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July 2017

Online at <https://mpra.ub.uni-muenchen.de/80601/>
MPRA Paper No. 80601, posted 09 Aug 2017 17:09 UTC

THE SILK HANDLOOM INDUSTRY IN NADIA DISTRICT OF WEST BENGAL : A STUDY ON ITS HISTORY, PERFORMANCE & CURRENT PROBLEMS

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Abstract

Handloom industry provides widest employment opportunities in West Bengal, where 5.8% of the households involved have been found to be silk handloom weavers, which bears a rich legacy. Shantipur and Phulia in Nadia district are the two major handloom concentrated areas in West Bengal. The main objective of this paper is to make a situational analysis of the handloom workers by focusing on the problems of the handloom weavers of Nadia district. The paper briefly elaborates the historical perspective of handloom clusters over this region at the backdrop of the then Bengal. It also analyzes the present crisis faced by the weavers of Phulia and Shantipur region of Nadia district. It makes a SWOT analysis of the handloom industry where strength, weakness, opportunity and threat of the handlooms sector has been analyzed. The paper recommends several measures like awareness campaign, financial literacy programme, SHG and consortium formation, common facility centre, dye house, market exposure to upgrade the present situation of the handloom industry.

Keywords: *Silk Handloom, Weavers, Nadia, Shantipur, Phulia*

1. Introduction

Handloom industry is one of the major cottage industries in West Bengal, providing widest avenues for employment opportunities, next to agriculture (Arup De, www.indianhandloomcluster-dchl.net). Though performance of silk handloom industry cannot be separately assessed, it has been observed that 5.8% of the households involved with handloom sector in West Bengal belong to silk handloom weavers (Handloom Census, 2010). Silk handloom bears a timeless legacy of the cultural heritage of West Bengal. Shantipur, Phulia in Nadia district, Dhaniakhali, Begampur in Hooghly district, Samudragrah, Dhatrigram, Katwa, Ketugram in Burdwan district and Bishnupur in Bankura district are the major handloom concentrated areas in the state of West Bengal (Ministry of Textiles, Government of West Bengal).

The main objective of this paper is to focus on the problems of silk handloom weavers of Nadia district. This section will elaborate the political and geographical location of the district explaining its natural advantage of building the cluster of handloom weavers.

Section 2 will explain in brief the historical perspective of handloom clusters at Nadia district on the backdrop of the then Bengal. Section 3 will analyze the present crisis faced by the weavers of Phulia region of Nadia district and section 4 will focus on the current problems of weavers from Shantipur region. Section 5 will make a SWOT analysis of the handloom industry where strength, weakness, opportunity and threat of the handlooms sector would be analyzed and Section 6 will conclude the chapter by showing a way forward.

Nadia district is situated in the heart of West Bengal delta held within the arms of the Ganga, namely, the Bhagirathi on the West and Mathabhanga on the North. The entire district lies on the alluvial plain of the Ganga and its tributaries. Most of the districts of West Bengal take their name from their headquarter's station of the district, but Nadia district takes its name not from Krishnanagar, the headquarter but from Nadia or Nabadwip hallowed by the memory of Lord Shri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu who was born here on 1486. The British district of Nadia was formed in 1787. The present district of Nadia after partition was formed on 1948.

The district Nadia is bounded on the north and north-west by the district of Murshidabad, which is a prominent producer and supplier of mulberry raw silk and silk yarn. On the south-east and east it is bounded by the Republic of Bangladesh. In the south and south-east the district is bounded by the district of North 24-Parganas. Nadia is situated between 22°53" and 24°11" North latitude and 88°09" and 88°48" East longitude and the shape of the district is irregular, lying North to South. The district is about 46ft. above the mean sea-level and the tropic of cancer divides the district into two parts.

For administrative convenience Nadia district is divided into four Subdivisions – Krishnanagar Sadar, Ranaghat, Kalyani and Tehatta. The district has an area of 3927 sq kms having a population of 5,168,488 as per Census 2011. Out of that SC & ST population are 1,546,917 and 140,700 respectively. The district has 17 Panchayat Samities consisting 187 Gram Panchyats and 8 Municipalities. Total number of Police Stations in the district is 19. The density of population in this district is 1300 persons per sq km. The district has 947 females as against 1000 males. The majority of the people of the district speak Bengali followed by Hindi, Santhali and other. Religion-wise about 73.75% are Hindus and 25.42% are Muslims. In the district of Nadia, the percentage of literacy by sex is 78.75 (Male) & 70.98 (Female) as per Census 2011. The important rivers of the district are Bhagirathi, Churni, Mathabhanga, Ichamati and Jalangi.

