

An in-depth study on jamdani and tangail weavers of Purba Bardhaman District, West Bengal, India

Abstract

Handloom sector is the backbone of the Indian economy and is the oldest industry since times immemorial. The sector is considered as the second largest economic activities in the country, after agriculture that provides employment to around 43.32 lakh weavers and ancillary workers. India is home to 95% of the world's handlooms. The sector makes a contribution to almost 15% of woven fabric making in the country and further adds to the export revenue. Weaving is a family activity that engages the entire family in the process of making fabric. The strength of the sector lies in its uniqueness, openness to innovations, flexibility of production, adaptability to the supplier's requirement and the wealth of its tradition. The glory of handloom industry was the thing of the past, at the present time the industry is in crisis. The sector is appreciated for transferring skills from one generation to another. Today it is no longer appreciated instead it is cursed or blamed. The major reasons are mostly substituted products, poor marketing, and competition from power loom, availability of cheaper imported fabrics, changing consumer preferences, economic liberalization, and alternative employment opportunities. All of these reasons have threatened the vibrancy of handloom sector amidst government policy of promoting and encouraging the handloom segment through a number of welfare programmes, schemes, and protections. The textiles of this region are very famous and are known globally. The study tries to capture the mechanism and present scenario of the handloom activities.

Keywords: handloom, cluster, weavers, silk, cotton, jamdani, tangail

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Abbreviations: WSCs, weavers service centres; IIHT, Indian institute of handloom technology; NCTD, national centre for textile design; UNESCO, United Nations educational, scientific, and cultural organization; SMEs, small and medium scale enterprises; NIFT, National institute of fashion technology; CETP, common effluent treatment plant; CFC, common facility centre; GHG, green house gasses

Introduction

The handloom fabric is a creation of age-old Indian tradition and an insight to the artistic ethos, and lifestyle of the weavers. Through its strong product characteristics, handloom symbolizes the diverse ethnic traditions of each state and craftsmanship of the weaver. India is a treasure house of fabulous handloom weaves that could enhance and add new dimensions to this age-old yet extraordinarily versatile craft. Handloom saris are the timeless showcase of India's culture and heritage, have always been unique and one-of-a-kind in their approach. Handloom *saris* have gained prominence across the globe for its originality and beauty.¹ Weavers from Bengal have practised their craft for centuries and made fine handlooms and muslin that passes the ring test. The Bengal handloom saris have a prominent position in the world of traditional attire and bear a rich history. From the multitude of fabrics and techniques that make up this draping marvel, the six yards of elegance, femininity, and grace, plays an important role on every occasion in this beautiful land.²

India is home to 95% of the world's handlooms and this sector contributes to India's export earnings. As per handloom census, the handloom workers in the country have declined from 65.51 lakhs (1995-96) to 43.32 lakhs (2015-16), accounting for 15% of the total textile production. Compare to the power loom sector, which in 1956 contributed to only 2.3% of India's total fabric, today occupies

85% of our fabric market. In 2015-16, the handloom industry wove more than 7600 million square metres of cloth. The government since independence has poured enough monetary support, and resources down this sector. As of last year, the textile ministry's annual report cites several schemes to rejuvenate the handloom sector.^{3,4} Some of this includes:

- Subsidized rates on hank yarn (of 10% on yarn price) under the Mill Gate Price Scheme
- Marketing events and promotional activities to help weavers exhibit their products. A ministry sponsored Handloom Week event every year,
- An Integrated Handloom Development Scheme to provide financial assistance, training in weaving and dyeing, design and management and construction of new handloom sheds.
- Institutional Credit Scheme that provides margin money assistance, an interest subsidy for the first 3 years of loan repayment, a credit guarantee trust fund, and promotional activities and camps by banks disbursing the loan to make weavers aware of the scheme.
- Comprehensive Health Insurance and Health Care Facilities.
- Scholarship scheme and life coverage under Mahatma Gandhi Bunkar Bima Yojana.
- Diversified Handloom Development Scheme for upgrading weaver skills through workshops, exhibitions, design development, documentation of traditional designs, setting up of Weavers Service Centres (WSCs), Research and Development facilities and Institutes like Indian Institute of Handloom Technology (IIHT), National Centre for Textile Design (NCTD).

