

# A STUDY ON THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITIONS OF HANDLOOM WEAVERS IN INDIA

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## ABSTRACT

*The handloom industry occupies an eminent place in preserving the country's heritage and culture and, hence, plays a vital role in the economy of the country. Production in the handloom sector recorded a figure of 9,268 million sq. metres in the year 2020–21, which is about 59.27 percent over the production figure of 5,493 million sq. metres recorded in the year 2003–04. As an economic activity, the handloom sector occupies a place second only to agriculture in terms of employment. The sector, with about 31.45 lakh handlooms, provides employment to 35.23 lakh persons, of whom 72.29 percent are women and 13.84 percent belong to scheduled castes and 19.21 percent to scheduled tribes. However, this sector is faced with various problems, such as obsolete technology, an unorganised production system, low productivity, inadequate working capital, a conventional product range, and weak marketing links. Further, the handloom sector has always been a weak competitor against the powerloom and mill sectors. Against this backdrop, the present work attempts to make an in-depth study into the lives and miseries of handloom households. It covers households located in select prominent areas of this sector.*

**Key words:** *Weavers category, social group, financial source, usage of yarn, sales, income.*

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## Introduction

India has a long tradition of weaving, particularly by hand. We are moving through different diversity, and handloom is one of them, as well as one of India's cultural heritages. This shows the dexterity and artistic ability of weavers to produce attractive products. Handloom always promotes innovations in its products through experimentation and exhibitions. Through its uniqueness and peculiar design, the handloom sector is a well-known industry all over the world. The handloom sector has a rich cultural heritage, so it has a dominant role in the Indian textile industry. Considering its contribution, the handloom sector has space nearby in the agricultural sector. It has a major role in developing the livelihood of rural people and eradicating poverty because most of the weaver's society is situated in a rural area. It employs tens of thousands of weavers and other allied workers. It helps in reducing discrimination between men and women. The handloom industry employs a large number of women. It provides a platform to reduce the gap between rural and urban people. In practice, the status of weavers is rapidly declining due to the generation gap. The results reflect that for the handloom industry to be sustainable, the handloom weavers' market has to be expanded and organized. The handloom sector plays an important role in the state economy.

## Objectives

1. To gain insight about the weavers segment.
2. To sketch out a model that influences weavers' social status.
3. To explore the social and economic condition of the handloom weavers, such as finance, yarn usage, source of sales and income, etc.

## ANALYSIS OF THE SOCIAL POSITION OF WEAVERS

According to Table-1, the total number of households engaged in handloom activities in India is 31,44,839 lakhs. This is an increase from the third Census, which had a population of 27.83 lakhs. Weaver households have

received 25,45,312 lakhs (80.94 percent) coverage, while allied worker households have received 5,99,527 lakhs (19.06 percent). In the rural area, handloom households account for 27,48,445 lakhs (87.40 percent) and in the urban area, 3,96,394 lakhs (12.60 percent). 22,60,971 (88.83 percent) of the 25,45,312 weavers' households are in rural areas, while 2,84,341 (11.17 percent) are in urban areas. The total number of allied workers is 5,99,527 lakhs, of which 4,87,474 lakhs (81.31 percent) are located in rural areas and the remaining 112053 lakhs (18.69 percent) are located in urban areas.

The total number of rural households was 27,48,445 lakhs, with weavers accounting for 22,60,971 lakhs (82.26 percent) and allied workers accounting for the remaining 4,87,474 lakhs (17.74 percent). Out of 3,96,394 households, the weaver's household covered 2,84,341 lakhs (71.73 percent) and the allied workers' household covered 1,12,053 lakhs (28.27 percent) living in urban areas. 35,22,512 lakhs of total handloom workers have been covering 26,73,891 lakhs (75.91 percent) of weaving workers and 8,48,621 lakhs (24.09 percent) of allied workers. Out of 8,48,621 lakhs (24.09 percent), 6,97,564 lakh (82.20 percent) allied workers living in rural areas and 1,51,057 lakhs (17.80 percent) living in urban areas.

Weavers totaled 2,67,381 lakhs, with 23,561 lakhs (88.12 percent) working in rural areas and 3,177,641 lakhs (11.88 percent) working in urban areas. 6,97,564 lakhs (82.20 percent) of the 8,48,621 lakhs allied workers live in rural areas, while 1,51,057 lakhs (17.80 percent) live in urban areas. There are 23,56,127 weaver's workers (77.16 percent) and 6,97,564 allied workers (22.84 percent) among the 30,53,691 rural workers. In addition to the 4,68,821 urban workers, 3,17,764 (67.78 percent) are weavers, and 1,51,057 (32.22 percent) are allied workers.

Among these, the average worker per household is 1.12 in rural areas (covering 1.11 workers per household) and 1.18 workers per household in urban areas. Among these, weaver workers count for 1.05 per household and allied workers count for 1.42 per household.

