

Chapter VII
Handloom Industry

Reference to the practice^{of}/Handloom weaving in North Bengal had been started since 1686, in the districts of Cooch Behar Malda and West Dinajpur. During that time the Weavers of Mechliganj Sub-division in Cooch Behar district made clothes of coarse quality out of jute string to use as screens and bed-sheets etc. Cotton production Weaving and handloom business was prevalent at that time, on the left bank of the River Atrai in the then, undivided Dinajpur district (West Dinajpur)^{1,2}

Thus from early times handloom became a traditional industry in the history of development of industrial geography in North Bengal. The present study therefore, deals with the trend of growth, locational factors, size groups and ultimately to find out some of its problems and remedial measures which will help in strengthening regional economy.

The growth Trend of the Industry from 1960

In understanding the growth of this industry it is necessary to find out the development of the number of looms and the volume of production. The table 68, therefore, has been given below .(Fig.20)

Table-68^{3,4}

Growth of Handlooms and Handloom Products in North Bengal

Year	Total No. of looms	Decade variation of looms	Percentage decade variation	Total production (in lakh mts.)	Decade variation in production	Percentage decade variation
1963-64	9,330			10.31		
1976-77	17,210	+7880	+84.67	36.49	+26.18	+253.95

The growth rate of the Handloom Industry has been shown in the above table. It is interesting to note that the number of looms increased at the rate of 84.67 percent while the productions speeded up at 253.95 percent, indicates a steady progress.

Again in order to find out the growth of regional variation of the industry, a district wise distribution may be given :

Table-69^{3,4}

Growth of Handlooms and handloom products by districts

Name of the district	1963 - 64	Production (in lakh mts.)	1976 - 77	Production (in lakh mts)	Rank in position		Rank in position	
	No. of looms		No. of looms		1963-64	1976-77	1963-64	1976-77
Cooch Behar	1,878	2.07	4,308	15.03	3	3	2	1
Darjeeling	151	0.17	272	0.31	5	5	5	5
Jalpaiguri	665	0.75	992	1.74	4	4	4	4
Malda	4,352	4.80	8,963	14.40	1	1	1	2
West Dinajpur	2,284	2.52	2,675	5.01	2	2	3	3

It is interesting to note that Malda with 46.64 percent of the total handlooms ranking first, where as West Dinajpur, possessing 24.48 percent of the total handlooms stands 2nd, in the same respect, Cooch Behar comes third with 20.9 percent followed by Jalpaiguri and Darjeeling with

7.10 and 1.61 percent respectively. Thus in three districts rank in volume of production closely followed by rank in number of looms. The slight departure from this rule in the case of Malda is due to unfavourable market w~~y~~hich ~~h~~being more favourable in Cooch Behar gives a higher rank in production.

The reason behind this growth of handloom industry is quite interesting. The riot between Hindus and Muslims in 1950 had brought a large number of Hindu weavers from East Pakistan (Bangla Desh) to the North Bengal's districts of Cooch Behar, Malda and West Dinajpur, resulting a heavy economic pressure. The entire economic balance has been disturbed due to heavy pressure of population and the limited scope for source of living within the region. In order to remove these difficulties a quick measure had to be adopted in notime and the main stress was given to the development of small scale and cottage Industry.

Hence, since 1960 the Handloom Industry became popular in North Bengal. Apart from their domestic consumption, the handloom products find their market in Assam. Thus the industry has developed rapidly in different districts of North Bengal, specially in the traditional weaving sectors of Cooch Behar, Malda and West Dinajpur. Handloom Industries have mainly been existed here employment oriented and market oriented as well.

Locational Analysis of the Handloom Industry.

In studying the locational analysis of handloom units in North Bengal it is necessary to make out the factors taking an

important role for their functions.

Industrial Infrastructure.

