



Profile of Social aspects and social conditions of weavers and allied workers in Nadia and Purba Bardhaman Districts of West Bengal

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Abstract

The occupational structure of the handloom community consists of three categories. The *mahajans* enjoying maximum profit, some independent master weavers are in the middle position, a large number of weavers, depending on piece rate system for their wages, posited at the bottom level with minimal profit. Handloom is basically a household production system. In these districts large section of weavers and allied workers are from O.B.C, mainly belong to *Basak* and *Yogi* Communities. Above 80 per cent of weavers have education up to school level in case of both districts.

Key words: Handloom weavers, Nadia, Purba Bardhaman, social profile, organizational structure

West Bengal had a great heritage of cotton textile industry from the very ancient period of time. This work was traditionally done by rural artisans, where they reflected their hope, aspiration and their life style through their design, the brilliant mix of colours which is admired all over the world. Government of West Bengal in its annual report of 2016-17 mentioned, that it has identified three circuits (Purulia-Bankura-Bishnupur, Kalna-Katwa-Nabadwip-Shantipur and Uttar Dinajpur-Dakhin Dinajpur-Malda) to develop market opportunities for tourism, handloom and handicraft products. The second circuit is my study area.

Tracing the origin of handloom weaving of Nadia is a very difficult task. It can be said that the art of weaving commenced in Santipur even before the arrival of Lord Chaitanya. Most probably the weaving activity started during the early 15th century during the regime of Gaur Ganesh Danu Mardhandev. Sari weaving became popular in the 2nd half of 17th century during the period of the then Nadia king Rudra Roy. The production became systematic and well organized during Mughal rule. The British controlled the industry through the East India Company. Those weavers protested against discriminatory British policies faced brutal punishment. The control of East India Company ceased to exist with the interference of the Governor General. After partition, handloom of Fulia area grows fastest in comparison to other parts of the district; even Fulia is the sole region of the district, where handloom is flourishing today. Nadia district has two handloom zones namely The Santipur Handloom Zone and The Nabadwip Handloom Zone (Poddar 2015).

Shantipur zone have 95200 weavers, 230 Primary weavers Cooperative Societies (PWCS). Within this zone, Ranaghat 1 and 2 block, and Ranaghat Municipality are famous for production of coarse sari, lungi gamcha, furnishing fabric. On the other hand, tangail shari, jamdani shari, santipuri shari, dhoti, dress materials and exportable fabrics are produced in Santipur block including Santipur and Fulia municipalities and adjoining areas (Report of Handloom Development office, Shantipur: 2022).

There are 48916 handlooms, 65125 weavers 203 P.W.C.Ss. in Nabadwip zone. Within this zone, Nababwip municipality and Nabadwip block mainly produce jamdani shari, coarse shari, lungi, gamcha, shirting. On the other hand Nakashipara and Krishnanagar 1 and 2 blocks and adjoining areas of Rajapur mainly produce jamdani sari, towels, and exportable fabrics (Report of Handloom Development Office, Nabadwip 2022).

The time of origin of cotton manufacturing industry in Purb Bardhaman District is partly unknown because of scarcity of proper reliable data, but according to Handloom Development Office, Chinsurah, the Bardhaman cluster was mainly growing since 1942. This cluster has 48407 handlooms (Handloom Census 2019-20). The weaving work is mainly done by two communities namely Yogi and Basak communities. Weavers of Yogi Community were traditionally efficient in lungi, gamcha and matha shari production. People of Basak Community are traditionally efficient in producing fine shari. But nowadays with the decline of handloom made lungi, gamcha and chittaranjan shari and growth of power loom in this sector, Yogi are engaging themselves in tangail shari and jamdani shari production. These efficient weavers were migrated from Nowakhali, Tangail, Dhaka districts (at present under Bangladesh) before and after partition of India and settled in Katwa, Dhatrigram Samudragarh, Purbasthali-1 block of Purba Bardhaman District.

This renowned cluster of Bengal is full of small weavers, master weavers, P.W.C.Ss weavers, individual private weavers, skilled designers, various technical people who make computerized card and also “National Awardees Weavers”. Though the main products of this cluster are jamdani and tangail sari with jacquard design but there are product variations from one block to another, they are as follows: a) Katwa-1 and Katwa 2 blocks, the main production is gamcha, lungi, and 100s tasar tangail sari with buti design, number of weavers 2643. b) Purbasthali -1 and Purbasthali -2 blocks have highest concentration of weavers with product diversifications, such as 100s tangail jamdani, cotton baluchuri with jacquard design, 100s tangail naksapar, jamdani shari using jacquard, gamcha, lungi, scarf, home furnishing materials etc, 12529 weavers are engaged here. c) The main product of kalna-1 block is 100s tangail shari with jacquard, with 4988 weavers (Handloom Census 2019-20).

