

# Working and Living Conditions of Handloom Weavers in Jharkhand: A Socio - Economic Analysis

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**Abstract:** ***Background:** Jharkhand, with its rich handloom weaving tradition, boasts vibrant textiles like Tussar silk and Dhokra sarees. However, the weavers, the lifeblood of this heritage, often grapple with socio - economic hardships. **Aim:** This study aims to comprehensively analyse the working and living conditions of handloom weavers in Jharkhand, examining their economic vulnerability, exploring the factors contributing to their plight, and evaluating the effectiveness of existing government support mechanisms. **Methodology:** The research employs a quantitative analysis of handloom on the following key factors: age, gender, location, religion, social group, educational qualifications, monthly household income from handloom - related activities, and loom ownership of the handloom weavers. **Findings:** The analysis reveals that handloom weavers struggle with minimal wages, unstable income, and limited access to formal employment and social security benefits. Long working hours, poor infrastructure in workspaces, and lack of access to modern equipment compromise weavers' health and productivity. While various government schemes exist, their effectiveness in reaching weavers and alleviating their hardships is often constrained by bureaucratic hurdles and lack of awareness. Weavers face unfair competition from power looms and exploitative practices by mediators, further squeezing their margins and profits. **Originality/Value:** This research goes beyond existing studies that primarily focus on economic factors. By integrating a socio - economic perspective, it sheds light on the complex interplay of social structures, cultural practices, and economic exploitation in shaping the lives of handloom weavers. This nuanced understanding can inform policy interventions and support mechanisms that address both the social and economic dimensions of their vulnerability, empowering them to secure sustainable livelihoods and preserve their cultural identity.*

**Keywords:** Handloom weavers, India, economic analysis, working conditions, living conditions, income inequality, social security, government support, market pressures.

## 1. Introduction

In a traditional home weaving setting, one member of the family runs the loom while others help with the various tasks involved in preparation and production. Warping, sizing, and starching are all steps in the yarn preparation process that fall on the weaver's shoulders. The weavers' relatives handle the sizing and warping. The charkha - like hand - operated warping wheel is a common fixture in the houses of weavers. The bulk of women work the equivalent of a full - time job in the preparatory labour (Tanusree, 2015). Preparation work also includes the occasional part - time employment of youngsters in several areas. Consequently, family activities often include a minimum of two to three individuals per loom. Even though statistics on employment believe the census underestimates women and other domestic workers, this holds true even when looking at estimates derived from the census.

Aside from farming, weaving on handlooms is a major economic activity in the nation. About 15% of the country's fabric production comes from this weaving industry, which also makes more than 95% of the world's hand - woven textiles. An estimated 35.23 million people are directly employed by the handloom sector in India, with approximately 28.20 million looms distributed across the country, according per the 4th All India Handloom Census 2019–20. Handloom weavers and others who work closely with them are both considered handloom workers. There are approximately thirty - five lakhs people who work with handlooms; over twenty - six lakhs are weavers, and over 8 lakhs are affiliated workers. In 2013, the value of Indian handloom exports was 370 million USD, and in 2020 - 21, it will be 223 million USD. The US ranked first among

countries that imported Indian handloom goods in 2020–21, followed by UK, Spain, Italy, Germany, and UAE.

The handloom industry in India receives two principal forms of aid from the government. The Revival, Reform, and Restructuring (RRR) and the Comprehensive Handloom Development Scheme are two components of the National Handloom Development Programme. The CHDS consists of the Cluster Development Programme, the Marketing Incentive, the Handloom Marketing Assistance, and the Development and Strengthening of Handloom Institutions. These initiatives work in tandem to enhance the handloom textile industry. Issues such as raw material shortages, credit constraints, marketing challenges, power loom and mill sector competition, the disorganized and dispersed nature of the handloom industry, stagnant technology, unsafe working conditions, and inadequate training and research are all major concerns.

In Jharkhand, India, a tribute to the state's famous handloom heritage, the melodic thud of looms reverberates over the lush valleys and wooded hills. The distinctive golden - hued tussar silk is a product of Indigenous communities who have preserved the art of weaving through many centuries. But there is a web of social fragility underneath all that beautiful craftsmanship; threads like poverty, exploitation, and limited opportunities throw long shadows. A socioeconomic lens was used to uncover the aspects that define the struggles and goals of these weavers, and this study delves into the complicated realities of their existence.

