

Dwindling Handloom, Sinking Weavers in Western Uttar Pradesh: A Case Study of Pilkhuwa, Amroha and Muradnagar

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Abstract. There has been an upsurge of interest on the history and conditions of handloom weavers in India in recent years. Various works have appeared. There has, however, been a dearth of microscopic studies relating to the health rights and poverty among the handloom weaving community of India in general and of Western UP in particular. Handloom weaver as a person devoid of basic health rights and subjected to the most inhuman form of poverty – has never been the central theme of the practical research works. According to the Approach Paper for the 12th Plan, the handloom sector is a major employment generating sector. As per the Handloom Census of 2009-10, there are 23.77 lakh handlooms in the country, providing employment to 43.32 lakh handloom weavers and ancillary workers.

The dispersed and decentralized handloom sector embodies the traditional wisdom, cultural wealth and secular ethos of our country. It is not just a source of livelihood for lakhs of weavers and artisans, but also environment friendly, energy and capital saving and labour-intensive form of art that has secured India's presence in millions of homes across the globe.

Equally importantly, this sector constitutes the only industry in the country that provides low cost, green livelihood opportunities to millions of families, supplementing incomes in seasons of agrarian distress, checking migration and preserving traditional economic relationships. With women contributing the majority of pre- and post-loom labour and accounting for over 50% of artisans in the country, and a significant mass of weavers/artisans consisting of scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and religious minorities, this sector also represents the economic lifeline of the most vulnerable sections of our society.

Over the decades, the situation of most weaver's has deteriorated into a pitiful state, as weavers face increased poverty, hunger, health issue and inability to provide for their families. There is a high level of tuberculosis and malnutrition leading to depression and in some cases, suicide. Weavers also lack accession to public health centers due to severe operational and logistic constraints. The present project intends to highlight the forms of poverty and deprivations prevalent among the handloom weavers of Western Uttar Pradesh.

Keywords: Poverty, Health Rights, tuberculosis and malnutrition, physical necessities, assets and income.

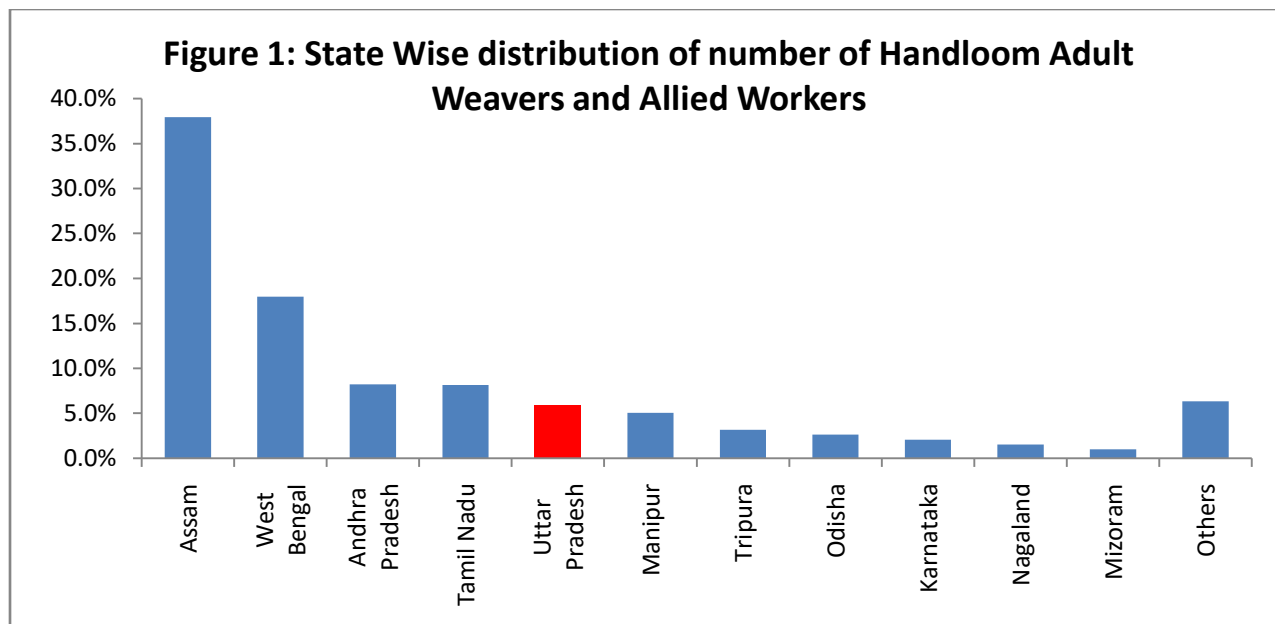
1 Introduction and Motivation of the Study

There has been an upsurge of interest on the history and conditions of handloom weavers in India in recent years. Various works have appeared. There has, however, been a dearth of microscopic studies relating to the health rights and poverty among the handloom weaving community of India in general and of Western UP in particular. Handloom weaver as a person devoid of basic health rights and subjected to the most inhuman form of poverty – has never been the central theme of the practical research works.

