

Assamese Jewellery and Its Status and Prospect: A Case Study of Ranthali Village of Nagaon District, Assam

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Abstract: *Assamese ornaments are one of the most important parts of Assamese culture. It is generally made by pure gold. Assamese ornaments were originally used by Ahom kings and queens of Assam and from that period these ornaments has occupied an honorable position in Assamese society. Gold washing and manufacturing of jewellery were two important ancient industries of Assam. "Ranthali" village of Nagaon district is recognized as one of the most important pocket for manufacturing Assamese jewellery. Therefore in the present work an attempt has been made to represent the importance of Assamese ornaments as a cultural resource of Assamese people and tries to depict how Ranthali village develop their economic condition through jewellery business and in what way it is develop as a cultural tourist spot in the state by developing this industry. This study is based on both primary and secondary data.*

Keywords- *Assamese jewellery, different types, economic opportunities, making method, prospect of tourism*

I. Introduction

The state Assam rich in the tradition of manufacturing gold jewellery dates back to several centuries. The jewellery is typically hand-made, and the designs mostly depict floral and fauna treasures of the region. Traditional designs of Assamese jewelleries are simple but decorated with vibrant red gemstone, ruby or mina. Black, red and green colors on gold jewelries are looking very gorgeous and these colors also dominate the traditional dresses of tribes and communities of the northeastern states.

Assamese ornaments are one of the most important parts of Assamese culture. It is generally made by pure gold. From the historical point of view this gold was locally available flowing down with the water of several Himalayan rivers, of which Subansiri is the most important. In fact, a particular tribe of people, the "Sonowal Kachari" were engaged only for gold washing in these rivers.

Gold washing and manufacture of jewellery were two important ancient industries in Assam and gold was abundantly found in the sands of different rivers of the state. During the rule of Ahom kings gold washing was done on an elaborate scale and the state derived considerable income from it.

In manufacturing Assamese jewellery large quantity of gold was used in making ornaments. F.C Hanniker in his monograph on gold and silver wares of Assam mentioned that Assamese jewellery is by no means without merit. No doubt it is very crude and precious stones are use and very well cut. But it is quaint and characteristics. The Assamese goldsmiths are not satisfied with 14 carat or even 18 carat gold and many of the Assamese ornaments have occupied a precious position among the good collection of Indian wares.

The ornaments are very much beautiful to look at and are a very prestigious part of Assamese culture. These were used by both Assamese men and women during the Ahom period.

II. Study Area

Ranthali village which is famous for "Assamese jewellery business not only in the state but also other parts of the country. This village is located approximate 8 kms away from Nagaon town near Pakhimoria development block under Dewdhar Panchayat. Ranthali village is located between 92⁰40' E longitude and 26⁰16' N latitude

The "Ranthali" village of Nagaon district is thickly populated village. According to 2001 census, 1946 people are living in this village which is increase to 2032 person in 2011 census. Almost 90 percent of the total families are engaged in Assamese Jewellery business.

Ranthali is a very small village of Nagaon district which is about 8 kms away from main centre of Nagaon town. It is one of the important place of Assam where different types of colorful Assamese jewellery are made. Jewellery making is the main occupation of the villagers of this particular village of Nagaon district.

