CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

The research project has revealed many aspects of the batik industry of Sri Lanka. The potential for upgrading has been discussed extensively, which will affect the sustainability.

5.1 Current Situation on Sri Lankan Batik Industry.

Batik Textiles produced in Sri Lanka has contributed significantly to the Sri Lankan economy between 1970 to 1980. This has been established by information and data gathered in the study. The demand for batik started its decline when Sri Lanka adopted open economic policies in 1977 and allowed the imports of all kinds of textiles especially to service the apparel export industry. This was further affected by the accelerated violence and decrease in tourist arrivals after the 1983 communal riots.

It was important to assess the current status of Sri Lankan batik industry. According to gathered information, the results showed that the first company commenced in 1960. This somewhat proves that batik art was introduced to Sri Lanka by Soma Udabage, who learnt batik in Indonesia in 1959. According to data, most of companies started in between 1960-1980. During the decade beginning 1980 the survey does not show the commencement of new factories. All the companies are family born companies and most of them still are managed by members’ of the first generation.

Reductions of employment are common factor to the industry except a few mass scale manufacturers. Since this is a craft and was considered a cottage industry, no manufacturer had maintained records of fabric capacity, profit and loss account etc. They only have a rough idea developed with their years of experience. They were ignorant about any quality management system such as ISO 9000 or any standards such as o-eko tex

This industry lacks knowledge of design, technology and marketing. Although it has existed for more than 50 years, it does not show signs of maturity.
5.1.1 Environmental Impact Due to Batik

Environmental impact due to batik industry is very critical. Each dyeing that is used on the batik textile is followed by a thorough wash with cold or warm water. Each application of wax is washed off at a temperature higher than that of the melting point of wax and usually this is done by boiling. As a result, the process itself is very unfriendly towards the environment.

Except the few large scale manufacturers, all others drained waste water with chemicals to the neighbouring environment. Due to poor knowledge of hazardous ecological issues, these batik manufacturers did not bother about responsible waste water disposal and its management. Waste water was disposed through open drains to paddy fields by some manufacturers. Particularly in the Marawila area it was observed that waste water management was very weak and there were instances where children played using waste water due to poor or lack of knowledge and understanding of their parents. They are totally unaware of modern environmental practices. This is also due to lack of knowledge, training and reluctance to investment in the sector.

5.1.2 Use of New Materials and Technology

The industry used a limited number of fabrics types. 100% cotton poplin was the main material used, while 100% cotton voile, 100% silk and 100% viscose were used by a few manufacturers intended for the upper market segment.

Most manufacturers used 36” wide 100% cotton blue line poplin. The material was joined using seams, if they needed higher widths. They were not taught to source higher width fabric that is used to make garments without joints, nor did they try to find out other available fabrics. They had not ventured out of what they started their industry with.

This research has shown that batik practitioners can use new fabric types and cater to their customer offering a wider variety. Government support in terms of training and education to uplift this industry seems unavailable. There is also no incentive for these manufacturers to import their raw material requirements.
It was found that the technology used in the present day batik manufacture is very old and primitive. They have not thought of upgrading the technology or improving the productivity. The manufacturers tend to waste a lot of chemicals and auxiliaries due to the poor knowledge of related technology while no steps are taken to conserve energy in the process.

5.1.3 Quality of Designs and Manufacture of Batik in the Sri Lankan Market

Most of batik designs was based on traditional art. In the 1970’s, designs were very fine and decorative. During that time batiks became famous as a fine craft on fabric. Colour combinations were also very good. More than one month was spent to create a good quality batik design, that was unique. Good examples are Soma Udubage’s batiks. (personnel communication)

Today most of the designs are commercialized. They only spend a few minutes to draw or trace the design and produce a very common looking designs using similar or same colour. There are no fine lines and intricate designs any more. Thick paint brushes were used to apply wax and very easy and simple quick techniques were used for batik designing.

