



Ray of Hope: Areas of Prospects of Handloom Textile in West Bengal with special reference to Nadia and Purba Bardhaman

*Soumen Debnath

Assistant Professor, Dwijendralal College, Krishnagar, West Bengal

Abstract

Although there are many areas of problems, which create hindrance for sustainability and development of handloom textile, still there are areas of prospects such as employment generation, low capital investment and large number of manual labour, income generation, capability for production of value added commodities, production for export and generation of foreign revenue, linkage creation like; human linkage, commodity linkage, monetary linkage, development of growth centers, regional concentration of industries.

Key words: prospects of handloom, manual labour, linkage creation, development of growth centers.

A handloom is a loom that is used to weave cloth by hand. In other word handloom is a loom where weaving is done without the use of electric or automatic machine. Hand weaving is done on pit looms; frame looms and stand looms, generally located in weavers' houses. Weaving is primarily the interlacing of two sets of yarn- the warp (length) and the woof (width). The device that facilitates this interlacing is the handloom. It is important to mention that "handloom" is different from powerloom, which is a type of loom that is powered mechanically by electric instead of using human power to weave thread into cloth.

Handloom industry still occupies a predominant position in the industrial scenario of Nadia and Purba Bardhaman district. The major concentrations of handloom weavers are in Santipur, Nabadwip, Krishnanagar I and II and Ranaghat I, Srirampur, Samudragarh, Nasaratpur, Dhatrigram, Kalna I, ketugram, Tamaghata, Jahannagar. There are more than 1.5 lakh looms operating in these two district providing employment to about two lakh people in the weaving and associated sectors of this industry. Only about 18 per cent of the weavers are under the cooperative fold, as per handloom census 2019-20. The region's handloom industry has an age old tradition and holds a special place in economy. For the benefit and development of the industry, the district handloom office is putting its best efforts to provide finance through NABARD and Nadia District Central Cooperative Bank Limited (NDCC), Bardhaman District Central

Cooperative Bank Limited (BDCC) along with implementation of various welfare schemes. Although there are many areas of problems, which create hindrance for sustainability and development of handloom textile, still there are areas of prospects. The products of the industry are not only sold in local and national markets but also through government showrooms viz. Tantuja and Manjusha. The handloom products of these districts have good reputation and in recent years, product diversification in the handloom industry has opened new opportunities for their export abroad.

Handloom is a traditional activity of the district and the most renowned of all the industries in Nadia and Purba Bardhaman. This industry, with its environment friendly production trend, requirement of low capital input, demand for human skill and manual labour is extremely suitable for densely populated developing countries like India. In this way, the economy of these districts of West Bengal is immensely dependent on this industry. The impacts of the handloom industry on the economy of the district are as follows:

Employment Generation: The economy of these districts is immensely dependent on its agricultural resources. Purba Bardhaman is the height rice producing district of state and Nadia is famous for jute and vegetable productions. The handloom sector provides employment sources to a large number of people. In fact, the handloom industry accounts for almost 60 per cent of the total industrial workers of two districts. Handloom industry also reduces the disparity in the male-female work participation rate by providing part-time and full-time employment opportunities to a large number of women who are engaged in the preparatory activities for making handloom cloth. But, there is a substantial difference in the income between male and female workers. It is also noticed that the women rarely hold the status on master weavers or owners of the production units, though they are actively involved in the weaving process in many cases. The labour intensive trend of the handloom industry is also suitable for a district like Nadia and Purba Bardhaman, with dense population and high incidence of poverty and unemployment. Many of the hired labours, who remain unemployed in the agricultural sector for some months in the year, engage themselves in the preparatory works of handloom production during those months. So handloom provides part-time job to workers of others field, especially to agricultural workers.

Low Capital Investment and Large Number of Manual Labour: The handloom industry is an environment friendly industry which requires investment of low capital and simple setup in the workshop to carry on the production. It is thus quite suitable for areas where people, in general, do not have huge capital to start business. The industry thus encourages the skill of entrepreneurship present among the people which would otherwise be lost in the dearth of capital required to start off with a big business. The presence of *mahajans* is still very prominent. Many of the weavers have been successful to come out of the *mahajani* grip and start off their own production unit.

The handloom industry is labour intensive and absorbs a large labour force of the region. The industry also supports age old tradition and skill that attach uniqueness to the handloom cloth. Though the weaving process in particular demands a lot of skill and trained labour, the preparatory processes and the ancillary industries of the handloom sector can be run with semi skilled labour. In fact, the techniques of the other

aspects of production, besides weaving, are so simple that people can easily be trained in a short period for the purpose. Even women, old people can also earn some money from ancillary works. Handloom production is domestic in nature, so women can engage themselves side by side with their household activities, sitting in their own house. In our society it is very problematic for women to work out side home. In many cases there is not proper arrangement for women; especially health related issues and hygiene are not maintained. In other cases women are not allowed to work outside the house for different social and family reasons. Labour intensive nature of handloom resolves these issues.

