



AN ANALYSIS OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS OF HANDLOOM WORKERS IN INDIA

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Abstract

Indian Handloom Industry is as old as humanity by itself. Handloom is an important cottage industry of India having glorious past and traditional value handed down from generation to generation. The Handloom Industry has a long tradition of excellence and unique craftsmanship. Because of typical design and colour combination, the handloom product has a special space in Textile Industry, hence handloom weavers were having good reputation in the world. Due to its ethnic and traditional designs Indian handloom products are very famous in European industries and have high demand.

Besides meeting one of the basic need of clothing this industry play a vital role in country's economy. The industry is an age old source of livelihood for millions people in the country. Around 4.3 million people are directly depending on the industry to eke-out their livelihood while many more millions of people are depending upon the subsidiary occupation connected with the handloom industry. This industry also generates indirect employment to dyers, twisters, construction of work shed and acquisition of looms and accessories. But the standard of living of weavers on Handloom Industry is very poor. So the present study has been conducted to study the socio-economic conditions of the handloom workers in India, mainly based on the results of the Handloom Census 2009-10 and puts forward some policy options for improving the welfare of the handloom workers. Direct comparison with the results of the earlier censuses was not possible as those censuses did not canvass data on the social indicators of handloom workers.

Key Words: *Handloom Industry, Socio-Economic Conditions, Average Income, Welfare of handloom weavers.*

Introduction

In the last 100 years the handloom sector has accommodated many socio-economic changes in its fold, and has been able to provide employment to lakhs of families in India. Handlooms form the second-largest economic activity in India after agriculture. Around 4.3million people¹ are directly depending on the industry to eke-out their livelihood while many more millions of people are depending upon the subsidiary occupation connected with the handloom industry.

With a long tradition of excellence in its craftsmanship, Indian Handloom is said to have dated back to the ancient ages. August 15, 1947, marked a turning point for the country's handloom weavers. Mahatma Gandhi's use of the charkha, or the spinning wheel, as a symbol of national regeneration and the subsequent focus on the handloom weavers during the freedom movement was largely responsible for the breakthrough.

Later, it was a fragile, bespectacled man in a dhoti, called 'half-naked fakir' by Churchill, who jumpstarted the revival of village handloom and handicrafts. Gandhi's vision has outlasted the grandeur of Five-Year Plans and industrialization drives in terms of employment-generation capabilities.

State intervention in the form of financial assistance as well as development and welfare schemes has helped it withstand the pressures and competition as a result of economic and technological developments and advancements.

More recently, in December 2010, NCAER completed the Third National Census of Handloom Units and Allied Activity Workers for Development Commissioner (Handlooms), ministry of textiles, aimed to update the database for the handloom sector in recognition of the need to understand the differential impact of policies by planners and policymakers.



This study attempts to identify the socio-economic conditions of the handloom workers in India, mainly based on the results of the Handloom Census 2009-10 and puts forward some policy options for improving the welfare of the handloom workers. Direct comparison with the results of the earlier censuses was not possible as those censuses did not canvass data on the social indicators of handloom workers.

Review of Literature

The present study is designed to examine the socio-economic status of handloom weavers in India. A comprehensive review of relevant literature in the area of research is essential as it places the research study in its proper perspective by indicating the amount of work already done in the related area of the study. A large number of studies have examined the various dimensions of socio-economic status of handloom weavers in India. An attempt is made in this part of the research study to give a brief account of research literature related to the topic of the present research work.

1. Handloom census of India 2009-10, NCAER, New Delhi.

Rajkishor Meher (1995)²: In his paper "The Handloom industry and the socio-economic conditions of weavers in Orissa" critically examines that, due to lack of proper organizational efforts this traditional cottage industry is losing its attractive occupational status. Even the highly skilled weavers fail to make ends meet by solely depending upon this occupation. As a majority of weavers are illiterates and semi-literates, the weavers' cooperative society at the village level is found to be under the effective control of dominant non-weaving and vested interest group consisting of private master weavers, petty merchants and the like.

Somappa. M.³, observed that the Government neglected the industry so far. The Government gives priority to develop the agriculture sector. The concentration of the Government is to develop the mill & power looms, as a result of this, the Handloom Industry has fallen into deep crisis. To develop the industry the Government should spend huge resources on handloom sector.

