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## Handloom Industry in Dakshin Dinajpur District: An Assessment

Rejaul Karim<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Research Scholar

Cooch Behar Panchanan Barma University  
Panchanan Nagar, Vivekananda Street, Cooch Behar  
Email: [rejaulkarim951@gmail.com](mailto:rejaulkarim951@gmail.com)

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**Abstract:** *The Handloom industry is a part of Indian tradition and culture. Dakshin Dinajpur District in West Bengal is well known for Handloom industry. In Dakshin Dinajpur weaving was started by weavers from Pabna in East Bengal during the partition. All these weavers take up weaving as a profession and settle in different regions of the District. Gangarampur has the highest concentration of weaving among the 8 blocks of Dakshin Dinajpur. The aim of this study is to investigate and analyse the socio-economic status of the handloom industry in Dakshin Dinajpur. Although the industry was prosperous in the past but it is now facing various kind of problems, such as financial constraints of weavers, low wages, rising yarn prices, lack of interest among the new generation, increasing use of power looms instead of handlooms, government schemes are not working properly. As a result, the handloom industry is facing losses day by day.*

**Keywords:** *Archaeologists, De-industrialization, Handicraft, Handloom Industry, Weavers*

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## Introduction

Weaving is one of the oldest cottage industries in India. The textile Handloom industry has started in the time of Harappan period in India. In Archaeologists provide evidence of textile production from Harappa and Mohenjo-daro.<sup>1</sup> The textile tradition in India is 5,000 years old.

Herodotus mentioned in his writings cotton was produced in India.<sup>2</sup> Kautilya's Arthashastra mentioned an employee named Sutradhyaksha to oversee the textile weaving system. Markopolo said people of India mostly from Bengal produced a lot of cotton and the trade of cotton was prosperous.<sup>3</sup> During the Sultanate and Mughal period, the Muslin of Bengal was world famous. We can also find about the textile weaving in Abul Fazl's 'Ain-i-Akbari'.<sup>4</sup> The Handloom industry was quite lucrative until the British came to India. But this industry had suffered losses in colonial India. When the Industrial revolution began in England in eighteenth century, the British imported high quality textiles product at low prices in India. Textiles made in the Indian handicraft industry could not compete. As a result, De-industrialization took place in India at that time. But this industry got its glory back during the Swadeshi movement.

After the partition of the India in 1947, many people came from East Bengal and settled in Gangarampur, Sukhdevpur, Thangapara, Maharajpur and other areas of Dakshin Dinajpur.<sup>5</sup> Most of the families were engaged in making of weaving garments.

The subject has been selected to explore the socio-economic status and problems of the Handloom industry in Dakshin Dinajpur. In the year of 2012, out of the 35506 weavers in whole Dakshin Dinajpur 19663 weavers are concentrated in the block Gangarampur which are exhibiting the leading geographical concentration of weavers of Gangarampur.<sup>6</sup>

## Socio-Economic Conditions of Handloom Industry

West Bengal gained a reputation in the field of weaving garments, weaving centers etc. Most of the Handloom industries in our state are in Nadia, Burdwan, Purba Midnapore, Birbhum, Hooghly, Bankura and Murshidabad districts of South Bengal. In North Bengal this industry is exists in Uttar and Dakshin Dinajpur. The total number of looms in Dakshin Dinajpur is 659.<sup>7</sup> Handloom Industry centers in Dakshin Dinajpur are: Narayanpur, Sukdevpur, Maharajpur, Belbari, Nandanpur, Kadighat, Tilna, Nandanpur, Bhaktipur, Patan and Gangarampur Municipality. Initially, the co-operative society manufactured cotton sari, dooby, fine quality cotton Sari, Jacquard Sari, Tangail Sari, Jamdani Sari, bed sheets, lungi, table's cloth etc. Tangail

## **Handloom Industry in Dakshin Dinajpur District: An Assessment**

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sarees originated in the city of Tangail in Bangladesh, it is known as Tangail.<sup>8</sup> These products have a great demand at the local market and all over the State of West Bengal. The establishment of “Tant Kapor Hat” a sale center in Gangarampur Municipality has helped to increase the sale of Handloom products. But the pace of the Handloom is become down slowly, due to the present situation of the Handloom Industry, it is seems that the number of weavers in this industry is decreasing day by day, many weavers have stopped their weaving machines. Handloom units are being converted to powerloom units. In Dakshin Dinajpur, especially grouping is seen among them, such as three group organizations are in i. Gangarampur, ii. Thangapara, and iii. Bordangi.