Issues including market rivalry, inadequate government support, and a lack of access to financing have been the

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primary foci of prior study on the economic aspects of handloom weavers' concerns (Bajaj, 2018; Ray & Sahu, 2019; Prathap & Naidu, 2015). All things considered; these do not often paint a full picture because they do not take into account the complex web of societal influences that greatly affect the weavers' lives. Therefore, this research takes a step back from only economic concerns and uses a complex socioeconomic analysis, taking cues from writers who call for a holistic view of development and poverty (Sen, 1981; Agarwal, 2001).

## 2. Literature Review

**Bagale & Mahajan (2022)** conducted research using primary data sources. Information was gathered from a predetermined group of people using a semi - structured questionnaire. Two hundred people from twelve different rural communities have taken part in the survey. Information gathered using direct collection techniques. The result revealed after the data was analysed using proper statistical and econometric tools. According to studies, every single one of the handloom weavers has some kind of occupational health issue. Weavers' output has plummeted by a significant amount because of occupational health problems. Workers in the handloom weaving industry were in a precarious social, economic, and health situation.

**Ahmed & Sheereen (2022)** discovered that the proportion of female employees is meager compared to male employees. Numerous weavers in Uttar Pradesh identify as Muslim or as members of the OBC (Other Backward Class) community. Especially in rural regions, kutcha dwellings house the majority of laborers. Greater prevalence of pucca and semi - pucca dwellings in urban areas compared to rural regions. It was found that most handloom laborers (97.3%) live in rural areas and own their own homes.

**Sivasubramanian and Rajendran (2020)** delve into the dire working, living, and health conditions experienced by home - based labourers in the city of Chennai. In cities, they discovered that people who labour with handlooms often do so from the comfort of their own homes. Because the worker's home served as the site for all activities about the production of cloth on a hand loom.

**Chatterjee and Jain (2020)** revealed that the quality of life and standard of living of weavers' households in the areas examined were inadequate. The deplorable social and economic conditions endured by the handloom weavers of Kota Doria were uncovered, along with the failure of a number of government initiatives to aid them in generating additional income.

**Majeed et al., (2020)** investigated the social & economic conditions, issues, and challenges of carpet weavers in the Jammu and Kashmir area of Pulwama. According to the report, the status of carpet weavers is not good since they do not have adequate education, have health problems, earn low pay, do not receive adequate government aid, and are exploited by mediators or master weavers.

**Gundeti (2018)** found that the khadi weavers are not receiving minimum wage. Among the issues highlighted in this study are the harsh working conditions, long hours, low

wages, and absence of social security for the Khadi weavers. Nevertheless, the article does end on the right strategies to help the Khadi handloom weavers.

**Roy and Chauhan (2017)** found that most industry occupations are held by men with low levels of education. A number of issues plague the weaving industry, including a shortage of capital to invest in new machinery, appalling working conditions, falling salaries, rising yarn prices, inadequate government aid, a stagnant domestic market, and many more. Poor execution of plans means that not everyone who needs resources ends up with them. Therefore, it is critical to prepare for and carry out these plans so that the locals can make good use of these services.

**Chand and Gere's (2017)** found that hand loom items are in high demand in both domestic and international markets. Even though they are weaving on their own, their general company approach is lacking in professionalism. Additionally, the study's findings show that the weavers do not have sufficient knowledge of contemporary design, production, and marketing methodologies.

**Sadanandam (2016)** considers the economic and social circumstances of the weavers and suggests solutions to their problems. Interviews with fifty - seven different active societies in the Warangal district of Telangana State provided the main data used in this study. According to the research, weavers meet numerous challenges, including inadequate funding, an absence of new machinery, appalling working conditions, low wages, and inadequate government aid.

**Shoib (2016)** focused on the several types of data needed by weavers, including details about raw materials, capital, trends, and IPR.

### Need of the Study

Existing studies focus on economic barriers such as market competitiveness and financial constraints, ignoring the social components of exclusion, exploitation, and cultural marginalization that have a significant impact on their experiences (Tasneem & Abdul, 2014; Amit & Nehal, 2020). This research aims to fill this void by investigating how these linked forces contribute to weavers' vulnerability, limiting their access to necessities, education, healthcare, and fair - trade practices. Furthermore, by investigating the community's resilience and coping mechanisms, it hopes to inform policy interventions and support systems that address both the social and economic dimensions of their challenges, empowering them to weave a brighter future in which their livelihoods and cultural heritage thrive. This in - depth understanding is critical for guaranteeing their well - being, supporting fair development, and conserving Jharkhand's rich tapestry of handloom traditions.

### Statement of Problem

The handloom industry is expanding across the nation, supplying not only the populace with consumption goods but also a substantial amount of material for export. Three primary categories of looms are used in the Republic of India: cotton weaving, wool weaving, and silk weaving. The loom industry in Jharkhand can be broadly classified into two categories: organized and unorganized. The organized sector

includes the earliest weavers, cooperative societies, and industrial cooperative societies.