Despite all these measures, people in handloom sector have high levels of poverty, extremely variable incomes and sometime abject penury. The region of Bengal has been an important textile export zone and remains an eminent destination for the production of traditional fabrics. Purba Bardhaman, amongst other districts of West Bengal, marks a significant site in the handloom map of not only Bengal but also India and the world, for its production of tangail and jamdani saris. In addition, it also produces scarves and stoles of cotton, silk, and various blends.¹⁷

During the partition in 1947 and the freedom war of Bangladesh in 1971, the skilled muslin weavers, consisting primarily of Basak community, migrated from Tangail district (presently under Bangladesh). They settled in Kalna of Purba Bardhaman district and Santipur in Nadia district, well-known for traditional handloom fabrics.⁵

As per the Kolkata Gazette, Extraordinary Notification (No.83/AR/O/2R-3/12) issued by the Department of Personnel and Administrative Reforms, Govt. of West Bengal on 24 March 2017, Purba Bardhaman was bifurcated from the erstwhile Bardhaman district. Purba Bardhaman has only 8 Blocks as handloom rich area out of 23 Blocks. The traditional art of jamdani weaving is a labour-intensive process and time-consuming. It is estimated that there were 36 varieties of muslin products in the South Asian region⁶ and jamdani was one of the very best varieties of the muslin.⁷ The uniqueness of jamdani sari lies in the intricacy of designs created with muted or vibrant colours, on the traditional loom during the process of weaving. They are not done either by embroidery or by a printing process. The finished garments are highly breathable.^{8,9}

Objectives of the study

The detailed objectives of the study are:

- i. To study the present status of handloom sector in Purba Bardhaman district.
- ii. To study the major challenges faced by this handloom sector.

The study area

Purba Bardhaman district in West Bengal, India is a place of ancient culture, religion, tradition and has the glory of its own. Its geographical coordinates are 23° 52' 56"N and 87° 51' 24" E located about 105km from Kolkata. It covers an area of 5,433sq.km. And a total population of the district according to census 2011 is 4,835,532. The district consists of four subdivision: Bardhaman Sadar (North), Bardhaman Sadar (South), Katwa, and Kalna. Mainly two subdivisions Katwa and Kalna have a concentration of handloom weavers.

The district is well known as a weaving centre with a name for cotton and silk saris and plays an important role in district economy. The talented weavers, after getting necessary support and encouragement from government, revived their inherited livelihood and the exquisite art of weaving flourished once again. Saris in sensible colours and exotic designs are produced in the weaving belt of the district creating excellent fabrics in its own exclusive weaving style through the jacquard mechanism.

Methodology

The study includes secondary research and primary field survey. The secondary research is drawn from a literature survey of different

research papers, journals, and government reports. A field survey was done to collect some of the important variables through series of individual and focus group interviews at different levels of the value chain, as well as with representatives from governmental and non-governmental supporting organizations. The categories of informants along the value chain are: weavers, designers / exclusive shop owners, producer-group leaders, input suppliers and mahajan being a dominant partner controlling both the input and output markets of the handloom industry through merchant capital and usury capital. Relevant information was collected from respondents on their work profile, work duration, working conditions, ownership of handlooms, family dependence on handlooms, family members engaged in handloom activities, the main source of income and thereby monthly income. Findings and observations have been analyzed and discussed briefly in this paper.

The findings of the survey

The production process and work: The sound of the tant (the handloom) echoes in the village, together with jubilant music ranging from traditional Bengali to popular Bollywood. The area is known for its scrupulous art of making handloom saris having meticulously created details that manifest it in each beautiful piece. Each weaver interlaces up to two handloom saris a week.

Once the yarn dyeing is done the warping follows. Hank sizing is largely followed for jamdani weaving and weft winding is generally done by the woman.

The weaving process is divided into several interlinked processes. The jacquard cards are punched based on the designs graphs, which are set on the jacquard device fitted on the loom, to create separately the ground and pallu designs. There are different sets of seasonal designs based on traditional motifs and a typical tant sari has a thick border and decorative pallu, consisting of motifs created while weaving.