### **Various Problems of Handloom Industry**

The Handloom industry was one of the largest cottage industries in India.<sup>9</sup> The Handloom industry meets about 30% of the total textile demand of the country. But the condition of the people employed in this industry is not good at all. Report of the Steering Committee on Handlooms and Handicrafts constituted for the Twelfth Five Year Plan (2012 – 2017) pointed out that, ‘Weavers in the sector are mainly from the vulnerable and weaker sections of the society’.<sup>10</sup> It is also true that handloom weaving as an activity is in deep crisis with low productivity, low wages, low literacy levels, firmly entrenched middlemen and very little formal bank finance flowing to the sector (B.I.R.D, Lucknow, 2016).<sup>11</sup> Like other industries in the world, Handloom Industry has plagued various problems. Although the Handloom industries in each State of India have some different types of problems, the basic problems are almost the same.

### **Financial Constraints**

In India about 57% of the weavers are under BPL category ( The third Handloom Census – 2009-10 ).<sup>12</sup> Therefore, one of the problems of this industry in Dakshin Dinajpur is financial constraint. Textiles are made in these industries, but are not sold properly in the market, even if it is sold; it is sold at a much lower price. Poverty is common among ordinary weavers and small traders. Weavers do not have money in their hands so they cannot stockpile clothes. As a result, they were forced to sell clothes to moneylenders at lower prices. Although there is a system of

## **Handloom Industry in Dakshin Dinajpur District: An Assessment**

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Government loans, it is time consuming and involves high interest. Weavers do not have enough capital to make large investments.

### **Weaving Infrastructure**

Infrastructural weaknesses are seen in the Handloom industries of Dakshin Dinajpur. Most of the looms in this district are old. Weavers are less interested to improve and develop these looms. Many are leaving their jobs and concentrating on agriculture. Sometimes, weavers want to improve them or set up new looms, but they do not have enough capital. Weavers do not get proper government assistance to improve their Handloom industry.

### **Creation of Artificial Recession by Brokers**

Weavers cannot sell textiles which are producing from the Handloom industry directly to the market. Again, the rate of education among weavers is low and weavers do not know much about the market. As a result, the weavers fell into an artificial recession. Brokers increase or decrease the price of textiles at will, that's why weaver are leaving this industry in a state of anxiety, frustration and financial loss.

### **Labour Crisis**

The major problem of the Handloom industry in Dakshin Dinajpur is acute labour crisis. Even middle-aged and old-age weavers in the do not want their next generation to work in the Industry. It is seems, there is a shortage of hired weavers in this industry. Shankar Das, a weaver, said, 'Now I have eight hired weavers in my nine looms, all of them middle-aged and old, one of whom has quit his job and is working as a hotel employee.' The main reasons for this situation are insufficient wages, high work pressure, and stubborn work. Many times all the members of the family are engaged in their work. So the labour crisis is one of the biggest problems.

### **Lack of Interest in the New Generation**

One of the problems of the Handloom industry in Dakshin Dinajpur is the lack of interest among the new generation to work in this industry. The Handloom industry is a monotonous and time consuming process. So it is seems that there is less interest to work in this industry among the educated next generation. According to the third Handloom Census, only 25% of the next generation of weaver families have chosen this industry as a livelihood.

# Handloom Industry in Dakshin Dinajpur District: An Assessment

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## Competition with Powerloom Sector

Dakshin Dinajpur initially had Handloom weaving; later some of the Handloom industries have been converted into electric power loom. There is a competition between Handloom and powerloom products. Powerloom products are cheaper than handloom products. As a result, customers buy more good quality clothes from Powerloom at lower prices.

## Act Implemented

The Handloom reservation act 1985, reserved 22 articles which to be weaved only in Handloom and later in 1996 this was restricted to 11 articles. According to some weavers the powerloom sector of Dakshin Dinajpur is illegally producing few reserved items of handloom.<sup>13</sup>

## Conclusion

From the above discussion it can be say that the Handloom industry in Dakshin Dinajpur was initially developed and prosperous. This district is famous as the main textile of handloom weaving industry 'Tant Saree'.<sup>14</sup> Presently this industry is going through a lot of hardships. The glory of this industry is diminishing day by day. Most of the people employed in this industry are poor; many have left the weaving profession to work in agriculture. Weavers are facing various problems in the weaving industry, such as low wages of weavers, lack of capital, competition with the powerloom sector, lack of interest among the new generation, labour crisis, etc. However, Government's intervention for the development of this industry can be noticed, but it is not enough to improve the Handloom industry. Again sometimes the schemes are not implemented properly; the benefits do not reach to the common people properly. The Government should take more initiatives in this regard. According to most weavers, the future of the Handloom industry will be brighter through overall efforts. The bright future of the Handloom industry in Dakshin Dinajpur can be expected through the positive thinking and initiative of both the weavers and the Government.

## Notes & Reference

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## **Handloom Industry in Dakshin Dinajpur District: An Assessment**

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