The Handloom Industry in recent years has fallen into deeper crisis, because of lack of adequate financial support. While socio-economic conditions of the majority of weavers are not in a better position and the weavers are trying to give up their profession and go to alternative works. The Government should take care of the Handloom Industry by allocating huge resources for the development of the industry. (Rajula Devi A. K.)⁴

In the Handloom Industry labour shortage was a serious problem due to the prevalence of extremely low wage rates in the Industry. Though a weaver is skilled, he was paid less than other skilled workers like a carpenter or mason. Inadequate credit facilities and challenges from the mills and power loom sectors reduced the production and the demand of handloom textiles. The decline in demand leads to the decline in the level of utilization of capacity. Manual P.M.⁵

2. Rajkishore. Meher (1995): The Handloom Industry and the Socio-Economic Conditions of Weavers in Orissa. Journal of Rural Development, Vol. 14(3), pp. 301-322.

3. Somappa M., Government attitude towards Handloom sector, Khadi Gramodyog, Vol.17, No.1, Oct 1970.

4. Rajula Devi A. K., "Plight of Handloom Weavers- A Study", Kurukshetra, January 1st, 1983.

5. Manual P.M. "Capacity Utilization in the Handloom Industry in Kerala, with Special Reference to Weavers Industrial Societies", P.Phil Thesis, Department of Economics, University of Kerala, 1987.

Objectives of the Study

To examine the socio-economic status of the handloom workers in India, and puts forward some policy options for improving the welfare of the handloom workers

Methodology

This study was carried out by using the Secondary Data. Secondary data for the study has been collected from the Government publications, journals, periodicals, Handloom Census of India, websites etc..

Results of the Study

Socio-Economic Status of the Handloom Workers in India

There are 43.31 lakh handloom workers in the country, out of which 36.33(83.88%) workers stay in rural areas and 6.98(16.12%) workers stay in urban areas. Of the 43.4 lakh handloom workers, 50% i.e. 21.6 lakh belong to the North Eastern states and the remaining 21.8 lakh are distributed among other states. The handloom work force is predominantly female, constituting 77.4 per cent of the total work force. As per the Handloom Census (2009-10), the average household size is 4.59 and the average number of workers per household is 1.56, the work participation rate being 33.9 per cent. Work participation rate of handloom workers is defined as the percentage of total handloom workers (full-time and part-time) to total population of handloom worker households.

The number of Handloom weavers and allied workers as per the Second Census of Handlooms of India (1995-96) and Third Handloom Census of India (2009-10) are shown in Table 1 given below.

Table 1:

Sl. No.	Census	Number of Handloom Weavers and Allied Workers (in lakhs)
1	Second Census (1995-96)	65.50
2	Third Census (2009-10)	43.31

Factors identified for the decline of Handloom Sector, inter alia, include, (i) competition with mechanized sector such as mill and powerloom Sectors, (ii) decline of handloom corporations/Apex Cooperative Societies (iii) high cost of credit & low disbursement of credit for the handloom weavers, (iv) marketing problems etc.

The number of handloom weavers and allied workers has declined, yet improvement in various other parameters has also been reported in 2009-10 Census over 1995-96 Census. The details are as under in Table 2 given below.

Table 2 :

Sl. No.	Indicator	2009-10 Census	1995-96 Census
1.	Man days worked per weaver per annum (days)	234	197
2.	Share of full time weavers to total weavers	64%	44%
3.	Share of weaver households reporting less than a meter reproduction	46%	68%
4	Share of Idle looms	4%	10%

Major findings from the above table are

1. The number of days worked by weaver households has increased from the second (197 person days) to the third (234 person days) census.
2. The proportion of full-time weaver's was found to have increased from the second (44%) to the third (64%) census.
3. There is a decline in the percentage of handloom worker households that reported less than a meter of fabric production per weaver per day from second census (68%) to third census (46%).
4. There was a decline in the number of idle looms from the second (10%) to the third (4%) census.

An age-wise distribution reveals that adult (aged 18 years and above) handloom workers account for 89 per cent of the workforce, while under-age workers (aged less than 18 years) account for 11 per cent of the workforce.

