts), Northeastern Regional Office also graced the occasion as a special invitee and expressed his satisfaction with the quality of the handcrafted products and its potential to reach markets. He stressed that the local weavers take the benefit of various schemes by the Government of India, first by registering themselves with the commission.

The exhibits were evaluated for its representation of cultural values through motifs, quality and type of threads, quality of the products and also about knowledge of the weavers about various motifs and their uses by a number of evaluators. Two young Karbi Textile Engineers - Mr. Sarlongkiri Tisso and Ms. Sangita Teronpi from Diphu interacted with the weavers, shared their knowledge and also evaluated the products.

Dr. A. K. Das, Professor, Department of Design, IIT Guwahati also evaluated handloom products and spoke about improved loin looms the institute designed for women in other areas that make it convenient and increase their efficiency while weaving. He also shared his observations on the importance of understanding the culture of a community, about their handloom and textile practices and appreciated Aaranyak and weavers for the exhibition.

The exhibits were also evaluated by two prominent designers of India, Ms. Maitryee Das and Ms. Mausami Sharma. They shared their observations related to Karbi Handloom and textile, and the waiting opportunities for the women in systematic diversification of the same to reach unexplored markets in regional, national and international arenas. The experts expressed their support to the local weavers through Aaranyak's initiatives on handloom.

Mr. Pankaj Sarma, Marketing executive of Orient, Guwahati, briefed about Reshmi and Cotton yarns produced by the company. also distributed Cotton and Reshmi yarn to all the exhibitors present in the program. He also recommended the weavers to use better yarn in their products to increase comfort of wearing and market value.

Mrs. Robina Teronpi, one of the exhibitors from Diring Lekthe village, shared that they are very fortunate to attend this program and that they were able to learn new things about handloom and their own motifs. She hoped that she would be able to share her knowledge with other women and contribute to the revival of cultural ethics and different motifs used by Karbis.

Mrs. Kareng Rongpipi from Chandrasing Rongpi village, sharing her experience of participating in the exhibition expressed that the women were able to learn traditional beliefs and taboos about different motifs and designs which most of them were not aware of and were disappearing among current generations.

Ms Moina Kramsapi, an eco-tourism entrepreneur and a member of PIRBI Biodiversity Business management, a community enterprise, coordinated the event. The program was made successful with the team effort of all the Aaranyak members, Joshna Terangpi, Deepika Chhetri, Jayanta Roy, Sarlongjon Teron, Bhaskor Barukial, Avinash Phangcho, Leenthoi Laishram, Rangina Phangcho, Prokash Engti, Ratul Das, Rowel Engti, Purno Singnar and also the local youths for volunteering in this program. Dr. Jayanta Sarma and Dr. M Firoz Ahmed of Aaranyak guided the team in all steps to achieve its objectives.

Aaranyak offers its gratitude and bestows the success of the event to all the enthusiastic participation of the women from different villages as well as the invited guests, evaluators and village community as a whole. It is worth mentioning that Aaranyak is committed to support the local communities living in the villages of the Kohora and Diring River Basins for their sustainable livelihoods through its Community-based Natural Resource Management Programme. Aaranyak is also grateful to its donors IUCN-KfW and USFWS for its support to the ongoing CBNRM Programme.

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