The climate of Nadia district is characterized by an oppressive hot summer; high humidity all the year round and well distributed rainfall during the south west monsoon season. The cold season is from about the end of November to the end of February. Based on the availability of cheap labour force (mostly migrated from Bangladesh), raw materials and generational skill of weaving technique the handloom industry in Nadia district has been developed. Being situated

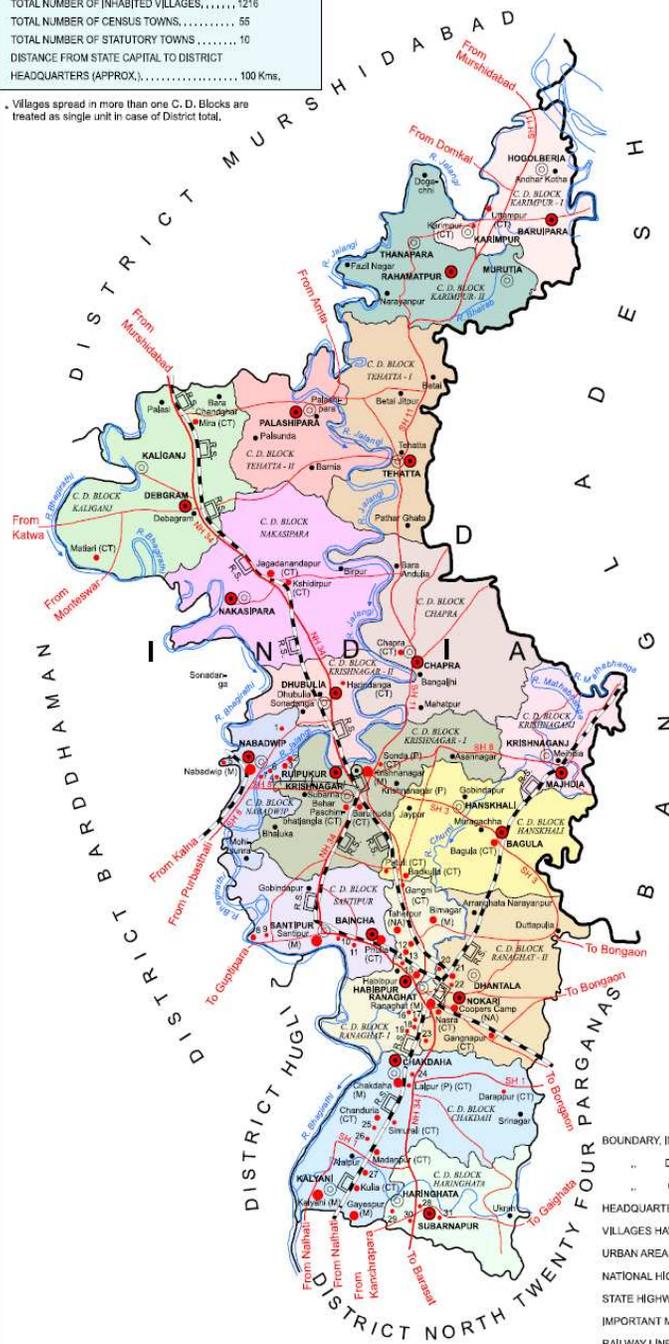
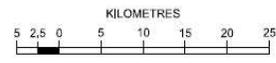
in a river based area, Nadia had the facility to connect itself with the other parts of the country as well as outside world through river borne trade.

Fig1: MAP OF NADIA DISTRICT

TOTAL AREA OF THE DISTRICT, 3927.00 Sq. Kms.
 TOTAL POPULATION OF THE DISTRICT, 5167600
 TOTAL NUMBER OF VILLAGES, 1307*
 TOTAL NUMBER OF INHABITED VILLAGES, 1216
 TOTAL NUMBER OF CENSUS TOWNS, 55
 TOTAL NUMBER OF STATUTORY TOWNS, 10
 DISTANCE FROM STATE CAPITAL TO DISTRICT HEADQUARTERS (APPROX.), 100 Kms.

* Villages spread in more than one C. D. Blocks are treated as single unit in case of District total.

INDIA
 WEST BENGAL
 DISTRICT NADIA



NAME OF NON-STATUTORY TOWNS

C. D. BLOCK NABADWIP

- 1 Barnanpukur (CT)
- 2 Tiorkhali (CT)
- 3 Gadigachha (CT)
- 4 Majdia (CT)
- 5 Babari Dewangarij (CT)
- 6 Char Majdia (CT)
- 7 Char Brahmanagar (CT)

C. D. BLOCK SANTIPUR

- 8 Nrsinghapur (CT)
- 9 Harinadibhastala (CT)
- 10 Ghoralia (CT)
- 11 Beharia (CT)

C. D. BLOCK RANAGHAT - I

- 12 Kamgachhi (CT)
- 13 Raghobpur (CT)
- 14 Panpara (CT)
- 15 Aistala (CT)
- 16 Satgachha (CT)
- 17 Anulia (CT)
- 18 Gopalpur (CT)
- 19 Farbatipur (CT)

C. D. BLOCK RANAGHAT - II

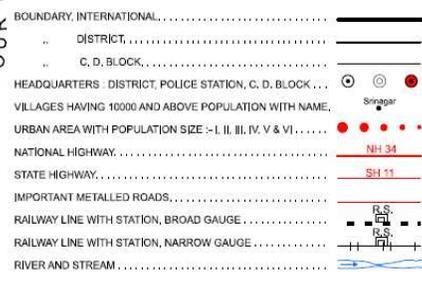
- 20 Hotalpur Krishnapur (CT)
- 21 Hijuli (CT)
- 22 Ranaghat (CT)
- 23 Belgharia (CT)

C. D. BLOCK CHAKDAHIA

- 24 Punglia (CT)
- 25 Priyanagar (CT)
- 26 Jangal (CT)
- 27 Saguna (P) (CT)

C. D. BLOCK HARINGHATA

- 28 Simhat (CT)
- 29 Haringhata Farm (CT)
- 30 Digta (CT)
- 31 Subarnapur (CT)



2. HISTORY OF SILK HANDLOOM INDUSTRY IN NADIA DISTRICT

Nadia district is neither a traditional raw silk producing region, nor a substantial section of weavers are producing silk clothes exclusively, but a vast section of handloom weavers are clustered around specifically two of its region which dominate the world of handloom industry, where silk is being used as a valuable ingredient. In the history of handloom industry, Phulia and Shantipur are the two renowned places to reckon with. Even in the annals of handloom saree, these are two prominent places for manufacturing handloom saree made up of a variety of yarn like cotton, silk and its mixed blending. However, the history of weaving in this district bears a glorious heritage.