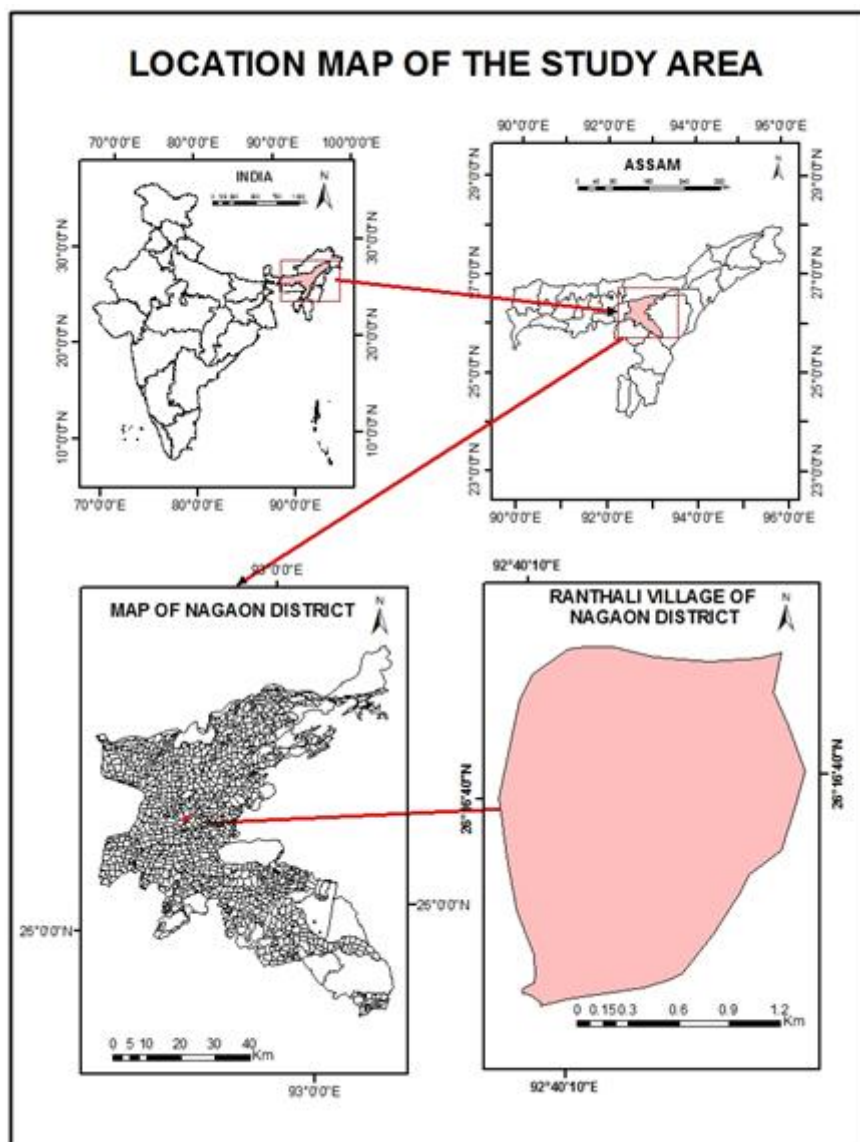


Fig. 1: Location Map

III. Objectives

The main objectives of the study are

1. To examine the status of Assamese jewellery in the context of Assam
2. To highlight how Assamese jewellery occupy an important position for their economic growth
3. To understand the manufacturing method of Assamese jewellery and their uses
4. To examine the future prospect of the jewellery business

IV. Methodology

The present work is a micro level study based on both primary and secondary data and information. The Primary data are collected through field survey, interviewing the people who basically involved this jewellery business. For this study a structured survey schedule is prepared for collecting relevant information and the Secondary data are collected from different statistical Report, Census, and Internet and also from a few books. Some existing related literature has been used for understanding the problem. The study is mainly based on primary data, which was generated by carrying out door to door survey with the help of a Survey Schedule.

Status Of Assamese Jewellery In The Context Of Assam

Assam is known to be a provenance of a sedate and chunky type of golden jewellery with unique feature of eminence. The craft flourished under the patronage of the Ahom kings but decline in the subsequent period. Manufacturing of Assamese jewellery concentrates in few selected pockets among the state of Assam.

Major pockets of this craft include Ranthali village of Nagaon district, Sonarigaon of Jorhat district and Borpeta town of Barpeta district.

Enamellings on gold were extensively done by SUNARS mainly at Jorhat district. There were many SUNARS in Jorhat district who involve to work on gold only. The enamel was of three kinds, a dark blue, dark green and white but red and yellow were sometimes used. Another important place where gold and silver work was carried on extensively was Barpeta district of Assam. During Ahom period local goldsmiths were involved to making jewellery but their work was not very fine. So Ahom king Rudra Singha imported goldsmiths from Benaras for manufacture better quality of gold and silver ornaments.

In Jorhat district craftsmen are classified into three classes. The class I craftsmen are identified as those who are engaged in the craft as a profession. Generally class II workers dependent on the class I workers for assigning their works. Class III craftsmen are working under the concern of class I craftsmen. In the case of Barpeta district two classes of craftsmen are found. The class I workers are taking the work as a business outlook and class II workers are those who are petty workers and taking the craft as only option possible for subsistence.