Income Generation: Though the handloom sector provides only a meager income to the weavers, still their monthly income is better than the hired labourers in the agricultural sector of the region. In fact, the average monthly income of a hired weaver is also better than the hired labourer in the other industrial sector of these districts (District statistical handbook Nadia, 2018). The industries related to the handlooms also offer more monthly earning opportunity in comparison to population related with agriculture. Although the industry generally demands skilled labour for weaving purposes, the preparatory works and ancillary industries absorb semi-skilled or unskilled labours, which otherwise remain jobless or create disguised unemployment in the oversaturated agricultural sector of the region. The nature of engagement in the handloom sector provides job security for a longer period than the agricultural sector, as the later is seasonal work.

Revenue Generation and Opportunity Creation for Ancillary Industries: Though the economy of Nadia is primarily dependent on agriculture, still, in recent years, there is a diversion of the rural work force to the non-farm sector. The handloom industry plays a dominant role in the overall industrial scenario of the district, supporting more than two lakh people in its production system. It earns a substantial amount of revenue for the district's economy and also occupies an important niche in the state economy. The Temporal pattern of sale of the handloom products in the domestic market during 2003-10 was obtained from the H.D.O. of Santipur. It can be seen that though there was a temporary downward pattern in the sale of the products during 2005-07, yet the sale of tant shari and other handloom products of Nadia in the domestic market industry recovered from 2008 and continued its way successfully, making a prominent contribution in the later years to the district's production.

The handloom industry uses products of different ancillary industries like the cotton yarn processing industry, the dyes and chemicals industry, the looms' spares industry and so on. The handloom sector receives its raw materials from these industries, which are located both within and outside the districts. In recent years, there is a tendency towards the growth of these ancillary industries in areas of production of handloom. These industries also generate revenue for these districts and provide part time and full time employment opportunities to the local population. In Nadia, these ancillary units are mainly small scale ones and generally owned by the master weavers and mahajans, who try to appropriate the profit from these aspects of production along with their profit margin from the handloom sector. Silk is not processed locally but is bought from the wholesale market in Kolkata. The silk yarns reach the capital city from the western Silk hub like Gujarat and Maharashtra. Silk is however consumed in selected aspects of handloom industry, especially in the manufacturing of exportable and expensive products (Poddar 2015: 159-160).

Capability for Production of Value Added Commodities: Since the production in the handloom sector is skill dependent and unique to the locality, the finished commodities can fetch a much higher price and there is high percentage of value addition at every stage of production of designed products. Thus in spite of low capital input, the price of the finished product make the weavers earn a sufficient amount for their skill and expertise work. This is truer in the case of exportable handloom products which can bear high price for its quality, style and uniqueness. There are many nation award winning weavers. *jamdani* silk shari with all body design priced up to 8 lakh per piece.

Production for Export and Generation of Foreign Revenue: The products of the handloom industry are popular even in the international market and a portion of the handloom production is exported. This export activity is concentrated only among selected affluent groups of weavers. It provides a significant stimulus to the production sector and boosts economic performance of these districts.

Linkage Creation: Different types of spatial linkages originate based on the functioning of the handloom industry and play vital role for its sustainability. The types of linkages include:

Human Linkage: Most of the weavers engaged in the production of the handloom sector are migrants from East Bengal and North Bengal districts. They are skilled workers acquainted with the traditional weaving styles, and without them, the production system would not survive. The industry also accounts for a large number of communicators who communicate to the state capital of Kolkata to access the required raw material weekly or daily, and supply them to the local traders. Thus the migrant weavers and the communicator create two different aspects of human linkage (Poddar 2015 :159).

Commodity Linkage: The handloom industry requires raw materials, which are not always found at the sources of production. The industry has developed mainly based on the availability of skilled labours and tradition of weaving. The raw materials are brought to the production centre from Kolkata from different parts of the country. Only a few rich *mahajans* and master weavers trade the raw materials directly from the other states. The finished products are sold locally and also sent to different wholesale and retail markets of the country, creating another type of commodity linkage. Again the commodities produced in the handloom industry of Nadia are sold in different fairs and through government selling organizations all over India. This linkage pattern, however, shows a slightly decreasing trend over the years. A part of the finished products is also exported, forming a type of international commodity linkage (Poddar 2015: 160).