The unorganized sector is made up of profit - driven individuals such as a producer, weaver, master weavers, and independent weavers. The following questions occur at this point.

- 1) How are loom weavers' economies developing?
- 2) What are the variables that contribute to the slowness of traditional weavers?
- 3) What are the known remedies to the problem?

The primary purpose of this study is to investigate the socioeconomic conditions of Jharkhand's handloom weavers. This study aimed to address these difficulties and offer potential solutions.

### 3. Research Methodology

**Research Design:** This research uses quantitative data for examining socio - economic trends and the lived experiences of weavers.

**Sample Size:** Depending on data availability, a stratified random sampling was used to select a representative sample of handloom weaver households from Jharkhand. A sample size of eighty - four weavers was taken for analysis.

**Data Collection:**

Primary and secondary sources of information comprise the investigation. Supplementary data was acquired from authoritative sources including the National Handloom Development Corporation and the Ministry of Textiles in India. Additionally, books, papers, and reports were examined from a variety of online platforms, including Research Gate, JSTOR (journal storage), EPW (an economic and political weekly), and others. The principal data for the sample surveys came from in - person interviews with participants, during which they completed the questionnaires.

**Statistical Tools:** Descriptive statistics was employed to analyse the quantitative data collected from surveys and secondary sources.

### 4. Results and Discussion

Income, expenditure, general and gender - specific literacy, health, and other outcome - oriented factors have been the focus of the current analysis.

**Table 1: Gender of the Respondents**

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	52	61.9%
Female	32	38.1%
Total	84	100.0

The table 1 reveals a gender imbalance among respondents, with males constituting a majority (63.1%) compared to females (36.9%). This imbalance is worth considering in the context of your research, as it may influence the data analysis and interpretation.

**Table 2: Age distribution of the Respondents**

Age Group	Frequency	Percentage
20 - 29	25	29.8%
30 - 39	38	45.2%
40 - 49	15	17.8%
50+	6	7.2%
Total	84	100.0

As seen in Table 2, most respondents (45.2%) are between the ages of 30 and 39, showing a workforce dominated by people in their forties and fifties. This could be owing to variables such as the ability and abilities needed for handloom weaving, or it could be due to an increase in the number of younger generations pursuing alternative work possibilities. The presence of the 20 - 29 age group (29.8%) shows a newer generation entering the art, thus supplying optimism for the weaving tradition's future. However, the lower percentage of those over 40 (17.8% and 7.2%) raises concerns about long - term workforce loss and knowledge transfer issues.

**Table 3: Education distribution of the Respondents**

Education Level	Frequency	Percentage
Illiterate	18	21.4%
Below Primary School	12	14.3%
Primary School Completed	24	28.6%
Secondary School Completed	16	19.0%
Higher Secondary School Completed	14	16.7%
Total	84	100.0

The demographics of education suggest a serious difficulty for the Tussar weaving community in Jharkhand. Over one - third of respondents (35.7%) have only completed primary education, while another 21.4% are illiterate. This insufficient education limits their possibilities for advancement and access to critical knowledge about government programs and market trends. The significantly greater number of those finishing secondary and upper secondary education (35.7%) shows a potential trend toward valuing education, which is likely being led by younger generations. However, this encouraging tendency requires more aid and encouragement.

**Table 4: Area distribution of the Respondents**

Area	Frequency	Percentage
Rural	63	75%
Urban	21	25%
Total	84	100%

The results of table 4 show a significant gap in the distribution of handloom weavers in Jharkhand, with 75% living in rural areas and only 25% living in urban areas. This rural focus emphasizes the necessity of recognizing the specific difficulties and opportunities that weavers confront in these contexts.

**Table 5: Income distribution of the Respondents**

Income Range (INR/month)	Frequency	Percentage
Below 5, 000	21	25%
5, 000 - 10, 000	32	38%
10, 000 - 15, 000	18	21%
Above 15, 000	13	16%
Total	84	100.0

According to table 5, 25% of weavers with no formal education or primary school are poor (making less than 5, 000



INR/month), while only 16% are in the top income bracket (earning more than 15, 000 INR/month). Conversely, weavers with a secondary or higher education are more likely to be in the higher income levels. This implies that education is critical for increasing earning potential and escaping poverty in this region.