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 as Madal. Ornaments which are put on arm are called as Baju or Kankan. Ornaments put on the ankle joints of the feet are called Nupur. The rings put on the toes of the feet are called Ujanti. The ornament 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, Dholbiri, Silikha madali, Gejera, Bana, Kathal kuhia madali, Dugdugi, Sonar har, Galpata, Galakantha, Chandrahar, Rupadhar, Gajamati har etc.

Several types of ear ornaments are used which include Lokapara, Langkeru, Thuria, Dighal Keru, Bakharna Keru, Uka Keru, Titakaria keru, Jangphai keru, Karnaphul etc.

Different kinds of Angathi includes- Jethineguri Angathi, Patia Angathi, Babari phulia Angathi etc.

Methods Of Preparation Of Assamese Jewellery

For preparing Assamese jewellery 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 community. In the 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 "Kecha Sonar Gahana" or pat Sonar Gahana.

Here in the preparation process gold is generally through the help of machine to smoother up. After smoothing the gold, it is cut into required sizes and packing by white paper. After packing the pieces of gold, they are hited by the haturi and other two different types of small instruments used by the goldsmith. Then the pieces of smooth and fine plates of gold will be ready to use in the preparation of ornaments.

In case of silver metal, three different types of elements are mainly prepared by silver, such "Tar", 'vissile', and 'pat' which are the most important elements for the formation of Assamese jewellery. Without these three important elements, the Assamese jewellery cannot be made. From these three elements of silver, two must be used in the formation of ornaments. For joining these three elements 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 Assamese jewellery items, here special colour is used which is generally known as 'Mina'. Besides these some different types of colorful stones are also used here. After pasting or using the stone and 'Mina' through 'Nuoni' and Kanchani, the pure gold is generally used outside the 'stone' or 'Mina'.

Some different types of colorful small size balls beads which are generally known as 'Moni' are also used in the Assamese jewellery items. According to size, colour and quality of the balls they are known as 'Bakharua moni', 'Balmoni', 'Desimoni' etc. Here a very small plastic thread is used to stitch the balls and prepare the necklace.



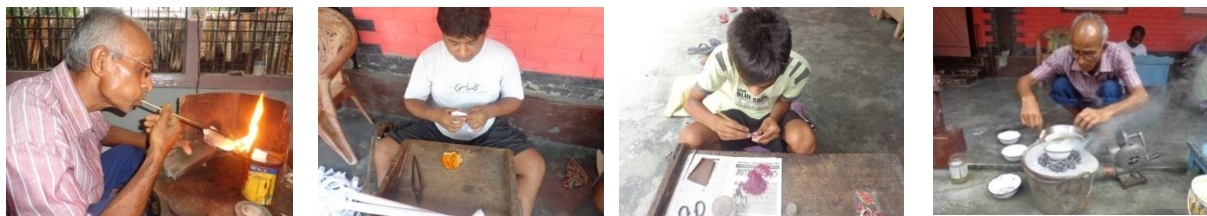


Fig 2 : Viewing few photographs of methods of preparing Assamese jewellery

Different types of instruments using in the preparation of the Assamese jeweler

- | | |
|---------------|----------------|
| Haturi | Bhati |
| Niary | Daish |
| Phali | Karsani |
| Kati | Nuoni |
| Lap | Thina |
| Bakhor | Lamp of candle |
| Flame of fire | |