The handloom is 8' x 8' pit looms, situated close to the ground. The weaver uses two heald shafts along with jacquard fitted on the top of the loom to create the interlacement while weft passes through the tunnel created by the warp yarns giving the fabric its structure. The interplay of hand and foot work, jacquard card designing produces the final product. Besides being a physical activity, the process of making fabric requires concentration and mental effort. Handloom products are marketed through co-operatives and state level apex unit like Tantuja which support and operate the marketing system of the cluster.¹⁰

Weaving community: Traditionally, handloom weaving is a family activity, performed in a rural household set-up and is spread across the weaving villages of Kethugram I, II; Katwa I, II; Purbasthali I, II and Kalna I, II Block. There are nearly 36096 weavers with about 94,000 handloom households, sprawling in the weaving villages and depending on this industry for their livelihood (Figure 1).¹¹ The production process in handloom sector is vertically integrated and the workforce is confined to Basak community of Hindu religion. They belong to scheduled caste with the family name tanti, that identifies the weaver family of the region and have migrated from East Pakistan (presently Bangladesh). At present 55% of weavers force is located in the district itself and 45% come from other districts of North Bengal side. 95% of village weaver force is Hindu while 5% belongs to Muslim. Weaving in the cluster is basically a male concentrated occupation while 5 - 10% women weavers are available in some areas at Tamaghata, Kamalnagar, Ketugram villages. However, preparatory

work like reeling and bobbin filling work is generally done by women members of the house. In terms of time, the preparatory work amounts

to 8 - 10% of total weaving work and its labour cost is also included under their wage payment of weavers.^{11,12}