The total workforce engaged in handloom related activity across all ages is 43.32 lakh. An age-wise distribution of these 43.32 lakh strong workforce indicated that:

1. 38.47 lakh (88.8%) of the total workforce are adult handloom workers (aged 18 and above) and thus eligible for the issuance of photo identity cards.
2. A little over a tenth (11.2%) of the total workforce is in the age group of less than 18 years.

The caste distribution of handloom weaver households has shown that Other Backward Castes (OBCs) form the majority group (45.2%) and SC households are the minority group (10.1%).

Level of Education

Education is one of the principal means of breaking the vicious cycle of poverty. The educational levels of handloom workers are presented in Table 3 given below:

Table 3: Distribution of Adult (18 Years and Above) Handloom Workers by Level of Education

Level of education	Number (lakh)	Distribution by education (%)	Rural share (%)
Never attended school	11.30	29.4	82.4
Below primary	4.88	12.7	82.6
Primary	7.02	18.2	81.9
Middle	8.83	22.9	88.6
High school/ secondary	3.92	10.2	83.8
Higher secondary	1.79	4.7	86.7
Graduate and above	0.65	1.7	80.2
Others	0.08	0.2	63.1
Total	38.47	100.0	84.0

A distribution of handloom adult workers by their level of educational attainment reveals that:

1. About 29.4 per cent of workers engaged in handloom activities have never attended school
2. However, more than two out of every five workers reported having completed at least middle-level education.
3. The share of rural workers is found to be increasing with the increase in level of education, which indicates that the handloom workers in rural areas are slightly better educated than their urban counterparts.

Health

The health conditions of handloom workers are on moderate. The workers suffer from various work related diseases such as pain in different parts of the body(hand, neck, head and eye sore, legs etc.), anemia, suffocation, rheumatic complaints due to long hours of working in a particular position. Most of the handloom workers get ill due to excessive hard work, lack of proper nutritious diet, lack of knowledge about health care etc.

Housing

One of the basic requirements for human well-being is to have a roof over one's head, either owned or rented. The type of dwelling units of handloom house-holds is represented in Table given below:

Table 4: Distribution of Handloom Worker Households by Type of Dwelling Unit

Type of dwelling unit	Number of households			Per cent distribution		
	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total
Kuchha	1,441,473	77,159	1,518,632	59.5	21.3	54.6
Semi-pucca	678,024	177,554	855,578	28.0	49.0	30.7
Pucca	301,620	107,441	409,061	12.5	29.7	14.7
Total	2,421,117	362,154	2,783,271	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table given above shows that more than half the handloom households stay in kuccha dwellings and theremaining stay mostly in semi-pucca dwellings.

1. 54.6 per cent households live in kuchha dwellings, of which 59.5 percent are in rural areas and 21.3 percent are in urban areas.
2. 30.7 per cent households live in semi-pucca dwellings, of which 28.0per cent are in rural areas and 49.0 per cent are in urban areas.
3. 14.7 per cent households live in pucca dwellings, of which 12.5 percent are in rural areas and 29.7 percent are in urban areas.

Irrespective of the type of dwelling they reside in, most households have owning their own dwellings (90.9%). The rest stay in rented (5.2%) or other kinds of accommodation arrangements (3.9%).

Poverty

One of the major development issue of Indian Economy is the level of poverty. The Handloom Census (2009-10) has captured valuable information on the poverty levels of the handloom workers by asking a few simple questions relating to the type of ration cards they possessed. The relevant information is summarised in the following table 5

Table: 5 Distributions of Handloom Worker Households by Type of Ration Card

Type of ration card	Households(Lakh)	Distribution of households (%)
Antodayaannayojana (AAY) card	2.71	9.7
Below poverty line (BPL) card	10.27	36.9
Above poverty line (APL) card	9.59	34.5
No ration card	5.26	18.9
Total	27.83	100.0

As seen from Table-5 9.7% of the handloom workers belong to the poorest of the poor category and 36.9% belong to the BPL category. Only 34.5 % of the workers hold APL cards. A sizeable number of the handloom workers (18.9%) do not hold any ration card. It is evident from the higher rates of incidence of poverty among handloom workers that though it generates some additional income for the households, handloom production is not sufficiently remunerative to lift the households out of poverty.