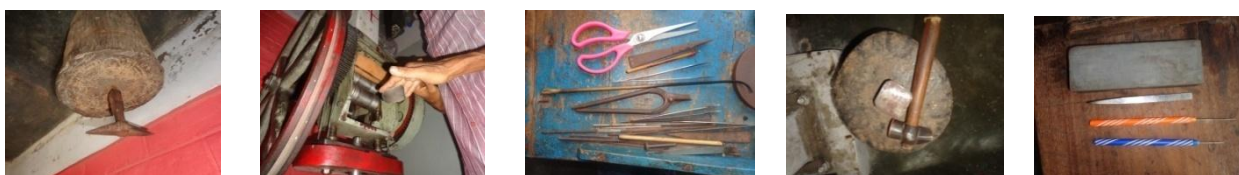


Fig 3 : Instruments used in making Assamese jewellery

Status Of Assamese Jewellery In Ranthali Village

Ranthali is a very small village of Nagaon district which is about 8 kms away from main centre of Nagaon town. It is the only place of Assam where different types of colorful Assamese jewellery are made. It is the only occupation of the villagers of this particular village of Nagaon district. In Ranthali village I have surveyed 47 households. From this survey I have found three class of worker engaged in jewellery business. The class I workers are those who involved the craft of jewellery as a profession. The class II workers are those when customers has given order to them then they involved in the craft of jewellery. The class III workers are petty workers who are dependent on class I workers for works to be assigned. From the surveyed household the class I workers constitutes 26.66%, Class II workers are 19.49% and 53.19% are petty workers.

Table 1: Showing Percentage Of Workers

Class of workers	Percentage(%) of workers from surveyed useholds
Class I	26.66
Class II	19.49
Class III	53.19

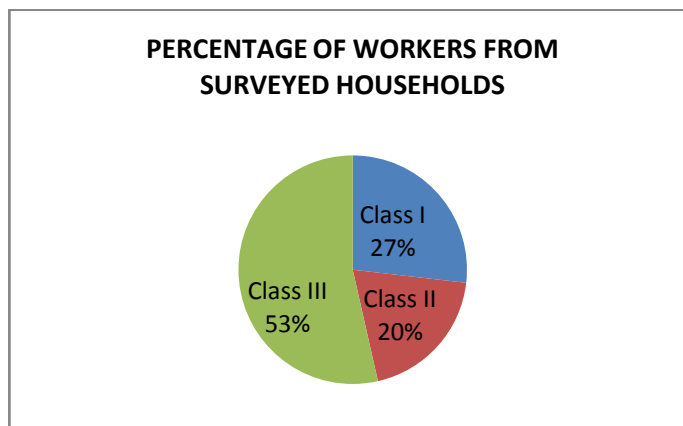


Fig 4: Showing percentage of workers

Income Pattern of the Craftsmen

In Ranthali village from the field survey it is found that 45% craftsmen earn below 5000 Rs per month, 38% craftsmen earn their between Rs 5000-Rs 10000 per month and only 17 % craftsmen earn their income above Rs 10000 per month. The following table shows the income pattern of the craftsmen.

Table 2: Showing Income Pattern Of The Craftsmen

Income Pattern	Percentage(%) of craftsmen from surveyed usehold
Below 5000	45%
5000-10000	38%
Above 10000	17%

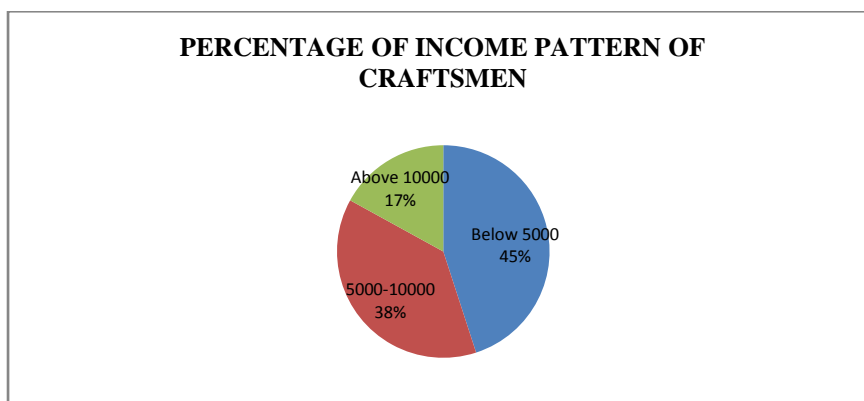


Fig 5: Showing income pattern of the craftsmen

Age Structure Of The Craftsmen

From the field survey it is found that 20% of the craftsmen fall in the age group between 20-30 years, 50% of the craftsmen are in the age group between 30-40 years and 30% of the craftsmen are in the age group between 40- 50 years. The following table shows the age structure of the craftsmen.