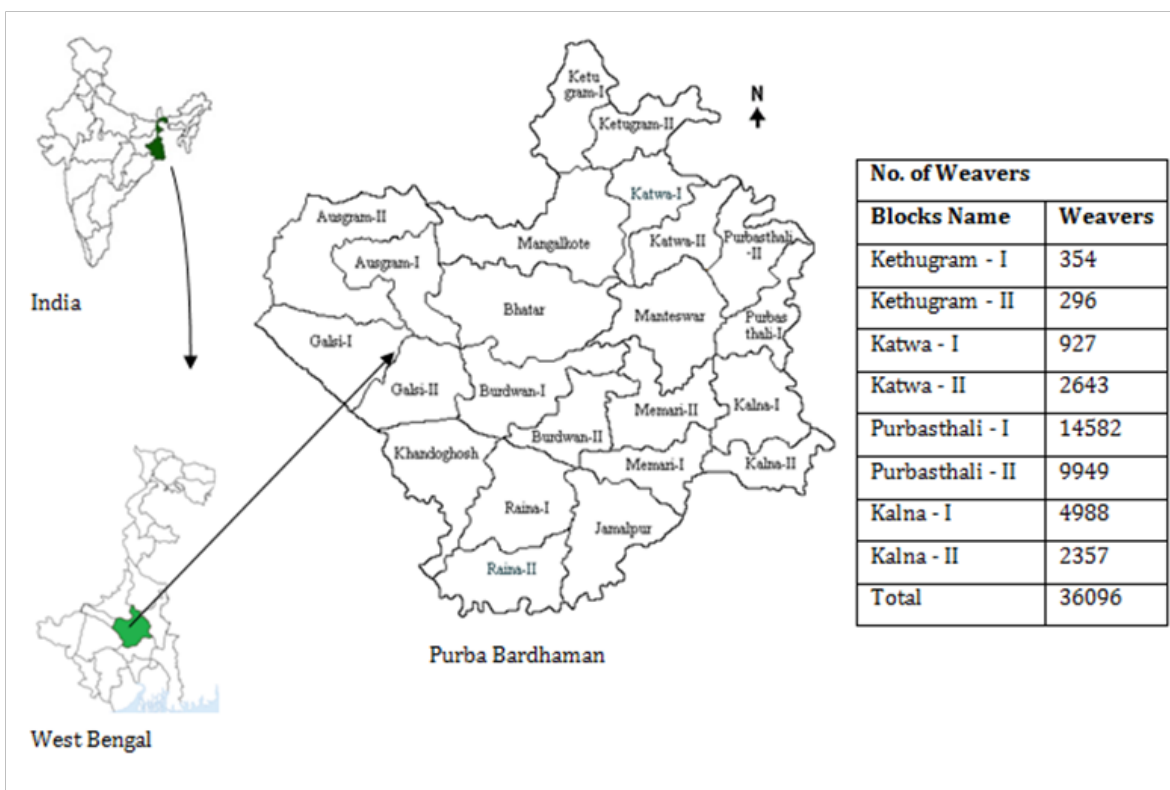


Figure 1 Map of the Purba Bardhaman District showing weaver concentrated blocks.

Product mix: The weavers are renowned for their expertise and knowledge in the weaving of silk and cotton variety of handloom products in their jacquard looms. Jamdani variety sari, tangail sari with naksa par and buti, scarves with attractive design and colours, are the pioneers in the field of Bengal heritage handloom products. The products are highly appreciated in the other States of India and are recognized the world over.

Jamdani sari: Jamdani is a traditionally woven sheer cotton handloom fabric having vivid patterns. The origin of the word jamdani is not assured. As per a popular description, the great exclusive fine art of weaving is drawn from a Persian word jama as ‘cloth’ and dana as ‘diapering’ combinely denotes diapered cloth. A different fact states that the word jam in Persian means flower and dani signify a container or vase.⁹

The jamdani fabrics are woven by traditional weavers who have achieved hereditary skill and experience and they spread the knowledge to their disciples. It is a labour-intensive form of weaving and consumes much time due to the richness of its designed motifs derived from the religious, social, and natural environment. The motifs are rendered through a particular discontinuous weft technique while weaving on the loom. The weavers are highly respected for their skills, build up an occupational identity, and enjoy social recognition and takes great pride in their heritage work. The jamdani wearers get a sense of cultural identity, dignity, and self-recognition within the society.

Dr. J. F. Watson in 1866, prepared an eighteen volume work which included seven hundred samples of Indian textiles, each described and presented so fabric could be reproduced by a British manufacturer.¹³ Dr. Watson wrote on jamdani, “With all our machinery and wondrous appliances we hither to have been unable to produce a fabric which for fineness and utility can equal the ‘woven air of Decca’. Exquisite in look, no wonder the jamdanis of old are today considered the prized heirlooms of many a Bengali family”.¹⁴

Jamdani, a textile of excellence has been acknowledged by United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as ‘Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity’. The super fine quality jamdani thrived under the enlightened patronage of the Mughal emperors during fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The Mughals tailored them into intricately fashioned angarkhas (upper garment/shirt) for men and women. The Mughals acknowledged its rarity and recognized the excellence. The figured muslin with delicate motifs was a new art form worked on by deft fingers; require limitless patience apart from skill. A weaver’s sensitivity to create, a length of fabric sometimes takes months to weave. During the regime of Jahangir and Aurangieb, finer quality of jamdani was a merchandise of royal monopoly and availability was rare.¹⁵

After the Mughal regime, the Nawabs of Dacca (in Bangladesh) and Wajid Ali Shah of Tanda continued to develop jamdani under their patronage. The Dacca weavers were expert in saris and dress materials and are known as Daccai jamdani. The traditional motifs

are of geometric pattern and derived from birds, leaves, local flowers, zigzag lines and the evolved directory of designs was known as Dacca gharana. The designs are classified as hazar-buti, rose-leaf, dora-kata, chand, tara-buti, and dabutar-khop. While the Tanda and Varanasi weavers in Awadh are experts in weaving Awadh jamdani and the products were mainly saris, dress materials, table cover, handkerchiefs, stoles, and caps. In Dacca and Tanda jamdanis, the ground yarns for both warp and weft are generally fine, a nature grey cotton yarn having counts between 60s to 150s. Sometimes, mulberry silk of 13/15 denier filature yarn was also used. The figured motifs in Dacca jamdanis are created by inserting extra weft consisting of bleached cotton, black/indigo dyed cotton yarn, gold/silver zari, silk muga filaments. Similarly, bleached cotton yarn and gold zari are the trends for extra weft in Tanda. The selvedge in both the styles is normally at 1/4th width have grey or bleached cotton warp yarns. The technique of weaving jamdani figured designs was called 'pick and pick' i.e., one pick extra weft design and then one ground pick. Particularly, two plain picks in place of a single pick are inserted after each extra weft meant for figured design. Nilambari jamdani saris are indigo dyed. The selvedge yarns are usually dyed with madder colour to create a beautiful matching of colours. In jamdanis, the effect of each desired motif is done by inserting 3-5 ply of extra cutout yarns as weft having the same count as that of warp yarn. The bleaching and dyeing techniques, during the reign of Mughals, Nawabs, were carried out by an indigenous method due to non availability of chemical dyes and ingredients.¹⁶