According to the Approach Paper for the 12th Plan, the handloom sector is a major employment generating sector. As per the Handloom Census of 2009-10, there are 23.77 lakh handlooms in the country, providing employment to 43.32 lakh handloom weavers and ancillary workers. This includes 38.47 lakh adult handloom weavers and ancillary workers, of which 24.72 lakh are engaged full time and 13.75 lakh on part time basis.

According to Planning Commission document, out of the 38.47 lakh adult persons engaged in weaving and allied activities in the country, 77.90 % are women. 10.13% belong to the Scheduled Castes (SC), 18.12% belong to the Scheduled Tribes (ST) and 45.18% belong to Other Backward Classes (OBC). As per the Census, nearly 27.83 lakh handloom households are engaged in weaving and allied activities, out of which 87% are located in rural areas and remaining 13% in urban areas. The majority (82%) of handloom households are weaver households, which means that at least one member of every such household is engaged in weaving.

A religion wise break-up indicates that about 78% households are Hindus, 15% households are Muslims, 6% households are Christians and the remaining households are Buddhists, Sikhs or from other religions. Most of the handloom households live in kutchha (54%) or semi-pucca (31%) houses; only 15% households live in pucca houses. Nearly 53% of the handloom households are engaged in commercial production and nearly 16% households undertake a mix of domestic and commercial production. The number of Handloom Weavers and allied Workers in different states in which Uttar Pradesh owns a significant position is shown in the following figure 3.



According to Planning Commission documents, despite their cultural and economic importance, however, both handlooms and handicrafts sectors suffer from perennial problems of weak infrastructure, inadequate availability of inputs at regular prices, poor supply chain systems and ineffective marketing and sales practices. Limited private entrepreneurial support has increased the sectors' dependence on Government resources and the lack of a universally recognized definition of 'handicraft' remains a challenge.

Over decades, the situation of weaver's has deteriorated into a pitiful state, as weavers face increased poverty, hunger, health issue and inability to provide for their families. There is a high level of tuberculosis and malnutrition leading to depression and in some cases, suicide. Weavers also lack accession to public health centres due to severe operational and logistic constraints.

Again to quote Planning Commission document, during the 11th Plan, the Government of India implemented Handloom weavers Comprehensive welfare scheme which to be administered through the Development Commissioner for Handlooms, Ministry of Textiles. This Scheme is an important initiative aimed at providing social welfare facilities to weavers and ancillary workers. It consists of two separate sub-schemes. (i) The Health Insurance Scheme (HIS) provides health insurance to the weavers and their families, and it is being implemented through ICICI Lombard General Insurance Company. The annual cover per family is ` 15000, of which ` 7500 is for OPD expenses. Total premium is ` 939.76, of which GOI bears 80% and State/weaver's share is 20%, with weaver's contribution being a minimum of ` 50. Based on feedback received from the State

Governments and the beneficiaries, several initiatives have been taken during 2010-11 and 2011-12 to improve delivery, which include settlement of insurance claims within 30 days from the date of receipt of claim and payment of interest at 2% above the bank rate on prorated basis in case of delay in settlement by the insurance company. A Grievance Redressal Committee has also been formed in all States having more than 5000 health card holders. (ii) The Mahatma Gandhi Bunkar Bima Yojana (MGBBY) is being implemented through the Life Insurance Corporation of India. It provides life insurance cover to handloom weavers in case of natural death (₹60,000), accidental death and total disability due to accident (₹1,50,000) and partial disability due to accident (₹75,000). Scholarship benefits of ₹300 per quarter per child are also available to enrolled weavers' children studying in standards 9th to 12th. The total premium is ₹470 per weaver, of which ₹290 is GOI's contribution, ₹100 is paid by LIC and ₹80 by the weavers.

The present research paper tries to investigate the dwindling importance of the handloom sector in Western UP through field works in Pilkhuwa, Amroha and Muradnagar and the corresponding despondency and helplessness leading to 'sinking syndrome' among the weavers of this region.

2. Objective of the study

The present work focuses on the following objectives:

- i. To highlight the socio-economic impact of the Schemes on the health and life of the Handloom weavers;
- ii. To identify the socio-economic conditions of the handloom weavers in western UP and their qualitative differences among Male and Female, SC-ST-OBC category.
- iii. To understand the awareness of the launched schemes of the Government and their accessibility among the handloom weavers and the allied workers.
- iv. To evaluate the overall impact of the Health Schemes for the Handloom weavers on quantitative and qualitative parameters.
- v. To suggest corrective measures and modifications to enable a smooth delivery of the Scheme, wherever required.