Table 3: Showing The Age Structure Of The Craftsmen

Age Group(Years)	Percentage(%) of craftsmen from surveyed usehold
20-30	20
30-40	50
40-50	30

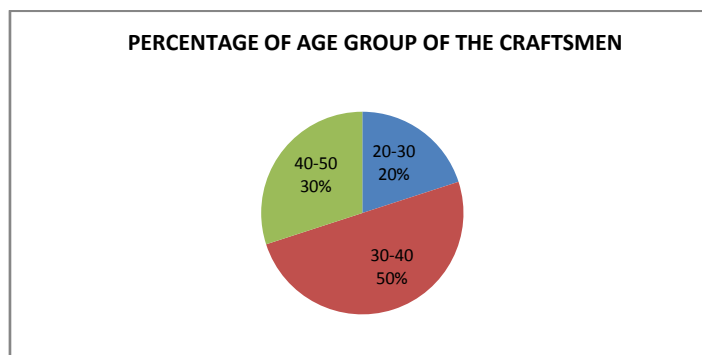


Fig 6: Showing age group of the craftsmen

Educational Status Of The Craftsmen

From the households survey it is found that most of the craftsmen are below HSLC level. 80% of the workers below HSLC level, 15% of the worker are HS passed and only 5% are BA passed.

Table 4: Educational Structure Of The Craftsmen

Educational status	Percentage(%) of the craftsmen
Below HSLC	80
HS	15
BA	5

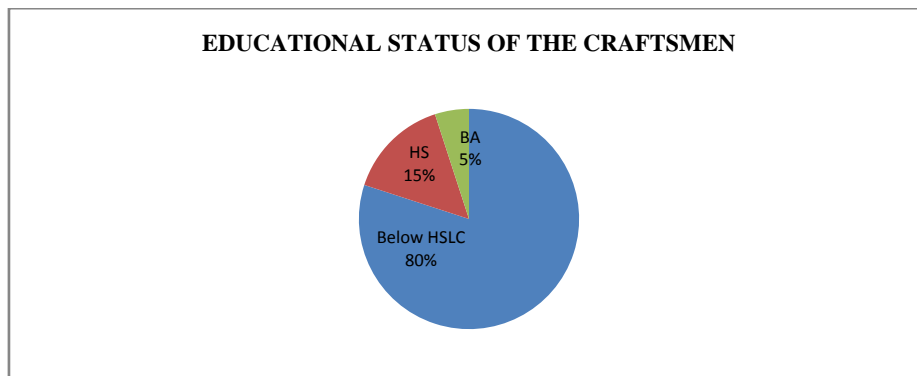


Fig 7: Showing educational status of craftsmen

Assamese Jewellery Manufactured In Ranthali Village

In Ranthali village, different types of Assamese 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. The Assamese ornaments can be divided in two types.

- (i) Traditional style of Assamese ornaments
- (ii) Modern style of Assamese ornaments

Table 5: Items Of Assamese Jewellery

Traditional Style	Wear
Gegera	Neck
Dhubiri	Neck
Lokaparo	Neck
Junbiri	Neck
Doogdugi	Neck
Galpata	Neck
Keru	Ear
Thuria	Ear
Gamkharu	Hand
Muthi Kharu	Hand

Modern style	Wear
Sing set	Neck
Pipa set	Neck
Square set	Neck
Borfee set	Neck
Dhanseera set	Neck
Maduli	Neck
Monimala set	Neck
Mes set	Neck