Monetary Linkage: The handloom industry gets monetary support from different state financial organizations. The cooperatives also arrange for loans from different types of government policies and schemes. The entrepreneurs from adjacent districts and Kolkata invest in the handloom industry of the Nadia and Purba Bardhaman districts. Added to this, the migrant weavers send a healthy portion of their wages and income to their original residential areas. Thus, different types of monetary linkages are created by the handloom industry of these two districts. (Poddar 2015 : 160)

Regional Concentration in Industrial Development: The handloom industry is skill dependent and thus is an extremely localized phenomenon. The available data shows that the handloom cluster in Nadia, which comprises mainly of the blocks of Santipur, Ranaghat I. Nabadwip and Krishnanagar II, engage 106563 industrial workers out of 184411 industrial workers (57.79%) of the district. It can also be seen that above mentioned blocks also account for 77.73 per cent of the total population engaged in the weaving section of the handloom industry of Nadia district (District Statistical Handbook Nadia: 2010). Handloom is the most important of all the industries of Nadia and thus, it controls the distribution of the industrial workforce. However, this concentrated phenomenon of the development of the handloom industrial sector creates inequalities and disparities in the overall development of the district. Same complain of regional disparities also raised in Purba Bardhaman district.

The handloom industry of Nadia and Purba Bardhaman has influenced the development of some urban growth centers in these districts. These centers have advantages of large skilled and trained labour force, availability of economic facilities, adequate transport and communication, proximity to existing commercial centers and markets, availability of required infrastructure etc. Important growth centers that have developed based on the handloom industry are Ranaghat, Chakdaha. Santipur. Fulia. Nabadwip, Krishnanagar, Samudragarh, Dhartigram, Kalna and Katwa. The economic growth of these areas totally based on the weaving industry, both handloom and powerloom. From last few years market of powerloom products of these areas are very down. These products are not in a position to compete with powerlooms' products of other states. As a result handlooms are facing less challenge from powerloom, to a little extent.

References:

- Abdul, N. (1996), "Handloom and Distress", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 31(23): 1384-1386. Retrieved from <URL://WWW.jstore.org>. Accessed on Mar. 10, 2021.
- Anubhai, P. (1988), "Sickness in Indian Textile Industry: Causes and Remedies", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 23(48): M147-M157. Retrieved from <URL://WWW.jstore.org>. Accessed on Mar. 10, 2021.
- Bag, Sailendra Kumar (1989), *The Changing Fortunes of the Bengal Silk Industry 1757-1833*, Calcutta: Manasi Press.
- Baines, Edward (1835), *History of the Cotton Manufacture in Great Britain, With an Early History in the East and All the Quarters of the Globe*, London: H. Fisher and P. Jack.
- Banarjee, Atulya (1388 Bangabdo), *Banglar Rachdel*, Fulia: tangail Tantujabi unnayan Samabai Samiti Ltd.
- Bandhopadhyay, Debashis (2020), "Antorjatic Shrikritir Laria namlo Banglar Tangail, Karial, Garad: TantSharir GI Pata Abadan Rajyar", *Bartaman Patrika*, Kolkata, October 09 2020, (in Bengali) Dakshinbango, p.09.
- Bhattacharya, Bitan (2020), "Karimpura Bandho Tantshilpo, Dinmujoree Bharva Tantider" ,*Bartaman Patrika*, Kolkata, October 13 2020.(in bengali) Dakshinbango, p.10.
- Bhattacharya, Sukumar. (1967), *The East India Company and the Economy of Bengal from 1707-1740*, Calcutta: farma KLM Private Ltd.
- Biswas, Pradip Kumar (2003), *Rural Industrialisation in West Bengal*, New Delhi: Manak.