Average Income

Average Incomes of handloom households from all sources as per the 1996-97 and 2009-10 Censuses are given in table 6 given below:

Table-6 : Average incomes of handloom households from all sources (Rs.)		
Category	Average annual earning of handloom households from all sources (Rs.)	
	1995-96	2009-2010
All India	17,496	36,498
Rural	N.A	37,167
Urban	N.A	32,030

As seen from the table, though the average earnings of handloom households have doubled in nominal terms since 1995-96. However, in real terms, the average earnings have come down. Assuming an annual inflation of 6.5 per cent per year since 1995-96, the average annual income of handloom households should have grown to Rs. 42,250 in 2009-10 to keep parity with the real income levels of 1996-97. The real income has thus actually declined. There are wide inter-state variations in the earnings of handloom households.

Table 7: Distribution of Handloom Worker Households by Type

Type of households	Households (Lakh)	Distribution of households(%)	Rural share (%0)
Weaver households	22.68	81.5	87.5
Allied worker households	3.91	14.1	80.8
Idle loom households	0.81	2.9	96.6
Others (households with no adult worker)	0.43	1.5	96.6
Total	27.83	100.0	87.0

Source : *Third Handloom Census 2009-10, NCAER, New Delhi.*

Most handloom worker households are weaver households and only less than a sixth of the total households pursue only allied work. Weaver households form the majority of handloom worker households located in rural India. This follows the pattern of most weaver households being found in villages (Table 7). A distribution is as follows:

1. Weaver households: 22.68 lakh household units (81.5%).
2. Allied households: 3.91 lakh household units (14.1%).
3. Weaver households located in rural areas: 87.5%.
4. Allied households located in rural areas: 80.8 %.

Regional distribution of handloom worker households by type gives two categories . The first category is of states where handloom worker households are mostly weaver households, as in the case of the North-Eastern states. The second category of states includes all states of India outside the North-East, with West Bengal showing a particularly high proportion of households into allied handloom work.

Policy Options for Improving the Welfare of the Handloom Workers

1. Government should provide free health insurance, health checkups, education for children, training & capacity building, interest free loans etc..
2. There is also a need for scaling up and intensifying both the Central and State Government's interventions in the handloom sector.
3. Collectivization of handloom weavers and service providers to take up input procurement, production, marketing and other support activities.
4. Provision of common infrastructure and services in a viable format in the cluster.
5. Creation of environment of empowered and participative decision making among weavers.
6. Apart from providing the weaver with a regular income, design innovation has brought many skilled artisans together to conceptualize & create new products.
7. The urgent need is to strengthen the co-operative institutions in the handloom sector. There is great potential in this sector to absorb new weavers.
8. Government should encourage new investments and entrepreneurs in handloom sector by providing better sops like any other new economy industry. The sops can be loans with low interests, cluster development, training and information. Priority can be given to the members of the weaver's families.
9. Training and development to enhance the skills of weavers in manufacturing and marketing aspects in changing business environment.
10. There should be a long-term plan from the government side to develop the clusters according to the domestic and international market needs and requirements.
11. The government should extend all benefits to handloom products, which are enjoyed by handicrafts like tax benefits and other subsidies.
12. To improve the raw material facilities the government should allocate and adequate spend resources to the weavers welfare programmes.



13. The Government should open more branches in States and give rebate on the Handloom cloth and improve the Handloom markets.
14. For enhancing marketing of Handloom Garments, Government should afford promotional programme like trade fairs, public relations, sales promotion and advertising etc.
15. The Government should follow price stabilization scheme like minimum support price regarding raw materials of handloom sectors’.

Conclusion

The handloom sector or the non-farm sector has been slowly deteriorating over the years and there has been a steady decline in the industry over the years. Handloom weavers are facing severe livelihood crisis because of adverse government policies, globalization and change in socio-economic condition. Suicides are on the rise. Ineffective implementation of the schemes, increased unfair competition from the power loom and mill sectors are responsible for the crisis. Handloom is unparalleled in its flexibility and versatility, permitting experimentation and encouraging innovations. The strength of Handloom lies in the introducing innovative designs, which cannot be replicated by the Power loom sector. Thus, Handloom forms a part of the heritage of India and exemplifies the richness and diversity of our country and the artistry of the weavers. Concerted efforts are being made through the schemes and programme to enhance production, productivity, and efficiency of the handloom sector and enhance the income and socio-economic status of the weavers.

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