(a) Raw material. The main raw material for the handloom industry is the cotton yarn. The supply of yarn has been obtained from Calcutta through middle men. The weavers still depend on the Mahajans or middle men for finance. The middlemen dictate terms of disposal of the finished products to the weavers, who sell them to the Mahajans at a low profit margin. The monthly requirements of yarn in different districts are as follows :

Table-70⁵

Monthly requirements of yarn by districts
1973 - 74

Name of the district	Amount of yarn (in Kg.)	Percentage of the total
Cooch Behar	74709	22.28
Darjeeling	613	.84
Jalpaiguri	12105	3.71
Malda	198025	60.73
West Dinajpur	40614	12.44
Total	426066	100

A regional variation of the monthly requirement of the five districts of North Bengal has been tabulated. It is evident from the table that Malda with 60.73 percent of the total requirements ranking first, while Cooch Behar sharing 22.28 percent stands second followed by West Dinajpur with 12.44 percent, Jalpaiguri with 3.71 percent and Darjeeling with 84 percent. In 1973 the West Bengal Government have established the West Bengal Handloom and Powerloom Development Corporation to develop the industry, under which 5 centres at Gangarampur in West Dinajpur district and one centre at Cooch Behar have been set up to distribute the raw materials among the weavers at a cheaper rate.

(b) Labour. For its various types of works, the industry requires a large number of labour which can easily be available in a predominately agricultural economy with ever increasing population in North Bengal. The table^{No.50} in the chapter VI, showing the growth rate of unemployed persons, proves that labour being never a problem for developing this industry.

(c) Market. The handloom units in North Bengal can find their market in Assam and Bihar apart from their home market. With the growth of population the demand for clothes have been increasing day by day within the region (Table 32 in Chapter III).

The average daily transaction of handloom products in the local market centres in different districts of North Bengal may be given in the following table.

Table - 71⁵

List of Local Market-Centres for Handloom Products
in North Bengal by districts 1973-74.

Name of the district (1)	Name of the market centre (2)	Type of the market centre (3)	Item of product (4)	Daily average transaction (in '000 Rs.) (5)
Cooch Behar	1. Baburhat	Weekly	Dhoti, Sari Napkin, and Yarn	N.A.
	2. Dinhata	bi-Weekly	- do -	N.A.
	3. Bhabaniganj bazar	Daily	- do -	N.A.
Jalpaiguri	4. Barobasa	N.A.	Sari and Napkin	N.A.
Malda	5. Harishchandra- pur	bi-Weekly	Sari, Lungi,	20,000
	6. Tulshitala	Weekly	- do -	20,000
	7. Kushida	Weekly	- do -	24,000
	8. Kumedpur	Weekly	- do -	20,000
	9. Mehahat	Weekly	- do -	20,000
	10. Gosanihat	Weekly	Sari and yarn	25,000
	11. Chanchal	Weekly	Sari, Lungi Napkin and Yarn	25,000
	12. Aiho	Weekly	Course Sari	20,000
	13. Bulbulchandi	Weekly	Sari, Napkin	20,000
	14. Fakurhat	Weekly	Sari, Napkin Yarn	24,000
	15. Gozole	Weekly	- do -	25,000

(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
	16. Dighirhat	Weekly	-do-	25,000
	17. Ratanpur	Weekly	Sari, Yarn	30,000
	18. Balupur	Weekly	Coarse Sari, Napkin	20,000
	19. Nawabganj	bi-Weekly	-do-	20,000
	20. English- bazar	bi-Weekly	Sari, Napkin	25,000
	21. Mathurapur	Weekly	Sari, Yarn	20,000
	22. Kaniaganj	bi-Weekly	Sari, Yarn	50,000
West Dinajpur	23. Rasakhawa	Weekly	Dhoti, Sari Yarn	30,000
	24. Bilaspur	bi-Weekly	-do-	40,000
	25. Patiraj	Weekly	-do-	40,000
	26. Panimala	Weekly	-do-	30,000
	27. Bandar	bi-Weekly	-do-	25,000
	28. Jitka	Weekly	Sari, Kungi Yarn	30,000
	29. Maharaj	Weekly	-do-	25,000
	30. Mohiniganj	Weekly	Sari, Dhoti Napkin, Yarn	30,000
	31. Durgapur	Weekly	Sari, Lungi, Yarn	25,000
	32. Bara Duari	Weekly	Sari, Yarn	25,000
	33. Kamarhat	Weekly	Sari, Napkin	20,000
	34. Dankail	Weekly	Sari, Yarn	25,000
	35. Saraihat	Weekly	Sari, Lungi, Yarn	25,000