It was as early as in 1409, the weaving activity was commenced under the aegis of Gaur Ganesh Danu Mardhandev. During 1683-1694, saree weaving was practiced under the ruling of King of Nadia Raja Rudra Roy. The production got systematized and was well organized leading to good recognition during the period of Mughal empire. Saree was exported to Afghanistan, Iran, Arab Greece & Turkey. This flourishing trend of exporting Bengal Silk saree continued till 1830, when exports of woven silk goods were in significant proportions. However, since 1840 Bengal silk have been gradually depleted both from the internal and external markets. The once flourishing silk industry became the worst victim of the British colonial and industrial policy and thus caused economic distress to the people of the country (Choudhury,1995) .

The British controlled the Bengal textile industry through East India Company and exploitation on native artisans had risen to an alarming extent. Finally the control of East India Company came to an end with the intervention of Governor General Kolkata, for the common representation of grief of the united weavers. Besides being cheap, the textile product also had its specific characteristics in the international market for its quality of yarn used in weaving. Hand Spun Yarn of 250 – 300 s, which is beyond the scope of mill, was used for weaving, which could counterfeit even the imported cotton yarn of Manchester (<http://www.indianhandloomscluster-dchl.net/nadia/index1.asp>).

During 1920 – 1925, Shri Darga Das Kastha introduced barrel Dobby, facilitating the conversion of the throw shuttle to Fly Shuttle. Later Shri Debbendra Nath Mukherjee introduced the Jacquard Machine which facilitated a broader cross section of new designs in the Market (Garrett, 1910). It was also learnt that 100 hook capacity Jacquard was first installed by Shri Jatindra Nath Lohori for producing varieties during the third decade of twenty century. During the same time sectional warping and sizing was introduced by Shri Hazari to produce a warp of 350 yards in length.

Due to several socio-political reasons cropped out due to division of Bengal at the time of Independence, many weaver families belonging to Vaishnava religion migrated from present Bangladesh and settled down near Nabadwip Dham (the birthplace of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu). Shantipur and Fulia are such places which grew up due to these migrated weavers. Gradually Shantipuri saree became the brand product of Shantipur, which became popular due to its fine and uniform texture. The sarees are named as per the design used in the extra warp meant for its side border, viz, *Nilambari*, *Gangajamuna*, *Benkipar*, *Bhomra*,

Rajmahal, Chandmalla, Anshpar, Brindabani, Mour Par, Dorookha. These santipuri sarees always have cotton ground base but the extra warp or border is made up of different textiles yarns, like muga silk, twisted cotton, zari, gold & silver are used (Mitra, Choudhury and Mukherjee, 2009).

The Bengal Small Scale Aids Industry Act during the early eighties (1980 –83), was instrumental support of the government for the growth of the Handloom industry. As per the act financial aid to a maximum of Rs 10,000/- in shape of 50% grant & 50 % Loan was provided to the individual weavers for purchase of looms and Margin money. During the mid eighties and later in the mid nineties 1995, there were *weaver movements* for the wage hikes but were unsuccessful for the suppression by Mahajans.

As the handloom industry spreads throughout the state of West Bengal, the item wise production pattern varies from district to district. It produces traditional items like sarees, dhotis, gamcha, towels, lungies and of late, there has been a tendency to switch over to the production of high quality items like, stoles for scarf for exclusive export market. In Dakshin Dinajpur and Malda districts coarser varieties of coloured sarees are mostly produced. But in Nadia and Hooghly, sarees like *Tangails* and *Dhaniakhalis* are mainly produced by weavers where the fabric is fine and cost is high. In Bankura, Purulia and Midnapore, the main handloom products are bed sheets, bed covers, window curtain cloth excluding ordinary sarees. In Midnapore, the mosquito curtain cloth is also produced and in South 24 Parganas, surgical cloth is mainly produced. Despite these diversities of production, West Bengal is famous for sarees made from quality cotton or silk yarn. Jamdani, Baluchari, Tangail and Murshidabad Silk have become a brand name in the market which cannot be replicated by the power loom. According to 2nd Handloom Census (1995), West Bengal, had 3.5 Lakh handlooms providing direct and indirect employment to about 6.67 lakh persons (www.texamin.gov.in). While the 3rd Handloom Census (2010) revealed a drop in the number of handlooms to 3.07 Lakh and numbers of households involved with this sector is 4.07 Lakh. The average annual earning of the handloom weaver and allied household workers ranges from Rs.26,015 to Rs. 27,006 .

Jamdani and Tangail are two pioneer dress materials which bears a golden legacy in the history of Bengal handloom. The artistic craft of jamdani weaving was derived from Persian technique. Jamdani style of weaving was flourished under the affluent patronage of kings and emperors of different times. It is always considered as a textile of excellence for its super fine qualities in the fifteenth & sixteenth Centuries. Specialty of Jamdani lies in its proficiency of making designs drawn mostly from the social, religious and natural background. These motifs are translated through a particular technique that also reflects weaver's sensitivity to create a new form of art.