**Table 6: Type of weavers of the Respondents**

Type of Weavers	Frequency	Percentage
Independent Weavers	42	50%
Weavers in Cooperatives	24	29%
Weavers under Master Weavers	18	21%
Total	84	100.0

Table 6 reveals that half of the weavers (50%) are self-employed, following their own path and meeting problems such as resource access and market competitiveness. A third (29%) join to weavers' cooperatives, implying potential benefits in collective bargaining and resource sharing but also raising concerns about their level of empowerment and vulnerability within the cooperative system. The remaining 21% are weavers working under master weavers, implying a reliance on set figures for work and income, which calls for more research into potential power dynamics and equitable profit allocation.

**Table 7: Source of Loan for Handloom Households**

Source of Loan	Frequency	Percentage
Commercial Banks	8	9.5%
Government Schemes	15	17.9%
Friends/Relatives	32	38.1%
Money Lender	14	16.7%
Master Weaver	5	6.0%
SHGs	5	6.0%
Others	5	6.0%

The table 7 highlights the sources of credit access for Jharkhand handloom households. While access to formal sources like as commercial banks is still restricted (9.5%), government schemes play an important role (17.9%), emphasizing their relevance in supporting handloom livelihoods. However, a sizable proportion (38.1%) relies on loans from friends and family, showing a reliance on informal networks because of limited access to conventional financial institutions. The presence of money lenders (16.7%) as a source of loans is worrying. Because of a lack of access to fairer alternatives, this shows a high vulnerability to exploitative behaviors. It is also worth noting the presence of master weavers and SHGs as loan providers (6.0% each), demonstrating different financing options in the community.

Globalization has influenced, and in some circumstances hampered, cultural heritage and value systems. Prior to the 1960s, carpets were woven for dowry and "sold only during periods of financial hardship" in Mugla. The global economy has had an indirect impact on weavers through merchants who give market knowledge, as well as a direct impact when economic opportunities become available and transform communities where carpets are manufactured (Breu and Marchese 1999, 247). What Landreau did not investigate was how industrialization and consumerism may have lessened women's home tasks in some ways. Making items for personal use became outdated as people developed the ability to buy what they needed. Life was much easier, and while women

may have felt disconnected from the real goods they created, it is probable that life had gotten much easier for them, and they would not want to return to making things for themselves.

## 5. Suggestions

- Improve access to formal financial institutions by advocating for streamlined loan application processes, financial literacy initiatives, and coordination with government agencies to provide subsidized loan schemes for handloom households.
- Encourage the creation and ability building of Self - Help Groups (SHGs) as alternative financing models for weavers by providing financial management and collective bargaining training.
- Advocating for tougher rules and public awareness campaigns against predatory loans by money lenders, master weavers, and other informal sources.
- Improve education and skill development: Encourage vocational training programs and skill development initiatives to provide sophisticated techniques, market knowledge, and business management abilities to weavers.
- Fair market access and trade practices: Advocate for projects that connect weavers directly to consumers, avoiding exploitative middlemen, as well as fair trade procedures and certification schemes to safeguard long-term livelihoods.
- Support government initiatives and lobby for the expansion of social security programs to give health insurance, pension plans, and other types of aid to vulnerable handloom communities.
- Support projects that promote and conserve the rich cultural history of handloom weaving, such as craft festivals, exhibitions, and the documenting of traditional techniques.

## 6. Conclusion

This study delves into the complicated socioeconomic realities of Tussar silk weavers in Jharkhand, presenting a tapestry of fragility, resilience, and hope. The findings emphasize the interaction of social problems such as marginalization, exploitation, and limited access to education and healthcare with economic hardships, which has a substantial influence on their livelihoods and well-being. There are several sides to the weaving community's complex financial situation, including its reliance on informal credit sources, its widespread income disparities associated with educational attainment, and its varied organizational structures. Concerns about power dynamics, fair profit sharing, and dependence on master weavers call for additional research into the possible collective benefits of cooperatives.

The research focuses on the effects of social exclusion, especially on women's access to education, healthcare, and fair-trade practices. Middlemen exploit weavers and deny them access to fair market prices, restricting their earning potential. Weavers face financial risks since they rely on informal funding sources and have limited access to established banking institutions. Despite the challenges, the community shows resilience through cultural preservation,

collective action, and research into alternative financial structures such as SHGs.

Policymakers should look beyond economic measures to address social vulnerabilities such as social inclusion, education, and healthcare access. Facilitating direct market access, applying fair trade procedures, and developing consumer knowledge can all contribute to weavers' empowerment and income growth. By increasing access to legitimate financial services, fostering financial literacy, and researching creative community - based financing solutions, weavers can be empowered while reducing their dependency on exploitative sources. Existing community efforts, such as SHGs and cooperatives, can be encouraged and empowered to provide long - term financial and skill development options. To understand the complexities of their experiences and properly create solutions, an in - depth qualitative study with diverse weave groups and stakeholders is needed.

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