The handloom sector is a small-scale industry and the operating system is very similar to the other traditional cottage industry, having the mahajani (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. All 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 handloom production and marketing of 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 per piece rate. In this system, the payment to the weavers is based on the number of finished cloth produced despite the time spent to produce it. Handloom workers usually incur loss, especially in dry seasons (during monsoon and when marriage like occasion are not there) since they underestimated their investment of time under this system.

The occupational structure of the handloom community consists of three categories

- The mahajans enjoying maximum profit
- Some independent master weavers are in the middle position
- A large number of weavers, depending on piece rate system for their wages, posited at the bottom level with minimal profit.

The mahajan and the independent master weavers practically have a similar controlling position in the handloom production other than a striking difference where the master weavers generally have their own looms and engage weavers by paying wages to work for them. Mahajan, generally like the capitalist system, do not run looms and supply yarns to the weavers and also do marketing of the finished products. The weavers are mostly simple, lack formal education and negotiation skill and hence left with no other option other than depending on mahajans. They know that the mahajans are exploiting them and get the products done at low rates 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 (Chattopadhyay 2001: 43-45)

The occupational structure of handloom industry reveals the darker side of the capitalist system, showing that the powers are in the hands of few people. Further, 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 (Sarkar2015: 4). However, in the handloom sector where most of the activities are manual and labourious, 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 marginalisation and deprivation 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 weavers' family perform allied activities. There is need of skill upgradation training in order to save time (interview of weavers and allied workers).

The dyeing unit follows old techniques using conventional methods and is not environment friendly. The quality of dye stuffs and improper dyeing technique are the reasons for defective dyeing and poor function of 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.

The weaving industry of Bengal is the most prominent and oldest industry in the country. Organized or unorganized, many skilled or less skilled people are associated with it. Although the equipment used by the weavers was not up-to-date. In Nadia district and almost everywhere in Bengal, many people are still choosing a livelihood by rising above the caste system. The strategic shift in production may have attracted different classes of people to the weaving. Many of them have embraced this industry so sincerely that they cannot think of moving to another profession despite their various problems. About ten percent of the new generations from weavers' families are involved in handloom. However, the participation of 25 to 40 year olds is relatively high. The instances are very rare that people of this age group leave weaving after joining this profession. But many instances are there, of shifting handloom to powerloom or taking handloom as a part-time job (interview of weavers and allied workers).

According to survey, most of the weavers in Nadia and Purba Bardhaman districts are Hindus, some are Muslims. More over, the exiled refugees from East Bengal, many of whom had never been involved in the weaving process at all, associated themselves with the weaving process as a total alternative livelihood after coming in these areas. However, weavers' refugees from Tangail and Dhaka took shelter at Phulia and kept themselves attached with the traditional handloom production process. And the non-weavers refugees, who come to this country, keeping themselves in tune with the rural economy, engage themselves in the traditional production of handloom. Another big reason to involve them in this production process is that it does not require much investment. Naturally, handloom gained popularity very fast in these districts flooded by refugees after partition (Roy 2007: 15-16).

For primary and detailed analysis of the handloom textile industry, I have surveyed 320 weavers and 240 allied worker of these two districts. To represent the overall scenario, I have chosen Shantipur Municipal area and Nabadwip block in Nadia district. In Purba Bardhaman district I have taken Purbasthali- 1 block and Katwa -2 blocks. The reasons behind choosing these areas within these two districts are, these areas have highest concentration of handloom on the one hand. On the other, weavers of these areas also produce diversified products.

Table 1.1

Nadia district: male female weavershandloom, problems, Nadia, Purba Bardhaman

Area	Male	Female	Total	Percentage of male	Percentage of female
Shantipur	45	35	80	56.25	43.75
Nabadwip	41	39	80	51.25	48.75
Percentage of Nadia district				53.75	46.25

Figure 2.1

Total male-female percentage of weavers in Nadia district



Figure 2.1 shows male-female percentage of weavers surveyed is 53.75 and 46.25 respectively. I select numbers of male and female weavers in accordance with the percentage of 4th Handloom Census, 2019-20. There are more male weavers in Nadia than female weavers.