Tangail sari: Tangail sari originated in Tangail, a district in Bangladesh. In earlier times it was called Begum Bahar interlaced with a silk warp and cotton weft. Subsequently, both cotton warp and weft became a trend. The heritage of over thousand year old culture of handloom weaving industry in Tangail district is cited by the well known voyager Ibn Battuta and Huen Sam's travel history.¹⁷

An extremely fine yarn is used which makes it soft and comfortable. Every portion of a tangail sari is woven and designed by hand. One of the exceptional features of these saris is par (edge) made from zari or silk yarn to obtain more shine and lustre. It takes around 5 to 7 days to weave a well designed tangail sari and the weavers get only Rs. 700-800 for making a single sari. Many weavers have revived the silk tangail saris. The laying of extra weft for figured tangail saris while weaving on the loom is almost identical to jamdani saris. They have extra-weft butis, small repeated motifs, interlaced on the ground of the sari. The main characteristics of tangail saris are loom finishing done by rolling on starch on the surface of the weaved fabric while weaving the tangail sari. Also, pre sized warp yarns are used and hence no hairiness reflect on the surface and each yarn is equally distributed and there exists no pair of yarns. Traditionally tangail saris have jacquard design both in border and pallu. The surface texture of tangail saris gets a paper finish appearance and is considered as its forte. The jacquard designs of tangail saris are dhup chayya, belpata, pata bahar, mayur pekham, meghe dombur, meghe mala, hira mon, agun path, mayur konthi, kalo path, sanja phool, ashman tara, pahar surya, yatra siddhi, ganga jal, khunja, jhomkolata, padma.

The tangail saris have the following shafts designs namely borfi, beki, taaj, bhomra, gajo moti, danth (teeth), aash par, and terchi. The traditional tangail saris are named as nilambari, pacha paar, begam bahar, khorke dure, chou khupi, ayna khupi, araa dure, anarkoli, jal dure and ganga-jamuna (Figure 2).^{17,18}

The cluster setup: A cluster can be defined as a geographical concentration of Small and Medium Scale Enterprises (SMEs).¹⁹ Of the total weaving looms only 5000 looms have been selected under the Bardhaman Handloom Cluster based on the weaver's concentration, product type, the presence of support organization, the presence of stakeholders, and wage structure of weavers. The profile of the cluster is:



Figure 2 (A) Jamdani sari, (B) Tangail sari.

For any craft to survive as an ongoing living entity and practice, it needs to lend itself to a continuous process of experimentation, change, and growth. It must evolve with the changing times, and relate to a universal language of aesthetics to consumers from across cultures while staying firm in its own idiom and integrity. Design intervention was made primarily through the introduction of silk, tussar and linen yarns in both warp and weft. This contributed a subtle lustre to the saris and increased their reach to more sophisticated customers throughout the country. Product extensions through smaller items like scarves, stoles, home furnishings, accessories and other goods, created a newer portfolio of options for jamdani, tangail's identity. Expert intervention, and skill up-gradation through institutional linkages like National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIFT) and WSC to local designers, expanded design knowledge.

Organisations like State Apex Tantuja, Central Cottage Industries Emporium, and Handloom House came forth to provide marketing tie-ups for showcasing the new identity of tangail products. Significant turnovers were recorded in retail sales through participation in pan India Exhibitions that provided validation of the efforts and encouragement to the weavers. More importantly, these efforts directly channelized the profits to the weaver by removing the middlemen.