Tangail, on the other hand was originated from the district of Tangail of present Bangladesh. Previously, this saree was named as 'Begam Bahar' where silk warp and cotton weft were used. Later on, both cotton warp and weft were used. There is a key difference between the weaving technique of Jamdani and Tangail. The embroidery thread of Jamdani is inserted after every ground pick, whereas in Tangail saree, the embroidery thread is inserted after two ground picks (Bhattacharya, Bhadra and Chowdhury, 2016). The weavers, mainly from Basak community, who migrated from Tangail district after the partition of Bengal and settled in Katwa,

Dhatrigram, Samudragarh area in Burdwan district continued the tradition of weaving Tangail saree.

At present, Silk Tangail sarees have been revived. Silk of Bengal were much acclaimed over the world since ancient times. The most well known Bengal silk saree which carry its popular name is Baluchari saree - a production of exclusive design and fabulous weaving technique. A revival in recent time of both the Baluchari and another outstanding traditional Bengal saree - "Daccai" have lead to nationwide and world wide popularity and interest in Bengal silks.

The Daccai Jamdani is a fabric on which designs are raised in inimitable style. Handloom still remains the great employer of rural sector in Bengal. Santipur, Fulia in Nadia district, Dhaniakhali, Begampur in Hooghly district, Samudragarh, Dhatrigram, Katwa, Ketugram in Burdwan district, Bishnupur in Bankura district are the mainly handloom concentrated areas in the state of West Bengal.

3. PRESENT CRISIS OF SILK HANDLOOM WEAVERS IN PHULIA

Phulia is a census town besides the river Ganges under Shantipur Police Station of Ranaghat subdivision of Nadia district. The main occupation of the majority of people inhabiting in this region is weaving. It is also holy birthplace of the great poet Krittibas Ojha (1381-1461). Shantipur has a long history of weaving handloom sarees of almost 500 years ago, while Phulia started flourishing in weaving textiles only after Partition/Independence of the country in 1947. Hundreds of displaced weavers, especially from the Tangail district of Bangladesh migrated to this place and constituted handloom clusters. The second wave of migration took place during the time of Bangladesh War in 1971. They are mostly from the Basak community (Live Mint, 2016). Similar to Rochdale's idea of constituting a textile centre with some pioneer artisans and weavers, a successful co-operative movement was organized with the migrated weavers in Phulia. The result was successful and Phulia became prominent in the history of textile world (Das, 2015).

Market researchers (Saha, 2016) opined that Phulia had around 75,000 looms n the early 2000, which declined to approximately 35,000 handlooms during 2010, when the annual production was about Rs. 450 crores (Basak, 2010). Presently, there are only 20,000 looms. Exports plummeted due to economic downturn and currently it accounted for less than 10% of overall production. The artisans and weavers are striving hard to save the industry from current disaster. They have introduced new styles and designs in the Traditional saree to make it more attractive. The *Tangail saree* of Fulia is also known as '*Fulia-Tangail*' nowadays.

Basak and Pal (2015) have found that in Phulia 83 percent families attached with this industry have their own handlooms and the family members are also associated with weaving handlooms and only 10 percent families are '*Mahajan*' families who are related with business of *sarees*. Remaining 7 percent households are workers who have no handlooms and are weaving only in exchange of money. Though 83 percent families have

handlooms but only 44.31 percent handlooms are operated by the family members. It is often observed that the Phulia handlooms are mainly operated by the migrated labours from the district of Cooch Behar as well as other parts of North Bengal. At present the average number of handlooms of each family is three and the families can't supply sufficient labours. As a result, the families are dependent on the migratory labours.

From a recent market based analysis (Saha, 2016), it has been exposed that almost all types of handloom workers of Phulia, starting from independent weavers, co-operative weavers to weavers under moneylenders, are disappointed, overworked and under-paid. Price of their handloom woven saree ranges from Rs.600/- (for the simplest motif with a pure cotton weave) to Rs.1000/- (for Jamdani in fine silk). The cost of raw material amounts to Rs.200/- to Rs.250/- and the poor weaver gets only Rs. 200/- per saree. A weaver, who usually produces around 5 sarees/week working for 10-12 hours per day ultimately earns around Rs.2000/- to Rs.8000/- depending upon his technical proficiency and diligence of labour.

On the other hand, Basak and Pal (2015) derived from their market survey that a handloom can produce average four *sarees* in a week. The weaver households are in destitute state. About 37 percent families earn less than Rs.3000/month which is not sufficient to maintain their present subsistence livelihood. About 37.5 percent families earn Rs.3000/-Rs.6000/- per month which is also insufficient to maintain a standard lifestyle. Only 11.5 percent families earn above Rs.12000 /- per month. In these circumstances the young generations are not interested to carry on this livelihood. 57% weaver families maintain the handlooms by getting capitals from *Mahajans* and only 43 % families use their own capital. 80.5 percent weavers of this industry are not involved with co-operative societies. At the initial stage of the development of the handloom industry at Phulia, the weavers initiate the process of production with the financial help of *Mahajans* and ultimately a large section of them can't break out from their shackles. That could be the reason why the associations of the weavers with the co-operative societies are so meager in numbers. However, their own apathy and financial illiteracy could be the other determinants, which cannot be completely ignored.