Table 1.2

Nadia district: male-female allied workers' percentage

Area	Male	Female	Total	Percentage of male	Percentage of female
Shantipur	24	36	60	40	60
Nabadwip	25	35	60	41.66	58.33
Total male-female percentage of allied workers in Nadia district				40.83	59.16

Figure 2.2

Total male-female percentage of allied workers in Nadia district

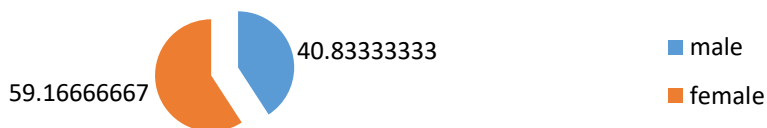


Table 1.3

Male-female allied workers of Purba Bardhaman district: percentage

Area	Male	Female	Total	Percentage of male	Percentage of female
Purbasthali-1	23	37	60	38.33	61.66
Katwa-2	26	34	60	43.33	56.66
Total male-female percentage of allied workers				40.833	59.166

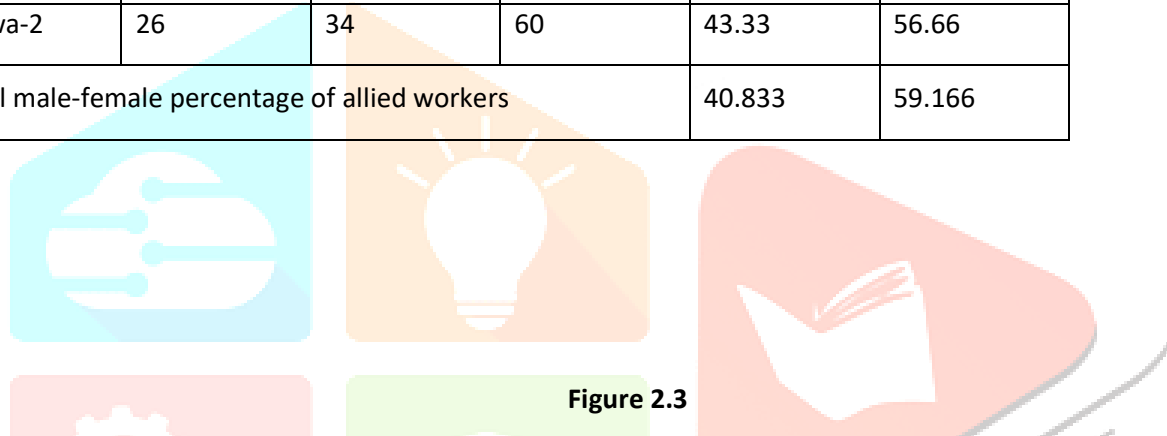


Figure 2.3

Total male-female percentage of allied workers in Purba Bardhaman district

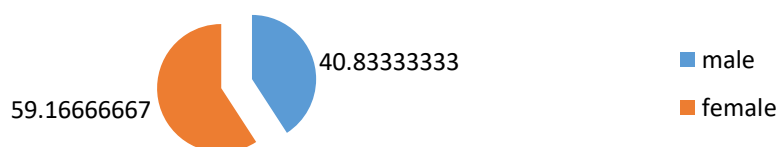


Figure 2.2 and 2.3 show that in case of allied workers, more female are engaged in pre-weaving and post-weaving activities. The reasons is that most of the allied activities are done in the house of allied workers.

Table 1.4

Purba Bardhaman District: Male-Female Weavers

Area	Male	Female	Total	Percentage of Male	Percentage of Female
Purbasthali-1	39	41	80	48.75	51.25
Katwa-2	38	42	80	47.5	52.5
Total	77	83	160	96.25	103.75
Total percentage of male-female				48.125	51.875

Figure 2.4

Purba Bardhaman District: Male-Female Weavers' Percentage

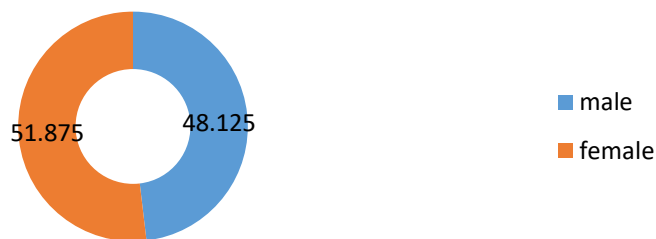


Figure 2.4 shows that in case of Purba Bardhaman district more male weavers are engaged in handloom weaving.