3. Literature Review

India's handloom sector is mainly concentrated in the decentralized sector operating in remote and rural locations (Mishra. A.K., 1994). This sector faces competition from the power loom and mill sectors (Rao. K.V & Raju. G.N. 2008). However, due to effective government intervention schemes and welfare schemes, the handloom sector has been able to withstand tides of competition (Sundarsingh.K., 1979).

Despite of government initiative in the development of handloom sector, the consequences of handloom crisis are worse in many weaving centres of Uttar Pradesh such as high interest rates, hike in power tariffs, hike in the prices of raw materials, competition from mills, unfavourable textile policies of the government etc. The Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) has received information from the People's Vigilance Committee on Human Rights [PVCHR], a human rights organization based in Uttar Pradesh that in places like Uttar Pradesh, the government neglected the industry to such an extent that the industry is now dead.

Authors' and Year	Findings
Tiwari. R.T. & Sinha. R.L., 1979	Throughout the changing fortunes of India's long history, the spinning wheels of India continued to hum their tune of prosperity and the Indian craftsmen earned everlasting glory for the delicacy of their muslins the finest of textile fabrics.
Sundarsingh.K., 1979	However, due to effective government intervention schemes in the form of market support, design inputs, as well as other developmental and welfare schemes, the handloom sector has been able to withstand tides of competition.
Mishra. A.K., 1994	India has the largest handloom sector in the world which is mainly concentrated in the decentralized sector operating in remote and rural locations.
Maheshwari. A., & Sivaprakasam, 2002	The handloom weaving industry is the country's biggest cottage industry providing livelihood to the largest population next to agriculture.
Rao. K.V & Raju. G.N., 2008	This sector faces competition from the power loom and mill sectors and constrained by its continued dependence on the cooperative delivery machinery, and the financial constraints of the state level handloom agencies/apex societies
Ashok Chattarjee, 2014	Artisan and his culture and skills are seen as representing a 'primitive past' and the new attitudes were revealed in the term 'sunset industry' that began to be applied to the craft sector. Handloom sector is caught in a bind-simultaneously needed for cultural window-dressing and dismissed as irrelevant relics.

4. Research Methodology

A comparative study of the various categories on the basis of gender and caste specifically highlighted the issues and problems of various categories of handloom weavers. Accordingly the factory units of *Pilkhwa, Amroha and Moradnagar* towns forms the sample of study. The case studies of these places have focused on:

- i) Population profile- socio, economic, religious and cultural aspects.
- ii) Nature of Formal and Informal Industries.
- iii) Handloom weaver as an important constituent of the production unit – working hour, wage, and protection through unions as well as Government legislations.
- iv) Infrastructure/facilities available to handloom weavers such as technology, banks, credits, housing, educational institutions, health facilities, health centres, medical protection etc.
- v) Implementation/ limitations of anti-poverty programmes.
- vi) Cases of malnutrition.
- vii) Cases of depression/suicides.
- viii) Development impact due to proximity to Delhi.

Sampling Frame: The proposed study as an evaluative study will be fact based, descriptive and analytical in nature. A proportionate sampling framework will be adopted.

Data Collection: It included Primary and secondary data. Secondary data is based on books, journals, monographs, occasional papers, government publications, circulars, orders, ordinances etc.

For collection of primary data an **interview schedule** will be prepared, pre-tested and administered among handloom weavers. It is also important to make use of observational method to seek information and get insight into the issues involved. A diary will be maintained to record the observations throughout the fieldwork. It is also proposed to conduct directional group discussion in selected villages. Some case studies will also be documented.

Data Processing: The study is mainly based on primary survey with focus on structured

questionnaire and personal interview including Schedules, Suitable statistical tools with descriptive measures.

5. Results and Discussion

The analysis concludes a huge deficiency in regard to the requisite infrastructure facilities for the weaving class was noticed during the course of survey. The survey covered weavers mostly in the age group of 45-60. Apparently, young persons were not found to be interested in weaving work due to its potential meagre earnings. The working condition was very shanty and sometimes found to be unhygienic because of poor lighting and ventilation system. Some more important conclusion drawn from the survey are as follows:

- a. Lack of continuous power supply was a major handicap for the weaving class for the areas under study.
 - b. Basic medical care and public health system was matter of concern as the government hospitals were placed at far away from their work place. The health insurance scheme was practically non-existent. Along with this, availability of financial support from the state was also rarely available for the weavers.
 - c. The government scheme of photo identity card of weavers was missing in the region and as a result they had no access to the Government welfare measures.
 - d. The prevailing wage rate in the region was almost 10 per cent less than the actual wage entitlement. Thus, maintaining a family with Rs.5000 per month with 10-12 working hours per day that too taking care of good education for their children is indeed a difficult preposition. Hence the desire to transfer the skills to subsequent generation was missing among the weavers under study.
- ii. As far as educational background is concerned the level of education of the weavers was upto 10th class. Moreover, the women weavers were found to be illiterate. This may be one of the reasons for the weavers to continue with obsolete technology.
 - iii. The State's neglect of this sector despite their contribution to national economy in terms of generation of self-employment as well as employment is quite evident. The state's measures to uplift the ills of weavers have failed to reach the poor

weavers.