Presently, six Cooperatives are seen in Phulia of which four handloom cooperatives are active. Those Handloom Cooperatives are:

- Handloom Weavers Cooperative Society: It is established as the first registered handloom cooperative society of Phulia township.
- Fulia Tangail Shari Bayan Silpa Samabay Samity Ltd: Fulia progotisil tatubay samity
- Nutan Fulia Tantubay Samabay Samity Ltd.
- Tangail Tantujibi Unnayan Samabay Samity Ltd.

Female handloom cooperatives in Phulia are:

1. Ashanandapura Mahila cooperative society (1980)
2. Sutragarh Narimukti samity
3. Dhakapura Mahila samabai samity limited.

4. Santipur Garhpara Narimukti Tantubai samity(1984)

Besides producing sarees, the societies have started producing several exportable items like silk scarves, silk-stoles, made-ups, dress-materials etc. since 1985. Most of the exportable outfits are made up of either, silk, wool, linen or tussar, muga, matka etc. And these exportable items are ultimately destined to countries like Japan, Germany, Italy, USA, Denmark, French, Switzerland, Australia etc. through merchant exporters.

Table 1. Production Statistics of Co-operative Societies in Fulia -2012-13

Name of the Societies	No. of Members	No. of Beneficiaries	Production (Rs. in Lakh)	Marketing (Rs. in Lakh)	Net Profit (Rs. in Lakh)
Fulia Tangail Saree Bayan Samabay Samiti Ltd	636	535	248.37	230.87	NA
Tangail Tantujibi Unnayan Samabay Samiti Ltd	524	525	644.23	687.90	15.19
Natun Fulia Tantubay Samabay Samiti Ltd	543	454	522.25	605.12	8.27

Source: Samabay Sadan, Fulia, 2012-13

The above table gives a clear indication that number of handlooms (which is equivalent to number of members in the societies) can never be a determinant factor of the volume of production or sales. Tangail Tantujibi Unnayan Samabay Samiti and Natun Fulia Tantubay Samiti have fared better than Fulia Tangail Saree Bayan Samabay Samiti, despite having lower number of beneficiaries. Therefore skill and attitude of the artisans and weavers always carry an important mileage for any co-operative society for securing higher returns.

Mr. Anup Dey from the Textile Committee has published a diagnostic study on the Handloom Cluster of Nadia, where he differentiated between the attitudes levels of two groups of weavers within Nadia district. Weavers from Phulia regions are mostly displaced and migratory artisans. Their economic insecurity plays a pivotal role in determining their level of intensity in work as well as proficiency. They are also highly adaptable to accept any kind of changes, be it in design and motif making or others.

Table 2: A Comparative study between Shantipur and Phulia Handloom Cluster

Features	Shantipur	Phulia
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Estimated Critical Mass	20000 looms & 60000 Weavers	12000 looms 36000 Weavers
Weavers	Settled Weavers of Santipur	Migrated Weavers & Even today weavers from North Bengal come here for work as labours, Basically they are not weavers of Nadia district.
Product	Saree, Dhoti, Exportable Fabrics	Saree, Dress material, Exportable Fabrics
Cluster Nature	Traditional Products	Both Traditional & Contemporary
Skill Levels	80% Skills	90% skills
% of Export Production	1-2%	15- 20 %
Past Major Projects	CAD/CAM Centre	Proposed Infrastructure project of DRDC
Attitude	Accept changes Slowly	Accept changes Fast

Source : De, Arup. Diagnostic Report of Santipur Handloom Cluster, Nadia
www.indiahandloomcluster-dchl.net/DiagnosisStudy.asp

The share of export production in Phulia is also 15-20% of production. Market surveyors are observing that production business is increasing day by day and spreading among the private traders and individual weavers as well. The *sarees* are exported to different cities of South India like Hyderabad, Secunderabad, Vishakhapatnam, Bijaywada, Bangalore etc. Nowadays, a new type of *Tangail Saree* has been invented by the handloom artisan-members of Tangail Tantujibi Unnayan Samabay Samity Ltd. known as *Non-Traditional Tangail Saree* which is based on *Tangail Gharana* but not exactly the original *Tangail Saree*. These *sarees* are of very simple designs and patterns and need not to starch. Not only co-operative members but also many weavers are now weaving this newly invented *Tangail Saree*.

However, despite having this progressive trend, the situation of the handloom industry in Fulia is depressive in some other dimensions and the industry is severely oppressed by multidimensional problems of following types.

- **Fierce competition with the powerlooms:** According to Handlooms Act, 1985 and 2008, 11 items of clothes are reserved only for handloom industry in India. As per rules, these items can't be weaved in powerlooms and it is punishable offence (Basak, 2010). But so many powerlooms have been running illegally in the adjacent areas of Fulia and easily producing

almost same quality of *Tangail Saree*. As a result, handlooms are failed to compete with them.

- **Marketing:** The weavers and co-operative societies are bound to depend upon the local private traders for marketing their produced handloom items which fetches them lower than the reasonable price for their products. A central organization for the marketing of these handloom goods is urgently felt by the weavers.

- **Wages:** The wages of the common weavers are so low that a subsistence standard of living is even not possible. The forthcoming generations are not willing to continue this generation borne profession.