(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
	36. Theniadpur	Weekly	Sari, Lungi, Yarn	25,000
	37. Bishnupur	Weekly	-do-	30,000
	38. Kamalabari	Weekly	-do-	25,000
	39. Harirampur	Weekly	Sari, Lungi, Yarn	30,000
	40. Gangarampur	Weekly	-do-	30,000

Note : N.A. not available.

A total number of 40 local market centres are functioning in the transaction of handloom product covering the 4 districts namely, Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri, Malda and West Dinajpur. Among them 18 centres are in the district of West-Dinajpur, while the share for Malda is also 18 in number, Cooch Behar has 3 and Jalpaiguri 1. With the exception of Dinhat, in Cooch Behar district, Harishchandrapur, Nawabganj, Englishbazar and Kaliaganj in Malda District Bilaspur and Jitka in West Dinajpur district, all the market centres are weekly. The item of products transacted are mainly Sari, Dhoti, Napkin, Lungi and Yarn.

The amount of daily average transaction of the 36 market centres varies in view of the volume of products, daily attendance and locational advantages. The table 72, therefore, shows the categorical classification of the market centres.

Table - 72

Categorical classification of Handloom Market Centres in North Bengal

Name of the district	Rs. 20,000	Rs. 24,000	Rs. 25,000	Rs. 30,000	Rs. 40,000	Rs. 50,000	Total
Cooch Behar	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.
Jalpaiguri	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.
Malda	9	2	5	1	1	1	18
West Dinajpur	1	N.A.	8	7	2	N.A.	18
Total	10	2	13	8	2	1	36

Note : N.A. not available

From the table it is found that out of the total number of 36 market centres 13 are under the category of Rs. 25,000 with 36.11 percent of the total, while the share for Rs. 20,000 category is 27.77 percent, ranking second followed by the category of Rs. 30,000 with 22.22 percent, the category of Rs. 24,000 and Rs. 40,000 having the same share with 5.55 percent each and for the category of Rs. 50,000 has only one centre bearing 2.80 percent of the total.

Number of Handloom Units within the Area

With a view to find out the total number of Handloom units in North Bengal, a district-wise distribution is given below :

Table - 73⁵

Number of Handloom units in North Bengal by districts
(According to the statistics 1973-74)

Name of the District	No. of Units	Percentage of the total Number
Cooch Behar	4,695	14.03
Darjeeling	378	1.23
Jalpaiguri	1,663	5.05
Malda	21,328	62.70
West Dinajpur	5,710	17.07
Total	37,774	100.00

A district-wise distribution of the number of Handloom units reveals that maximum concentration has taken place in the district of Malda with 62.70 percent while West Dinajpur ranks second sharing 17.07 percent followed by Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri and Darjeeling with 14.03, 5.05, and 1.23 percent respectively.

The reasons for large number of units in the districts of Cooch Behar, Malda and West Dinajpur are due to a huge number

of migrated people from East Pakistan (Bangladesh) and, perhaps a big portion of them came from weaving sector, because there is a strong base of this industry from early times. The table below will show the immigration of population in North Bengal.

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Table-74

Population migration from East Pakistan to
North Bengal by districts - 1961

Name of the district	Total Population	Total Migrants	Percentage of migrants to total population
Cooch Behar	426,111	252,753	59.31
Darjeeling	238,040	23,947	10.06
Jalpaiguri	627,960	218,331	34.76
Malda	355,288	64,454	18.14
West Dinajpur	492,495	172,237	34.97

The percentage of emigrants in different districts have revealed that Cooch Behar shares the maximum with 59.31 percent of the total population, while West Dinajpur ranks second with 34.97 percent followed by Jalpaiguri with 34.76 percent, Malda with 18.14 percent and Darjeeling with 10.06 percent.