- iv. The schemes for health insurance and medical support for occupational hazards have rarely reached to the weavers of the regions under study.

Further, the surveyor team of reported the following items:

It is here that we know the difference between ground realities and the government promises, their reports and their policies .Their abject failure on the ground. A sign says 'welcome to the handloom city of Pilkhuwa which is welcoming but wrinkles and deep gorges on the faces of weavers tell a different story .The weavers of Pilkhuwa and Amroha do not know even one government policy from which they were benefitting. They are now worse and showing a declining phase. should not be misunderstood when saying that “handloom industry is in declining phase”. am talking about handloom industry of these particular areas of study.

Prabhakar Mani

In simple terms, the conclusion is, in 21st century where, you can remember friends, policies, items, etc on e-market, the handloom sector is like forgotten password, which we all forgot to remember, only one thing can solve that is re-making of the password i.e, our Handloom sector needs reform very much, if we start as early as we can only then we help it from vanishing. As people say history repeats itself, we have to make this statement true, we have to, and we will, make our India again flourished by the Indian handicrafts.

Shubham Jha

The centuries old art of weaving is dying a slow death because weavers are unable to make both ends meet. We made several visits to Pilakhuwa and Amroha. In Amroha,Smt. Laxm ged 32 works hard on the loom. Her two impoverished children are playing outside. Her village has been famous for handloom. But Laxm who has spent over 10 years spinning fabric is disappointed today. The trade is horrible and there is no money, have a family to support and living on just 3, 000 rupees a month is difficult “she says.

Rav Ranjan

The weavers are not provided basic medical facility. They do not get financial support in case of any miss-happening during the work. Even at working place there is not a single first-aid box for workers to treat his/her in case of any injury. They do not know about any Government scheme. Even they do not know about the Mahatma Gandh Bunkar BimaYojana (MGBBY) which is started by central government especially for handloom weavers. Even if someone knows about these schemes they do not get any benefit from these schemes because of some corrupt officers and middlemen.

Ashish Kumar Yadav

The Patenting designs/varieties, Cooperative system, Free export/import trade opportunity, Budget allocations, Intermediaries (individuals/institutions), Enhancement of Value, Competition and unfair competition from mills and power looms, Wages, employment and livelihood issues. Due to all these factors, handloom sector is in its extinct stage.

Manoj

The work place is with weak buildings and not well constructed and narrow dark stairs leading to the factory... tap water unhygienic with algae growth. government hospital far away from the village and having no access to it. no proper medication as one of the female weaver SON informed us that government hospitals are unhygienic with fewer doctors having no experience thereby providing useless medicines... thus they have to rely on costlier private hospitals not affordable for everyone. dim bulbs were the source of light with 7-8 hrs. of supply.

Eliza

In district of Amroha and Pilkhuwa, no weaver wants their next generation to carry out their profession. We met the DM of Amroha and told her about the prevailing conditions of weavers .She assured us that she would work to ameliorate the conditions of weaver.

Deepika Kalucha

The handloom weavers are not provided with the proper facilities of survival ... We too experienced it..as when we visited a handloom cum handicraft mill, there was no electricity and there we came to know that the children of the weavers are not able to get proper education because the school is quite far from their place and there is no facility of MID-DAY MEAL even in their govt. school .The hands which create such beautiful creations are not paid off rather their money is eaten up by the superior powers. as what we saw in the mill of Fab INDIA , that the cost of 1 bed sheet that they produced is Rs 650 which is sold at Rs 2000 in the showrooms of FAB INDIA .

Tript Babbar

We observed the people were doing such a tedious work with the threads in a single bulb. It was shocking to hear that they earn 20 to 30 rupees per day. However their face was pale and their voice was trembling. They were feeling insecure of talking to us.

Akshay Sonker

The central govt. has taken several measures to develop and promote handloom products and carry forward the rich tradition of handlooms of several Indian cities such as Varanasi, Bareilly, Lucknow, Surat, Kutch, Bhagalpur, Mysore and Tamil Nadu. But what about Western UP, near to Capital Delh but far away from development in handloom sector.

Tanya Munjal

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