- **Raw materials:** The soaring price of raw materials (i.e. cotton, silk, muga, jari etc. and handloom equipment) further escalates the problems. Since much of these raw materials are imported from distant states like, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Assam etc., the problem is infusing much complication.

- **Capital:** In the handlooms industry of Phulia, the opportunity to derive institutional financial support is very low. As the banks refuse the weavers to lend money, they are compelled to take loans from the private money lenders after committing to pay higher rate of interest which adversely affects the entire industry.

- **Electricity:** The weavers are obliged to pay the electricity bill at commercial rate. Though the handlooms are not driven by power, the poor weaves are subject to victim of this whimsical decision of the authority. The role of the government is hardly active.

- **Export:** Though the foreign exchange earnings from the Phulia Handloom items act as a boosting factor to the weavers, the export rejection due to quality or standardization problems also brings a huge set back to the fate of the weavers. A rigorous export orientation is required to make the product free from colour defects, weaving defects and design defects.

- **Import:** After the Indo-Bangladesh trade deal of 2011 regarding import of 47 types of handloom products of Bangladesh, there seems to be a glut in the market of textile garments, especially Tangail sarees. The handloom district of Phulia is being badly affected for this.

- **Investment:** The volume of investment undertaken by different financial agencies in Phulia is comparatively low in the handloom industry. Only the Government and co-operative banks are providing loans to the weavers. The problem is both sided. On one side there is financial illiteracy, on the other side complicated formalities of Banks and co-operatives.

- **Infrastructure:** Infrastructure facilities available in the handloom industry are inadequate. For making this cottage industry return-assuring and export-intensive, high level infrastructure development is urgently required.

4. Handloom Cluster in Shantipur & Present Problems of the Weavers

Shantipur is one of the ancient cities of Nadia district which bears a rich legacy of handloom sarees. It is situated in 23°15'N and 88°48'E, on the left bank of the river Hooghly. It covers an area of 7 square miles and its population is 2.88 Lakh (GoI, 2011 Census). Hinduism is the main religion of the town (79.15% population is Hindu), followed by Islam (20.25%), Christian (0.04%). Shantipur was in existence at the time of Raja Ganesh who ruled Bengal during 1414-1418. However, the name 'Shantipur' was widely believed to be given by Rudra Rai who was King of Nadia on the latter half of 17th Century (<http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~princelystates/states/n/nadia.html>). In the time of Maharaja Rudra Rai, Shantipur was a populous town and a celebrated cloth market. In the old days of East India Company, it was the site of a commercial residency and the centre of large government factories (Nadia, Bengal District Gazetteer, 1910). The British Government used to purchase Shantipur muslin for exporting it to European market, which averaged over Rs.12 Lakhs during the first 28 years of 19th Century. However, the industry faced a decaying trend as the industrial revolution in Britain became prominent. All the factories in Shantipur was sold during 1870 to 1880. The East Indian Company adopted preferential trade policies to sell the European textile product in Indian market and the market of Indian product in British market was completely narrowed down under high tariff wall. Thus rise of Lancashire ultimately devastated the fortune of weavers of Bengal textile weavers. However, during the decades leading upto Independence, Shantipur saw gradual inflow of techniques like the Barrel Dobby facilitating the conversion from Throw Shuttle to Fly Shuttle (1920s), the Jacquard Machine (1930s), and sectional warping and sizing that allowed production of warp yarns 350 yards long (1930s).

Currently, Shantipur cluster is the most prominent cluster among the Nadia handloom centres with reference to the number of loom availability to weavers and increasing trends of production. The other clusters of Handlooms can be noted at Ranaghat I & II, Phulia, Nabadwip & Nakshipara/ Rajapur.

Table 3: Handloom Clusters of Nadia District

Handloom Clusters	Product	Estimated Numbers of Looms	Present Trend
Ranaghat I & II	Coarser Saree, Lungi, Gamcha, Furnishing, Fabric	2000	Decline
Fulia & Adjoning	Tangile Saree, Jamdani Saree, Dress Material, Exportable Fabrics	12000	More Prospering
Shantipur	Santipuri Saree, Exportable Fabrics	20000	Prospering but not like Fulia

Nabadwip	Coarser Saree, Lungi, Gamcha, Jamdani, Shirting	2000	Decline
Nakshipara/Rajapur	Jamdani Exportable Fabrics	1000	Decline

Source:- Focused Group Discussion with WSC, HDO & Cluster Actors

4.1 Situation of Shantipur Handloom Cluster

Types of Weavers: All the weavers who participate in the weaving programme of the handloom cluster are not from the cooperative societies, many of them work through Mahajans and some are individual workers but also members of cooperative societies; these weavers are much richer than the others. Das, Roy and Mandal (2016) have observed that their study area consisted 63% of the weavers who joined with cooperatives but on the other side around 30% of the weavers were associated with Local Mahajans. Local Mahajans were producing low price saree while the cooperative produced high price saree and if the cooperative found any dispute in the making of saree, the weavers were bound to refund the whole money. 7% were found to be individual weavers who weaved themselves and sold the product in the local market. These are the poor weavers. The total percentages of migrated workers in Shantipur are 47% while residual 53% are from local and adjoining areas. Market observers commented that all the workers who work here are mostly young people. It has been found that 65% of weavers are within 20-40 years and only 20% of people belong to 40-60 years and another 15% are senior citizen people. But only male weavers have been migrated here (ibid, 2016).