Table 1.5

Nadia district: level of education among weavers

Level of Education	Number of weavers	Percentage
Never attended School	11	6.875
primary	82	51.25
Secondary/ H.S	56	35
Graduate & above	11	6.85
Total	160	100

Figure 2.5

Nadia district: level of education among weavers

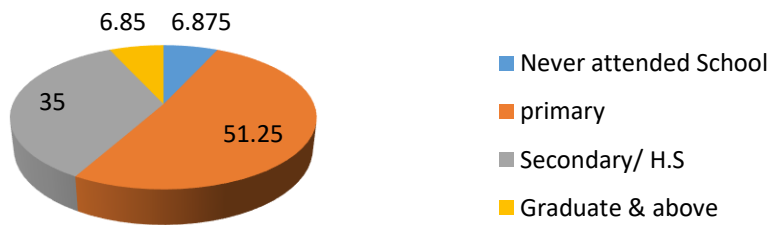


Figure 2.5 shows that more than half of the weavers in Nadia are educated up to primary level and 35 per cent are educated upto secondary or higher secondary level. On the other figure 2.7 shows better condition of education among weavers of Purba Bardhaman district.

Table 1.6

Nadia district: level of education among allied weavers

Level of Education	Number of allied workers	Percentage
Never attended School	11	9.16
primary	59	49.16
Secondary/ H.S	45	37.5
Graduate & above	5	4.16
Total	120	100

Figure 2.6

Nadia district: level of education among allied workers

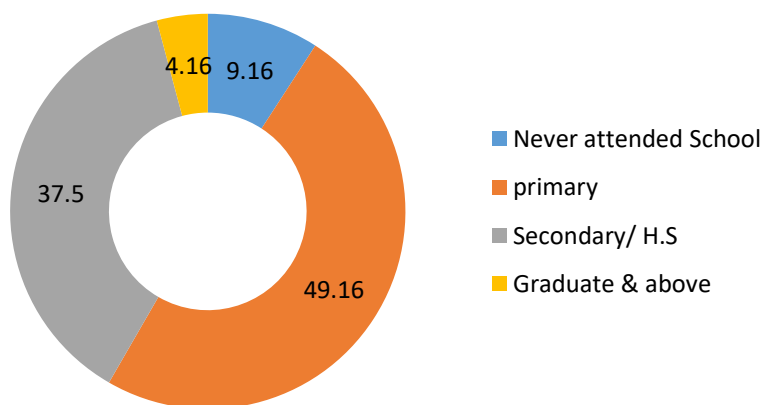


Table 1.7

Purba Bardhaman district: level of education among weavers

Level of Education		Percentage
Never attended School	14	8.75
primary	84	52.5
Secondary/ H.S	54	33.75
Graduate & above	8	5
Total	160	100