Capital Structure : The collection of accurate data relating to the invested capital in the case of Cottage and Small-Scale Industries is beset with difficulties. In the present survey an attempt has been made to obtain the average value of productive capital invested per unit was obtained from the owners of each sample establishment.

The estimated original cost of fixed assets in respect of 30 sample establishments covering the 5 districts is Rs.403,200. This amount is exclusive of the cost of rented land and buildings, and leaves out those establishments for which information is not available. In most cases buildings in which the establishments are situated are used for residential purposes also. Assets were calculated in respect of that portion of the building which is used for the industry.

Number of workers employed :

Obviously, there are serious difficulties in counting workers in handloom industry. Because a great majority of the weavers work for a wage under a Master-weaver, Mahajan and co-operative. The condition of industry is, however, still unorganised, most of the weavers still working in their own homes, and there is no facility for collecting periodical returns as in the case of mills.

Assuming that each weaver has to support besides himself 3 persons on an average. The total employment, therefore, in North Bengal can be calculated in the following table.

Table-75⁴

Number of workers engaged in Handloom Industry
by districts

Name of the district	Total no. of	Total no. of workers (multiplied by 3 persons with total weavers)
Cooch Behar	11,703	35,109
Darjeeling	1,414	4,242
Jalpaiguri	2,745	8,235
Malda	8,963	26,889
West Dinajpur	2,446	7,338
Total	27,291	81,808

A district-wise distribution of workers employed in handloom industry shows that Cooch-Bihar comes first with 42.78 percent of the total worker while Malda ranks second having 31.64 percent followed by Jalpaiguri with 10 percent, West Dinajpur with 9.50 percent and Darjeeling with 5.18 percent.

Organisation. The organisational structure of the handloom industry may be classified in the following heads.

Independent-weavers. Are those who own their organisation with the help of family members. The owner himself purchases the raw

materials, under-takes production function and markets the product in the local market, or sells it directly to the cloth merchants or dealers. The necessary finances may be provided by him out of his own resources or by borrowing. He is completely free to organise his production in such a way as to maximise his profits without the intervention of any outside agency.

Master Weavers. are more or less akin to independent weavers in many respects, exception is that outside establishment. The master himself and his family members may work but the master weavers can be distinguished. The first type exercises ownership right over the employment. The second types do not have any production unit, they just supply raw materials to the out workers and receive the finished products. The second category of master-weavers cannot strictly be called as weavers since they no longer engaged themselves in production. They have now given up the practice of weaving in order to concentrate on trading in yarn and cloth, though they belong to the traditional community of weavers.

Co-operative Society. The co-operative society may either undertake centralised production or as with the second category of Master-weavers, advance yarn to the members who work in their own households, and receive the finished product from them. The table below will show the total number of Co-operative societies in North Bengal.

Table - 76⁴

Number of Handloom Co-operative Societies in North Bengal
by districts

Name of the districts	No. of Co-operative Societies	No. of Active Society
Cooch Behar	36	18
Darjeeling	6	2
Jalpaiguri	29	5
Malda	60	16
West Dinajpur	21	8
Total	142	49

There are altogether 142 number of handloom co-operative societies have been establishing in 5 districts of North Bengal but only 34.5 percent of the total are in active, revealing a discouraging activities of the co-operatives.

Cost of Production of Handloom Cloth.

Any proper cost accounting of handloom cloth is a very difficult undertaking as the industry is not organised, and the bulk of the weavers hardly keep any account. However, the cost of material namely μ yarn varies from 50 to 80 percent, while the cost of labour varies from 15 to 23 percent, depending upon the fabric woven. Yarn is, however, by far the largest factor entering into the cost of production.

Problem of the Handloom Industry.