- Chakraborty Subhasis (2017), "The Cotton Industry of West Bengal", *Proceeding of the Indian History Congress*, 78 (2017) :1217-1235. Retrieved from <URL://WWW.jstore.org>. Accessed on Mar. 10, 2021.
- Chakraborty, Subhasis (2014), *Banglar Tant Shilpa Nadia Jaler Ekti Samiksha 1947-2013*, Kolkata: Setu. (in bengali).
- Chakraborty, P. K. (1983), *Problems of Co-operative Development in India With Special Reference to West Bengal*, New Delhi: S Chand and Co. Ltd.
- Chatterjee, R. (1987), "Cotton Handloom Manufactures of Bengla, 1870-1921", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 22(25): 988-997. Retrieved from <URL://WWW.jstore.org>. Accessed on Mar. 10, 2021.
- Chattopadhyay, A. (2001), *Bardhaman Jaler Itishas O Lok Sanskriti*, Kolkata: radical Impression.
- Choudhury T. (2015), *The Decay of handloom Industry in the Cachar District of Assam an Analysis of the Causal Factors and Socio-Economic Impacts*, Ph.D. Thesis, Silchar: Assam University. Retrieved from, URL: <https://sg.inflibnet.ac.in.pdf>. Accessed on June 12, 2021.
- Chowdhury, Sushil. (2014), *Prithibir Tantghar Banglar Bashrashilpo O Banyajya 1600-1800*, Kolkata: Ananda Publisher.(in Bengali).
- Das, Ganesh. (2020), "Antorjatic Shrikritir Laria namlo Banglar Tangail, Karial, Garad :TinSharir GI Pata Abadan Rajyar", (Bengali) *Bartaman Patrika*, Kolkata, October 9 2020, Dakshinbango,p.09.
- Das, Sujit Kumar (2001), *The Warp and Woof: An Enquiry into the Handloom Industry in West Bengal*, Calcutta: K.P.Bagchi &Co.
- Datta, B.D. (2018), "An In-depth Study on Jamdani and Tangail weavers of Purba Bardhaman District, West Benga; India", *Journal of Textile Engineering & Fashion Technology*, 4 (3): 263-270.
- Dekshit, Jayanta. (2020), "Handloom weavers staring bleak future following COVID-19 lockdown", *Indo-Asian News Service*, New Delhi, May 19, 2020.
- Desai, A.V. (1983), "Technology and Market Structure under Government Regulation: A case Study of Indian Textile Industry", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 18(5): 150-160. Retrieved from <URL://WWW.jstore.org>. Accessed on Mar. 10, 2021.
- Desai, P. (2020), "Handloom weavers staring bleak future following COVID-19 lockdown", *Indo-Asian News Service*, New Delhi, November 20 2020 Retrieved from URL:<https://www.onmanorama.com/lifestyle/news/2020/04/19/mpact-covid-19-on-indian-handloom-sector.html>.
- Dharma, R.P. (2002), "Hank Yarn and Handloom", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 37(47): 4654. Retrieved from <URL://WWW.jstore.org>. Accessed on Mar. 10, 2021.
- Dogra, Bharat (2010), *Struggle of Handloom Weavers to Save Livelihoods and Silk*, New Delhi: Kulshrestha Printers.
- Dutta, A.k. and Streefkerk, H. (1985), "Weavers Traders and the state: Handloom Weaving in Bangladesh", *Economic and political Weekly*, 20(37): 1571-1578. Retrieved from <URL://WWW.jstore.org>. Accessed on Mar. 10, 2021.
- Dutta, Prabhat and Dipankar Sinha (2008), *Self Help Groups in West Bengal Challenges of Development and Empowerment*, Kolkata: Dasgupta and Co.Pvt.Ltd.
- Ghosh, G K and Sukla. Ghosh (2017), *Indian Textile Past and Present*, New Delhi: APH Publishing Corporation.
- Goswami, O. (1990), "Sickness and Growth of Indian's Textile Industry: Analysis and Policy options", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 25(44): 2429-2439. Retrieved from <URL://WWW.jstore.org>. Accessed on Mar. 10, 2021.