In the 70’s and 80’s most of the products were designed for foreigners who visited Sri Lanka. Because of this, they tried to maintain good quality. Today batik products are produced for the local market which is driven mainly by price. In these items, the stitching quality is very poor and sewing thread colours are not matched. Garment fit and appearance are not up to the marketable standard even with a very mature garment manufacturing industry.

Colour fastness properties of these textiles are poor. They are not aware of independent testing. Due to wrong dyeing techniques, practitioners’ are wasting dye, chemical and money, without achieving high quality products intended for niche markets. Although this is a lucrative business for a few, there seems no upward mobility of the industry because of the poor knowledge and conditions of many.
5.1.4 Batik Techniques used in Sri Lanka

Tjangting tools and brushes are used for waxing. All the designs are drawn by hands by skilled operators. Stamping, templates or pens are not used by Sri Lankan manufacturers even for repeated design motifs. Ordinary wooden frames are used with pins to hold the fabric while wax is applied. As a suggestion they can use simple clamping system to hold material to frame. Very primarily Kerosene oil cooker or firewood hearths were used for wax melting. For melting of wax a few of them were using double boilers and while others keep the pot on direct heat. When direct heating is applied they cannot maintain a constant temperature and by doing so energy is also wasted. This system can be improved by using electrical wax melting system or using or adjusting a small flame with gas burning device. Housekeeping of the workshops was very poor. They need to pay attention in maintaining good working conditions and environment, which is clean and neat. With the improvement of the working conditions and the outlook of the facility, the practitioner can attract subordinates for work, as most people are happy to work in clean and neat organization.

In the batik manufacturing process, cold water dyes such as Vat dyes and the napthols dyes were commonly used. Basic colours available in the market were used. Colours were not mixed due to colour master’s poor knowledge of dyeing and colour mixing. Some of the manufacturers were not following the proper dye recipes. All chemicals are mixed together initially and dyed without giving correct recommended time for dye fixation. Finishes or softeners were not used at all for better hand feel.

5.2 How Can We Improve the Current Situation of the Batik Industry?

To remain competitive, batik practitioners have to create for their customer a better value added products than their competitors and regularly implement innovative ideas, technology improvement and new designs that will transform the business to a sustainable one.

5.2.1 Niche Marketing

One of the recommended ways forward is niche implementing a niche market strategy. This will make firms more competitive because they will focus more on the target consumer. This helps a company compete against lower priced imports because the
company will be able to identify the most profitable market segments. The most important factor on which a firm needs to focus is to understand the consumer and the market segment. Niche marketing is usually used by smaller firms like batik because they can concentrate on establishing a strong image and position in their niche. (Buddhi batik is a good example). In my study, it was found that marking or marketing is one of the major problem related to batik manufacturing.

5.2.2 Innovation
Successful entrepreneurs must use systematic innovation, which consists of a purposeful and organized search for changes and in this systematic analysis of the opportunities such changes might offer for economic and social innovation.

Batik manufactures should seek, think, and generate new ideas beyond the status quo. Ideas can be generated from external resources such as clothing and textile organizations, other textile industries, from competitors, by establishing a “think tank” team to brainstorm ideas, by asking and answering vital questions in line with production, product improvement, customer service, customers’ needs and values, distribution, channel, training, brand positioning, customer segmentation, communication programs, staff employment, etc. Introduction of new production methods such as wax spraying, applying, or stamping tools, new dyeing machines, technologies, new innovative marketing strategies is essential.

5.2.3 New Technology and Government support.
Upgrading related technology among batik manufactures is one of the main requirements to upgrade Industry. Without adhering to very old systems they should think new ways with new technology. Because of their poor educational status, Government will need to employ competent and dedicated staff who will handle the task efficiently and effectively. This Government staff also highly related technology educated and they should learn new material sourcing strategies, new technologies and marketing concepts to cater to batik manufacturer.