The handloom units have to face a number of problems, which are given as follows :

(a) Marketing Problem. The handloom weaver is considerably handicapped in the absence of a proper and well organised market for the sale of his cloth. He is generally at the mercy of the cloth dealers who charges him a substantial commission for retailing the cloth, the prices of handloom products. Thus fixed by the cloth market, not by the weavers or the producers, and the pace of these prices is set to a large extent by the prices of mill made piece goods. The organisation of the handloom clothes for the sale are very unfavourable in comparison with the mill-made clothes, who are very well organised. The principal problem for the handloom weavers is the reduction of marketing cost. Another drawback of the handloom product is the lack of standard product which is necessary for interprovincial competitive market.

(b) Lack of Funds. As discussed before there are three types of organisation, namely, Independent weavers, Master-weavers and Co-operative societies. A large percentage of workers work for the master-weavers and also depend on them for finance. Most of the small working for master-weavers suffer from lack of organisation. Since they work for middleman, and since their bargaining power is weak, a very narrow margin of profit is left for them. Hence there is little scope for improvement. Handloom weavers use

mill made yarn, the prices of which increases day by day as a result the poor weavers cannot hold back the stock for want of sufficient fund, he has to purchase yarn either from the retail dealer or get the yarn and return the finished product to him and receive a wage for the work done.

Master, weavers are, therefore, the main source of finance. The Independent weavers who are not directly working for them, also come under their clutches when they go to them, as they have to for loans. In some cases yarn is advanced to the weaver and the finished product is returned to the master-weavers. In such transaction the bargain is always unfavourable to the weaver. Sufficient amount of financial assistance is therefore, necessary for the small weavers.

(c) In efficient Method of Production. So far the demand for the product is largely local, but there is scope for its expansion, provided the products are modified to suit the varying nature of demand in outside districts. The weaver with his inadequate resources and traditional skill are not willing to take up the responsibility of producing distant market.

Development plan for the Industry : In spite of the distress condition of handloom weavers, this is a major industry in North Bengal, because :

- (1) It engaged a huge number of population in CoochBehar Malda and West Dinajpur district.

- (2) It can produce a specialised kind of production for earning foreign exchange.
- (3) It can also cater to meet the local middle class demand.

Government have initiated several steps to revitalise these traditional industry.

(a) Training Centre - To improve the quality of products raining cum production centres have been set up by the Directorate of Handloom Industry in the Districts of Malda and Cooch Behar. The Centre at Malda was established in 1958 at English Bazar with 50 trainees with a monthly stippend Rs. 75 to each. The training centre at Cooch Behar was started in 1976 with 12 trainees.

(b) Working capital loan - Insufficient supply of working capital is one of the major problems for the handloom units. The government have sanctioned to the weavers Co-operative society Under this scheme Rs. 224,000 has been sanctioned between 1970-71 to 1976-77 in the district of Cooch Behar, Rs. 173,750 was disbursed between 1965-66 to 1974-75 in the district of Malda and Rs. 31,000 has been assisted in the District of West Dinajpur in 1973-74.

(c) Improved Appliances - In order to increase the production of the handloom goods and to meet the diversified taste of the demand as well, improved appliances are necessary to compete with the mill-made product. Loans and grants are disbursed for these purposes.

Table-77⁹

Assistance of capital for Improved Appliances

Name of the district	Year	Amount disbursed (inrs.)
Cooch Behar	1971-72 to 1976-77	8,603
Malda	1965-66 to 1974-75	57,428
West Dinajpur	1973-74	14,080

Apart from the above financial aids, share capital loan has been distributed to the weavers' Co-operative society, and Rs. 118,000 has been disbursed in 1977-78 in Cooch Behar district, while Rs. 20,995 has been financed in Malda district between 1965-66 to 1974-75 under this scheme.

Handloom is an important small scale industry. On its welfare depends the prosperity of a large population of skilled workers in this region. If a fair chance is given, it can hold its own against mill. Increased supply of yarn direct to the weavers by the mills at cheaper rate, the evolution of a dependable and efficient organisation for its finished goods, publicity for making the better quality of handloom clothes, by reducing the dependence of the industry on a host of middlemen and furnishing new designs, the industry, therefore, can be survived which ultimately will help in making balanced regional economy.