Loom improvements were carried out through the introduction of the steel reed to replace the bamboo variety, as it improved the quality of the product. Infrastructure was also strengthened through the development of a Common Facility Centre (CFC) as a resource and dyeing unit with a mini boiler and a generator set. Not only was the dyeing cost to the weaver reduced, but the consumption expense too decreased tremendously through the saving on the overall water consumption for dyeing. A Common Effluent Treatment Plant (CETP) created world-class standards in tandem with Green House Gasses (GHG) emission norms. A yarn bank was promoted to benefit individual weavers. The common sourcing of bulk yarn has empowered weavers to access the requisite quantities at better

rates while reducing the monopoly of local market traders. Through upgraded technology and skill development of weavers, production per loom per day has increased from 3.66 metres to 4.5metres.

Furthermore, a Design Studio was set up inside the CFC Unit during 2014-2015. Previously, the weavers performed all the design related work manually such as paper designing, card cutting, punching, and drafting. Hence the number of design developments per day was minimal, as were the colour combination options. The Design Studio enabled the development of exclusive motifs, more contemporary color combinations, and better time utilization for the

weaver, giving them more time to invest in other necessary aspects. Earlier, local weavers/designers relied on design feedback from the trader or master weavers, but through the intervention of an expert designer in the cluster, they started receiving constant and dynamic support about new concepts, colour forecasts, and designs.

The producer company has begun collecting the produce of individual weavers and marketing it to bigger companies in bulk. The weavers are now earning 9,000 - 12,000per month instead of the previous Rs. 5,000 - 8,000 which they earned through the mahajans / local market.

Table I Bardhaman Handloom Cluster profile

Implementing Agency	:	National Handloom Development Corporation (NHDC)	
Date of established	:	2007-2008 Financial year.	
Common Facility Center (CFC)	:	Available	
Partnership	:	60% Government and 40% Private Public Partnership	
Numbers of weavers per villages	:	Samudragarh	: 600
	:	Hatsimla	: 3000
	:	Nasratpur	: 2100
	:	Goalpara	: 600
	:	Nadai	: 500
	:	Nibhuji	: 500
	:	Dhatrigram	: 3400
	:	Total	: 10700
Raw Material	:	Yarn: 100s cotton some time two ply, viscose, silk (tussar, muga)	
Weaving	:	Maximum in plain, jacquard used for ornamentation	
Sizing ingredients	:	Adhesives (sago flour, corn starch)	
Processing (Dyeing)	:	Eco-friendly dyes (azo free dyes)	
	:	Sulphur, Naphthol, Vat	
New machine	:	Cabinet dyeing machine looms, Advance warping machine Computerized card punching machine	
End use of their product	:	Saris, shirts, scarf and other items	
Marketing	:	Local business and export	
E-business	:	Selling through Amazon portal	
Handloom Brand and Handloom Mark	:	Approved by the Government	

After cluster intervention, the weavers were benefited through participation in the different training programme on skill development and have acquired much knowledge on design pattern/ technique/ colour combination as per market trends. Through new product development and participation in different exhibitions throughout India, they came to know the real value of their products. Cluster yarn depot at the CFC Unit also provides yarn at subsidized rates and marketing support on a regular basis.”

Socio – economic condition: Based on the survey, the handloom sector is a small-scale industry and the operating system is very similar to the other traditional handloom industry, having the mahajan (moneylender) system. They belong to the same weaver’s community and also belong to the capitalist class. Over the years, they acquired funds and kept aside the weaving work to become businessmen. A

mahajan acts as a distributor, supplier and maintain full control over the production, and marketing activities. Despite not being involved in the main production process, the mahajans have an indirect but oligopolistic presence in the entire value chain of the production and marketing of handloom products to enjoy the maximum profit.

The mahajan provides the raw silk or cotton yarn to the wage weavers on credit and the entire family gets involved in reeling, dyeing and weaving activities. The final fabric material is handed over to mahajan, and payments to the weavers are done on piece rate basis. In this system, the payment to the weavers is based on the number of finished fabric pieces produced despite the time spent to produce it. The handloom workers usually incur loss since they underestimated their time under this system.