The gross profit of the cooperative is not increasing rapidly through 2009. There are three types of weavers.

- Type I (Entrepreneur weavers): They buy raw material on their own, work on their own designs and then market their product through a variety of local channels, traders etc.
- Type II (Labourer weavers) – These weavers are linked to master weavers, who receive the raw material and design brief from the master weaver and pass on the final product to them and receive their weaving wages in return.
- Type III (Cooperative fold weavers): These weavers are linked to the primary cooperative societies which procure raw material, pass it on to the attached weavers and pay them wages

4.2 Formation of Co-operatives

Shantipur-Fulia region is a weaver-concentrated area and approximate 42,000 looms are operated in the area and about 95,000 people are engaged in allied work of weaving. An individual weaver cannot create those units properly and he has no options left but to depend on the cooperatives. So, cooperative based development is seen in the region. Out of the total,

major 65 handloom cooperative is registered in 2002-03 in West Bengal. Under this category, there are only 11 cooperatives active now in Nadia District.

4.3 Household Income Level

The household income of Shantipur changed widely after generating various source of income which are created by the development of handloom cooperative. Earlier in this area the household income of the people was relatively low. The present statistics reveals that the maximum share of people are having income level between Rs.4000/- to Rs.6000/- and next highest portion of people fall within the income level is Rs.2000/- to Rs.4000/- (ibid, 2016) . The number of people in the two income level that is more than Rs.8000/- and less than Rs.2000/- is very less in number. This comparison reflects the improvement of economic standard of maximum respondents in Shantipur. Thus, maximum people who were in low income group earlier could upgrade themselves in the middle income group.

4.4 Promotional Production

The main production of original style are being changed slowly in design, pattern as per customers' likings i.e. a) on pure basic gharana, b) modernized and ornamented saree on basic gharana, c) newly inclusion of light weight and feather-feeling saree of modern style with antic touch for the customers of good taste – namely, Ambari, Panchali, Gandhari, Nayansukh, Kadambari etc. which may be called 'Non-Traditional Tangail'.

In order to promote exportable, cloth production was diversified to satisfy the need of the abroad customers and for the betterment of marketing in the niche market and also more wages earning for the weavers. This export oriented weaving started first with the encouragement of the Handicrafts and Handlooms Export Corporations of India Limited and one of their Japanese customer and well-known Textile Designer of Japan, Mr. Yurgen Lahl (Das, Roy and Mandal, 2016). Types of exportable cloths are scarves, stoles, made-ups etc. dress materials etc. Saree was sold directly to the customer through retail showroom, exhibitions and to whole-sellers of all over India. So far as exportable products are concerned, the Society doesn't sale directly to the aboard market; they export their production through various merchant exporters to the market of Japan, Italy, USA, UK, Australia, Germany and Middle East countries.

All yarn of natural fibre like cotton, silk, wool, linen, muga, tussar, matka etc. are used as raw materials. The society has its own dye-house where both natural and chemical dyeing methods can be used. All the dyes are ensured eco-friendly according to international standard. Steps are taken to modernize the dyeing units. Installation work of modern Hankdyeing machines, Boiler and Effluent Treatment Plant started.

4.5 Structure of the Cluster

Core Cluster Actors : The Core actors of the cluster are the weavers, master weavers. The evolution of the weavers into the Master Weavers tells about the organic relation that these core cluster actors enjoy amongst themselves. This further shows how the growth of the cluster has provided opportunities to a weaver to develop into a master weaver.

Master Weavers: Previously this category of weavers were engaged in weaving only, but today they undertake the overall responsibility of supplying the raw material to the weavers, provide the design and pay wages to the grass root level weavers; and then supply the sarees to Mahajans. Mahajans provide design and colour information and a better price realisation for the saree, but on the other hand make the transactions on credit. There are around 700 master weavers actively involved in production activities of the Shantipur cluster. It is estimated that in total, these master weavers have 16,050 working looms, and equal number of weavers working as labours. A part of the production of master weavers is also sold in the local haat of Santipur (Mitra, Choudhury and Mukherjee, 2009) . The modal unit size of the master weavers is 4 looms. There are few master weavers having 10, 20, 30, 40, 50, 60 looms under one shed. The master weavers apart from the weaving earning of one loom earn profit margins from the products weaved on the loom engaged by the labour.

Weavers: There are about 20,000 working looms and 60,000 persons involved directly / indirectly in the weaving and preparatory activities. The women basically undertake the preparatory works like separation of hanks, sizing, pirn winding. There are around 111 different weaving communities namely the “Pramanik”, “Kastha” , “Dalal” , “Khan” etc. Majority of the weavers belong to Tantuvay community (ibid, 2009). All the weavers have good weaving skills for weaving saree on Jacquard looms. The average earning of the weaver family is in the range of Rs. 1500 – Rs. 2000 per month.

Dyers: Dyeing is basically carried out in the dyeing unit. There are about 90 units doing dyeing as a commercial activity. These units, based on the quantity of yarn dyed are categorized into large, medium and small units. 60% of the total yarn sales are in the coloured yarn form, and the remaining 40% is in the grey form. The yarn traders employ the large and medium scale for dyeing where as the small-scale unit does the job work for the master weavers.

Designers: There are about 100 small designers in the cluster, who do designing work on their own creativity and imagination. They neither have a formal education nor a mechanism to update their knowledge skills. Lack of exposure has made their skill only tradition based. Their main role in the cluster is to do costing for the master weaver, and supply them the punch cards for the Jacquard.