Figure 2.7

Purba Bardhaman district: level of education among weavers: percentage

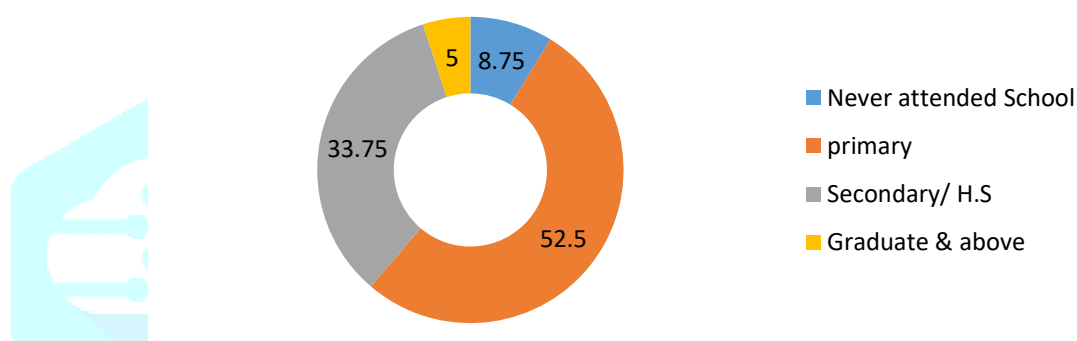


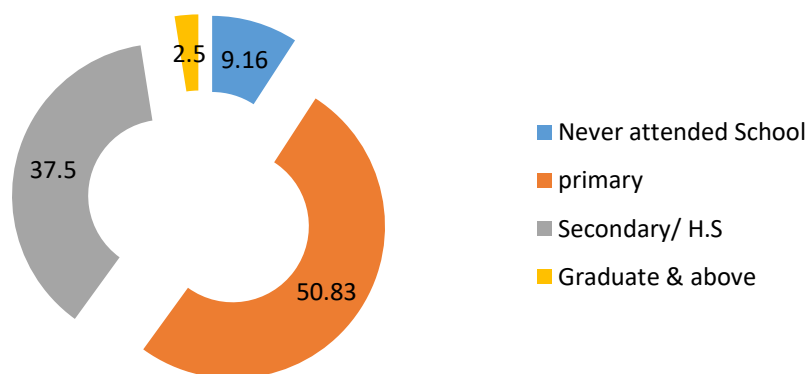
Table 1.8

Purba Bardhaman district: level of education among allied workers

Level of Education		Percentage
Never attended School	11	9.16
primary	61	50.83
Secondary/ H.S	45	37.5
Graduate & above	3	2.5
Total	120	100

Figure 2.8

Purba Bardhaman district: level of education among allied workers: percentage



In case of comparison between figure 2.6 and 2.8, we can find that both district has same education level in secondary or higher secondary education among allied workers. Purba Bardhaman district is little more educational level in primary education.

Table 1.9

Nadia district: profile of social groups of weavers

Social group	Number	Percentage
SC	31	19.375
ST	9	5.625
OBC	87	54.375
Others	33	20.625
Total	160	100

Figure 2.9

Nadia district: profile of social groups of weavers



Table 1.10

Purba Bardhaman district: profile of social groups of weavers

Social group	Number	Percentage
SC	26	16.25
ST	10	6.25
OBC	93	58.125
Others	31	19.375
Total	160	100

Figure 2.10

Purba Bardhaman district: profile of social groups of weavers' percentage



Comparison between figure 2.9 and figure 2.10 shows that in Purba Bardhaman district has more weavers belongs to OBC than Nadia. They are mainly people of *Yogi* and *Basak* communities

Table 1.11

Nadia district: allied workers social groups

Social group	Number	Percentage
SC	32	26.66
ST	8	6.66
OBC	52	43.33
Others	28	23.33
Total	120	100

Figure 2.11

Nadia district: allied workers social groups percentage

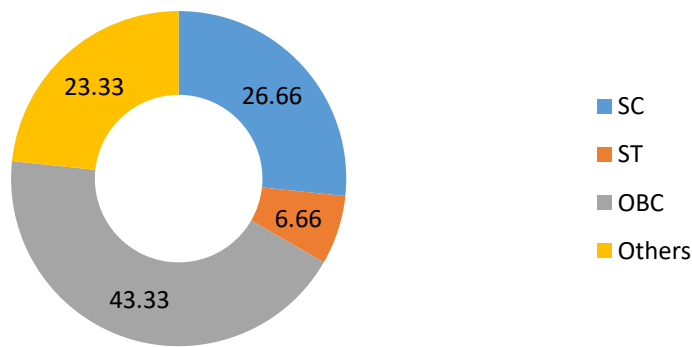


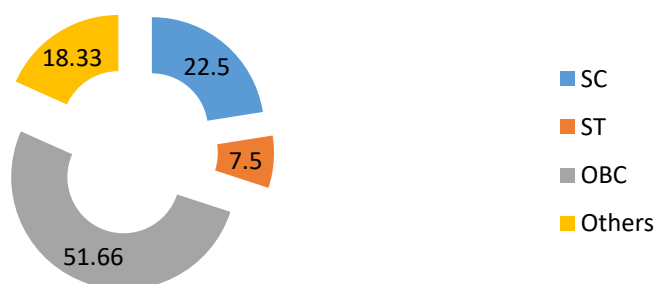
Table 1.12

Purba Bardhaman district: allied workers social groups

Social group	Number	Percentage
SC	27	22.5
ST	9	7.5
OBC	62	51.66
Others	22	18.33
Total	120	100

Figure 2.12

Purba Bardhaman district: allied workers social groups percentage



Comparison between figure 2.11 and 2.12 shows that among allied workers more people belong to OBC in Purba Bardhaman than Nadia, like weavers.

Through the above analysis we can understand different aspects of social profile of the weavers and ancillary workers of Nadia and Purba Bardhaman districts. Issues like male- female ratio, level of education, social groups of weavers and allied workers have been analysed. Through comparative analysis between two districts among above

mentioned areas, social profile and conditions of people related with the production of handloom, have been clearly depicted.

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