The occupational structure of the handloom community consists of three categories

- a. The mahajans enjoying the autocratic status
- b. Some independent master weavers, positioned in the middle rank
- c. A large number of weavers, depending on piece rate system for their wages.

The mahajan and the independent master weavers practically have a similar controlling position in the handloom society other than a striking difference where the master weavers generally have their own looms and engage weavers by paying wages to work for them. The mahajan, generally the capitalist system, do not run looms and supply yarns to the weavers and also do marketing of the final product. The weavers are mostly simple, lack formal education and negotiation skill and hence left with no other option other than depending on mahajans. They are aware that the mahajans are exploiting them and get the produce done at low prices and sell them at considerably higher rates to consumers but are unable to confront their sway since the livelihoods totally depend on the mahajans, and this might become difficult to get work from them. This can be referred to a case of over-socialization where mahajans operate as malfeasant.

Therefore, the occupational structure reveals the darker side of the capitalist system, showing that the powers are in the hands of one person. Further, from the concept of Granovetter,²⁰ the economic activities of the mahajan can be regarded as malfeasance and opportunists who have an adequate amount of wealth due to better linkages with associates.²¹ However, in the handloom sector where most of the activities are manual and tiresome, a weaver family working on a normal day, cannot weave more than 8 - 10 meters of fabric, as a matter of fact, the payment based on piece rate system reflects marginalization of the weavers.

The work shed of some individual weavers needs repair and maintenance. Therefore, necessary support in this regard is required by the individual weavers. The bank does not provide credit facility for their working capital and hence, the conditions of individual weavers are deplorable. Intervention in this area is required so that the weavers can have a better work environment.

In the preparatory process, women members of the weaver's family perform and there is need of skill up gradation training in order to save time.

The dyeing unit follows old techniques using conventional methods and is environmentally unsound. The quality of dyestuffs and improper dyeing technique are the reasons for defective dyeing and poor fastness properties. Since the cluster does not have a good dyeing unit to have quality dyeing of yarns, the cost of dyeing gets higher and hence proper intervention is required.

Looking into the present market trend, product diversification is highly required to yield consistently higher returns. Although the local designers are skilled, training on new design development by an expert may help in value addition of the existing products.

Marketing and distribution system for handloom products is of conventional type and there is a lack of market opportunities. In order to generate a special market space and popularize the handloom products, frequent buyer-seller meet, the formation of marketing consortium, exhibition cum sale, and proper advertising campaign using different media sources is desired.

Barring these economic issues, there are common health problems which came to fore during a discussion with the weavers. The issue that needs attention is the prevalence of work related stress, eyestrain, headache, and hearing loss among the weavers of the area. There is lack of proper medical amenities to address the health related problems.

The workplaces are congested with non favorable conditions of high temperatures and humidity, poor illumination, and high noise levels. These conditions expose them to various types of health related risks that get implicated in their impaired health. The lack of proper health-care facilities and medication is also a reason for migration from this handloom sector.

Decline situation of handloom: West Bengal has an exquisite weaving tradition that reflects craftsmanship and aesthetic appeal. Weavers toil for most of their waking hours to weave the rich fabric that delight consumers across the world. The beauty is barely reflected in their lives as they stare at a bleak future, uncertainty is all that is left of the warp and weft. The lives of these skilled artisans are in perpetual crisis, where motifs of distress and denial are dominant. Burdened by the weight of mounting debt, the weavers owe their debts to mahajans as banks have cut their lending.

The single borrower is Tantuja, but is financially weak and makes long delays in making payments to the primary societies supplying textile products. Consequently, the society becomes a defaulter as it fails to make a scheduled payment to various raw material suppliers. This makes the societies dysfunctional and weavers' depend upon the mahajans for capital and gets far more caught in the vicious cycle.

Apart from the government approved handloom societies, around 3,50,994 handlooms in the state, provide work to more than 6,00,000 workforce. About one-third of the weavers in the district have formed cooperatives. Marketing is seasonal businesses and takes place mostly during the festive seasons of March-April and October-November. Hence, there is an urgent requirement for giving consumption credit to weavers along with a liberal and targeted social security support intervention.