4.6 Major Problems of the Weavers

a) Production:

In India, as per rules, it is punishable offence to weave 11 items in power loom and mill. But few of these reserved items are being woven very openly in power loom. So many power looms are illegally running in Aishtala, Birnagar, Ranaghat, Swarupgonj and Nabadwip in Nadia district and easily producing ditto copy of Tangail and Santipuri saree in very large quantity and flooded the

handloom market by these cheaper-price cloths. Handloom products are unable to compete with them. There exists a Government department to protect this illegal weaving, but their activity is hardly felt.

b) Marketing:

For marketing the products, most of the weavers and cooperative societies depend on the private traders and do not able to get responsible price of their products. There are no large sized central whole sales organizations for boldly marketing of handloom goods. Direct retail and exhibition sales are not only solution of marketing problems of handloom industry. However, very recently Department of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises and Textiles of the Government of West Bengal have promoted Biswa Bangla Marketing Corporation to improve the quality of life of Bengal's handloom weavers through selling their products around the corner of the countries and world. The organisation's unique business proposition is to plough the operating profit back to the artisans and weavers whose entrepreneurship has been pivotal to Biswa Bangla's success.

c) Wages:

The weaving wage rate of these handloom workers is so low that weavers are not being able to maintain their living and as a result a large number of handloom workers are going outside the state in search of other jobs.

d) Finance:

The commercial Banks are less interested to give finance to the weavers. Unorganized artisans cannot think, even in dream, to have bank loans. The master weavers are also refused by the banks, when they badly call for capital and ultimately getting no other alternatives, they are bound to take loan from the village money lenders at the highest rate of interest which in turn results into deterioration of their economic position.

e) Export Import:

At the time of September, 2011, an undesirable deal has been signed and started its execution officially between India and Bangladesh. As per deal 47 types of ready markets can be imported from Bangladesh under duty free and quota free scenario. This ultimately made a cloth-flood in domestic market. This came as a major blow to Shantipur handloom clusters.

5. SWOT ANALYSIS OF SILK HANDLOOM CLUSTER IN NADIA

➤ **STRENGTH**

- Silk handloom sector in Nadia district bears a rich legacy of traditional handloom sectors.
- District has large number of weavers and artisans who possesses intergenerational skill.
- District is closer to Kolkata, the capital of West Bengal, which facilitates the weavers and textile merchants to market their product.
- Silk, which is one of the significant raw materials of this handloom sector, is produced in the neighbouring districts i.e., Malda and Murshidabad.

- Co-operative Societies play instrumental role in providing several types of facilities to weavers, starting from product design, loans in concessional terms, marketing and so on.
- Large numbers of master weavers are presently inhabitants of this district. Most of them are migrant weavers from neighbouring country Bangladesh.
- Wage workers are also available in abundant number.

➤ **WEAKNESS**

- Major weakness of the industry is lack of awareness of weavers and artisans connected with this industry regarding several institutional facilities. They fail to avail different concessional credit advantages and welfare scheme facilities due to their own ignorance and financial illiteracy.
- Lack of education is also another reason why the weavers avoid paper work in different banks and financial loans.
- Village money lenders take the advantage of financial illiteracy of poor weavers and artisans and extract the pay off of the weavers' class.
- The farm size is also fragmented which hinders the textile companies to reap the benefit of the foreign market.
- The machines are also outdated. Most of the handlooms in West Bengal are pit-looms.

➤ **OPPORTUNITY**

- The handloom industry in Nadia has the opportunity to make access in a larger market, despite being situated in a small place.

➤ **THREAT**

- The industry is being threatened by the powerloom sector. All 11 items restricted to be manufactured only by the handloom sectors are also being produced by the powerloom sectors at a cheaper rate.

6. SUGGESTED REMEDIAL MEASURES: A WAY FORWARD

During the 1990s, a new style and production trend has emerged in Shantipur and Phulia. Apart from the weaving of traditional Bengal handloom sarees, new products like yardage, scarves and stoles for Export started and the weavers began to understand the tastes and preferences of foreign markets. The adaptability of the silk weavers with the change in time and preference pattern can only make the handloom industry resilient with the forth coming situation.

The weavers of the district succeeded to understand the ongoing change in style trend and the colours became more muted and the designs understated. Various complex and esoteric weaves had been abandoned for their complicated techniques and high labour cost were revived as weavers began to get remunerative prices for their products. New experiments were carried out with yarn combinations like silk, wool and cotton. Natural and artificial yarn combinations were also used. Phulia in fact led the way in the export of high end handloom stoles and scarves. These were exported in large volumes.

Phulia and Shantipur are today home to weavers from different economic strata. On the one hand you have the affluent, market savvy weavers who have many looms and a number of weavers working under them. However, lack of awareness and education became the major stumbling blocks in their way of success. The Government should take emergent steps to fill up these lacunae. On the other hand, there exists large number of self help groups attached in this sector. They are almost marginal with few or no assets to their names and what unites them is their fabulous weaving skill. The Integrated Handloom Cluster Development Programme promoted by the Ministry of Textiles, Government of India is expected to fulfill the hope for those struggling weavers. With objectives like SHG and Consortium formation, common facility centre, dye house, market exposure and so on, things would definitely look up for the Bengal handloom saree weavers of Shantipur and Phulia of Nadia district.

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