- Jain, L.C. (1983), "handlooms Face Liquidation: Powerlooms Mock at Yojana Bhavan", *Economic and political weekly*, 18(35): 1517-1526. Retrieved from <URL://WWW.jstore.org>. Accessed on Mar. 10, 2021.
- Kumar, K Mahendra (2010), *An Analysis of Production and Marketing of Handloom Fabrics in Andhra Pradesh (A Study of Prakasam District)*, Ph.D. Thesis, Guntur: Acharya Nagarjuna University. Retrieved from, URL: <https://sg.inflibnet.ac.in.pdf>.
- Kumar, Suresh K S and C. Ganesh (2014), *Handloom Industry in India An Over View*, New Delhi: Abhijit Publications.
- Kundu , Pramananda (1950), *Refugees and the Handloom Industry of West Bengal in Textile India*, Delhi: oriental Books Reprint Corporation.
- Kundu, A. (1980), "Pattern of Organization of the Handloom Industry in West Bengal: Part Two", *Social Scientist*, 9 (2/3): 41-52. Retrieved from <URL://WWW.jstore.org>. Accessed on Mar.10,2021.
- Kundu, A. (1980), "Pattern of Organization of the Handloom Industry in West Bengal: Part One", *Social Scientist*, 9 (1): 18-32. Retrieved from <URL://WWW.jstore.org>. Accessed on Mar.10, 2021.
- Liebl, M. and Roy, T.(2004), "Handmade in India: Preliminary Analysis of Crafts Producuers and Crafts production" , *Economic and Political Weekly*, 38(51/52). Retrieved from <URL://WWW.jstore.org>. Accessed on Mar. 10, 2021.
- Mallick, kumodnath. (1986), *Nadia kanini*, Shantipur: Shantipur Lok Sanskriti Parishad.
- Mitra, Debendra Bijoy (1978), *The Cotton Weavers of Bengal 1757-1833*, Calcutta: L Frame and Co.
- Mukunda, K. and Syamsundari, B. (1998), " Doomend to Fail? 'Handloom Weavers' co-operatives in Andhra Pradesh", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 33(52): 3323-3332. Retrieved from <URL://WWW.jstore.org>. Accessed on Mar. 10, 2021.
- Nambiar, A K C. (2013), *Handloom Industry in India*, New Delhi: A.P.H. Publishing Corporation.
- Nardinelli, C. (1986), "Technology and Unemployment: The Case Study of Handloom Weavers", *Southern Economic Journal*, 53 (1): 87-94. Retrieved from <URL://WWW.jstore.org>. Accessed on Mar. 10, 2021.
- Nath, P and Mrinalini, N. and Sandhya, G.D. (2001), "National Textile Policy and Textile Research", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 36(5/6): 489-496 . Retrieved from <URL://WWW.jstore.org>. Accessed on Mar. 10, 2021.
- Nath, Purnendunath. (1388 bangabda), *Shantipur Samaj, Sanskriti O Itihas*, Shantipur: Shantipur Lok Sanskriti Parishad.
- Nayae, Rahul. (2020), " Handloom weavers staring bleak future following COVID-19 lockdown" ,*Indo-Asian News Service*, New Delhi, April 19 2020, Retrieved from URL:<https://www.onmanorama.com/lifestyle/news/2020/04/19/mpact-covid-19-on-indian-handloom-sector.html>.
- Neogi , Alakavo (2020), " Karanakala Rajyar Tantsilpider kach Thaka 8 koti takar Shari Kinlo Tantujo", *Bartaman Patrika* ,Kolkata, October 14 2020,(in bengali) Dakshinbango, p. 09.
- Poddar, S (2015), *The Handloom Industry and its Impact on the economy of Nadia District in West Bengal*, Ph.D. Thesis, Kolkata: University of Calcutta. Retrieved from, URL: <https://sg.inflibnet.ac.in.pdf>. Accessed on june 12,2020.
- Raman, R (2017), *Marketing Practices of Tamilnadu Handlom weavers' Co-operative Society LTD, (COPTEX), Chennai- A Study on Silk Products*, Ph.D. Thesis, Annamalai Nagar: Annamalai University. Retrieved from, URL: <https://sg.inflibnet.ac.in.pdf>. Accessed on June 12,2021

Roy, T. (1989), "Relation of Production in Handloom Weaving in the Mid-1930s", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 24(4): PE21-PE25+PE28-PE34. Retrieved from <URL://WWW.jstore.org>. Accessed on Mar. 10, 2021.

Roy, T. (1998), "Economic Reforms and Textile Industry in India", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 33(32): 2173-2182. Retrieved from <URL://WWW.jstore.org>. Accessed on Mar. 10, 2021.

Roy, T. (2002), "Acceptance of Innovations in Early Twentieth-Century Indian Weaving", *Economic History Review*, 55 (3): 507-532. Retrieved from <URL://WWW.jstore.org>. Accessed on Mar. 10, 2021.

Roy, T. (2007), "Out of Tradition: Master Artisans and Economic Changes in Colonial India", *Journal of Economic Studies*, 66 (4): 963-91.

Sarkar, S. (2017), "A Detailed Analysis of cotton Textile Industry at Bardhaman Cluster of West Bengal", *The International Journal of Engineering and Science*, 6 (1): 33-39. Retrieved from <URL://WWW.jstore.org>. Accessed on Mar. 10, 2021.

Sen, Manab (2005), *Study of Self Help Group and Micro Finance in West Bengal*, Kalyani: State Institute of Panchayat and Rural Development.

Sinha, Monami (2019), "The Effects of GST on the Handloom sector", *Social Scientist*, 47(5/6):63-70. Retrieved from <URL://WWW.jstore.org>. Accessed on Mar. 10, 2021.

Soundarapandian, M. (2002), *Growth and Prospects of Handloom Sector in India*, Mumbai: National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development.

Srinivasulu, K. (1997), "High – Powered Committee, Low Voltage Report: Mira Seth Report on Handlooms", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 32(24): 1381-1384. Retrieved from <URL://WWW.jstore.org>. Accessed on May 10, 2021.