Change in lifestyles and market scenario illustrate that handloom weaving is no more a viable profession. The production has been reducing, although there is demand in the domestic market for handloom products. Weaving on an indigenous handloom is time taking and thus adds immense value to the products. The contemporary handloom products are presently using dyed polyester filaments yarn and blended yarns. The use of such yarns instead of natural fibre and use of power-looms to weave a staggering variety of clothes and the handloom products has played confusion with regional identities. This has significantly affected the continued existence of many auxiliary activities and is a significant contributing factor for the downfall of the handloom industry. Mechanized yarn winding machines are used for winding and thus starching of yarn by homemade rice starch, spinning on barrels and bobbins. Modernization of the process and use of substitutes is beneficial for the weaver in terms of production but has extremely affected the rich heritage of handloom products.

Older weavers want their children to have nothing to do with the crafts and handloom weaving appears to be largely an occupation of senior citizens with several old weavers continuing with the tradition with no younger apprentices in sight to continue with the same. The entry of standardized mill manufactured yarn altered the

unique identity of handloom fabrics irrevocably. Competition from lower cost power loom limitations has diluted the handloom identities. In addition, sometime the dyes used are of poor quality having poor light and wash-fastness and quickly fades.

Pattern of seasonal migration: The handloom weavers have been pushed into a corner by power-looms and declining incomes, with many leaving the looms while others are in constant debt. Many of them are economically backward, abandoned their looms and migrated in search of other livelihoods. Uneven development is the main cause of migration. To earn a better living, the skilled workforce migrates to work in similar industries in nearby districts or other states. It is a fact that the migration is a need-based movement and workers migrate from a less developed region to developed region.

Conclusion

The handloom sector in Purba Bardhaman district has a strong social embeddedness within the society. However, the presence of mahajan displays the prevalence of malfeasance. Further, the success of production process largely depends on the accessibility of good quality raw materials at competitive prices, efficient process and effectual marketing strategies for the final products. Therefore, an effective raw material management and an efficient distribution and marketing support mechanism are necessary to curb the oligopolistic control of mahajans over the entire production and market mechanism. The government must ensure a well-organized supply chain to organize for ancillary facilities for the various workforces within the manufacturing process, by installing rural kiosks and removing the presence of mahajans in the business.

During the field study, it was perceived that the government is not successful enough to manage the supply, distribution, marketing process and bring together the auxiliary facilities to the weavers. This has given space for penetration of mahajans into the business, who are making huge profits margins leading to marginalization of poor weavers.

Many weavers have expressed their willingness to continue with their traditional handloom weaving but stressed the need for the government support to strengthening production and distribution mechanism in order to have earned a better livelihood by practicing their heritage craft.

The Government can bring in some potential policy solutions such as:

- i. Setting up distribution and collection centres for finished product in terms of equal pay to all weavers
- ii. Providing rural households with supplementary employment and facilitate the empowerment of women
- iii. Technological up-gradation in the handloom sector
- iv. Ensure quality healthcare in the deprived corners of the rural areas.

Such policy solutions can provide a balanced pathway towards sustainable development in the society, which would certainly put off malfeasance and, simultaneously, acknowledge the embodied and embedded nature of the society.

Most processes of dyeing and warping were primitive, and 100s single cotton yarn is used for both warp and weft. The handloom

cluster suffered as it was unorganized, and the weavers isolated with the added limitation of low capital, poor exposure to latest technologies, inadequate institutional linkages and support, and absence of marketing intelligence.

For the Basak community, weaving has been the prime source of livelihood, with their youngsters already acquainted with it since childhood. The younger generation is more educated and has been reluctant to take up weaving as a profession, but after the cluster intervention programme, this scenario is changing. Through various awareness programmes over the last few years, they have been somewhat motivated by the government initiatives, beginning to realize the significance of the industry in playing a major role in employment generation. At present 47% of the youth has been inspired to join the profession, as against the earlier 30% before the intervention. If the birds go homing, it is a good sign for the possibility of revival of the Burdwan cluster and the future of tangail saris.

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Conflict of interest

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