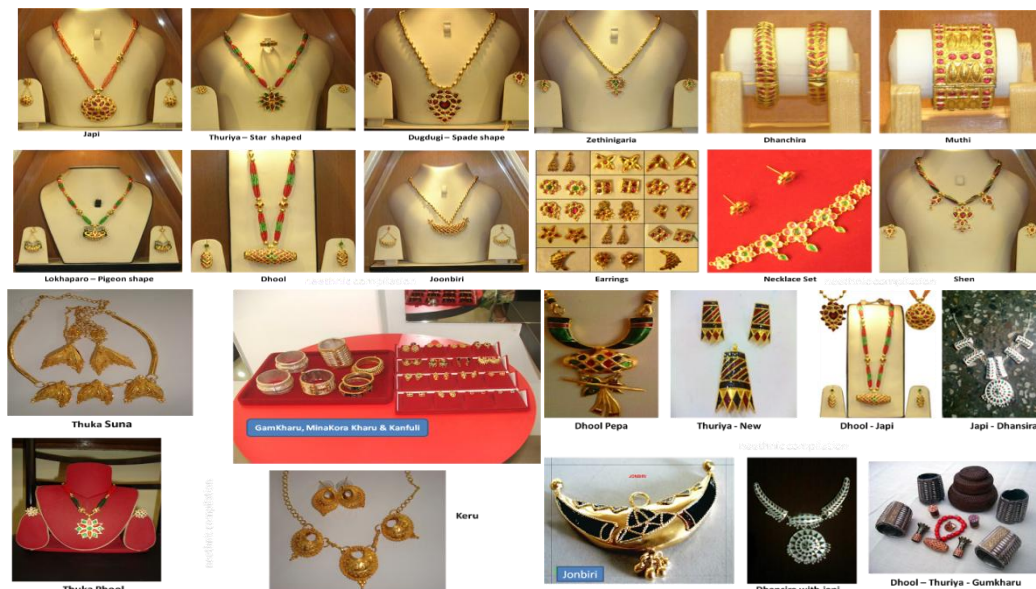


Fig 8 : Few designs of Assamese jewellery

Assamese Ornaments As A Tourist Attraction

The Assamese jewellerys are most prestigious and honorable property of Assamese people. It is one of the most important handicrafts of Assamese culture and can be considered as most attractive piece of art in gold. The price of the ornaments is very reasonable. The design of the Assamese ornaments is very much different from other ornaments available in the market. The design of these ornaments are mainly based on nature based

things like 'Junbiri' is look like half of the moon, Dhulbiri is like as 'Dhul or drum which is the main instrument of traditional Assamese Bihu festivals etc. Besides these, the replicas of local birds (Sen, Lokapara), flowers and leaves are also used as a design..

Thus, Assamese ornaments bear immense cultural significance and if we try, we can promote it as an important item of cultural tourist attraction for the tourist of different parts of our country. This precious and gorgeous piece of Assamese culture also has great demand even in outside the country. So the state govt. should take special care in promotion of this jewellery business which will also help and encourage the local craftsman of the region.

Market Of Assamese Ornaments In Assam

The market of the Assamese ornaments is very good. It is a very respective business. The craftsmen of the Ranthali village who are involved in this business get a heavy profit. They prepare the ornaments in their home and sell it every districts of Assam. They directly sale their products door to door every towns and also sale their product through whole seller.

Now a days the demand of the Assamese ornaments are gradually increasing day by day. They also successfully occupied the market of national as well as international level. In this way a profitable amount is earned by the craftsmen from this business.

The Major Findings Of The Study

The major findings of the study are

- The important attraction of this place is that the families of Ranthali village are engaged in traditionally gorgeous Assamese jewellery business.
- The economic condition of the villagers is medium.
- The tradition of preparing these Assamese ornaments of the local people of Ranthali village is very much old.
- The main reason behind this jewellery business is most of the family involved in this business to support their family and love for this craft.
- The village has tremendous potentiality for growth and development of cultural tourism.
- The infrastructure facility is very limited in the village with poor accommodation, bus services, water supply etc.
- The provision of financial support and facilities of marketing, training or promotion of cottage industries are not satisfactory as there is no such scheme from the state govt.

V. Conclusion

The Assamese ornaments have great demand and immense potentiality as a part of cultural tourism. It is one of the most prestigious and gorgeous handicraft of Assamese culture. Tourists are very much attractive to this type of traditional items.

The business persons of the Ranthali village are trying to display these ornaments at the shopping centers of the tourist hot spots such as Kaziranga, different type of pilgrimage centres and hill stations to sale their product in the peak season when maximum tourists come to these places. As the ornaments are very much beautiful to look at and not much expensive, it attracts both domestic as well as foreign tourists very easily.

The business persons of Assamese ornaments also has contract with some well known jewellery shops of the cities of Assam to sell their products. Like 'Gamkharu' is one of the most popular shop of Assamese jewellery at Nagaon district. In Guwahati 'ZANGPHAI' is one of the popular Assamese jewellery shop where most of the jewellery items bring from Ranthali village. To promote their business, proper publicity and marketing facility are required.

If we can promote it successfully, at both national as well as international market, it will give a great support to this household industry of backward rural areas.

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