Table-1  
Type of handloom households and handloom workers under handloom census 2019-20

| Type           | handloom households |                   |                    | Handloom workers   |                   |                    |
|----------------|---------------------|-------------------|--------------------|--------------------|-------------------|--------------------|
|                | Rural               | Urban             | Total              | Rural              | Urban             | Total              |
| Weavers        | 2260971<br>(88.83)  | 284341<br>(11.17) | 2545312<br>(80.94) | 2356127<br>(88.12) | 317764<br>(11.88) | 2673891<br>(75.91) |
| Allied workers | 487474<br>(81.31)   | 112053<br>(18.69) | 599527<br>(19.06)  | 697564<br>(82.20)  | 151057<br>(17.80) | 848621<br>(24.09)  |
| Total          | 2748445<br>(87.40)  | 396394<br>(12.60) | 3144839<br>(100)   | 3053691<br>(86.69) | 468821<br>(13.31) | 3522512<br>(100)   |

Source: Fourth all India handloom census 2019-20

Note: Figures in parentheses indicate percentages to total

Table-2 shows that of the total male workers, 9,75,733 or 27.70 percent are engaged in weaving and allied activities, with 77,87,732 or 79.81 percent working in rural areas and the remaining 6,99,631 or 20.19 percent working in urban areas, with 77.80 percent covering weaver workers and 22.20 percent covering allied workers in both rural and urban areas. Of the total of 25,46,285 female workers, 72.29 percent are engaged in weaving and related activities, with the remaining 22,74,516 workers employed. There are 89.33 percent of workers in rural areas, with a residual of 2,71,769 lakh (10.67 percent) in urban areas, with 75.19 percent of weaver workers and 24.81 percent of allied workers located in both rural and urban areas. In addition to the total number of transgender workers, 494 workers represented 0.01 percent, with 403 workers representing 81.58 percent of the total in rural areas and 91 workers representing 18.42 percent of the total in urban areas, while weaver workers were noticeable at 49.19 percent and allied workers were noticeable at 50.81 percent.

The majority (75.19 percent) of handloom households with workers are weaver households, so at least one member of every such household is engaged in weaving.

Table-2  
Gender-wise workforce of handloom workers in India

| Gender | Type of handloom workers | Rural  | Urban          | Total          |
|--------|--------------------------|--------|----------------|----------------|
| Male   | Weavers                  | 601562 | 157587         | 759149 (77.80) |
|        | Allied workers           | 177210 | 39374          | 216584 (22.20) |
|        | Total                    | 778772 | 196961 (20.19) | 975733 (27.70) |

|             |                |                    |                |                  |
|-------------|----------------|--------------------|----------------|------------------|
|             |                | (79.81)            |                |                  |
| Female      | Weavers        | 1754391            | 160108         | 1914499 (75.19)  |
|             | Allied workers | 520125             | 111661         | 631786 (24.81)   |
|             | Total          | 2274516<br>(89.33) | 271769 (10.67) | 2546285 (72.29)  |
| Transgender | Weavers        | 174                | 69             | 243 (49.19)      |
|             | Allied workers | 229                | 22             | 251 (50.81)      |
|             | total          | 403 (81.58)        | 91 (18.42)     | 494 (0.01)       |
| Grand total |                | 3053691<br>(86.69) | 468821 (13.31) | 3522512 (100.00) |

Source: Fourth all India handloom census 2019-20

Note: Figures in parentheses indicate percentages to total

Table-3 shows that, as per economic activity, handloom is one of the largest employment providers after agriculture. The sector provides employment for 13.74 percent of persons engaged in about 14.27 percent of households, of which the weaving work participation rate is 76.42 percent among scheduled castes. Next, 17.85 percent of handloom workers are generated by 19.13 percent of handloom households, while the weaving work participation rate is 81.68 percent among scheduled tribes. 75.38 percent of households provided by 35.98 percent handloom workers have a weaving work participation rate of 75.38 percent, and 33.02 percent of households provided by 32.43 percent handloom workers have a weaving work participation rate of 73.10 percent from other castes.

Table-3

Social group-wise distribution of handloom households, handloom workers and handloom weavers

| Social groups               | Handloom households |                   |                     | Handloom workers   |                   |                     | Handloom weavers   |                   |                     |
|-----------------------------|---------------------|-------------------|---------------------|--------------------|-------------------|---------------------|--------------------|-------------------|---------------------|
|                             | Rural               | Urban             | Total               | Rural              | Urban             | Total               | Rural              | Urban             | Total               |
| Scheduled castes (SCs)      | 409810<br>(91.33)   | 38927<br>(8.67)   | 448737<br>(14.27)   | 439792<br>(90.84)  | 44352<br>(9.16)   | 484144<br>(13.74)   | 342025<br>(92.45)  | 27951<br>(7.55)   | 369976<br>(13.84)   |
| Scheduled tribes (STs)      | 558805<br>(92.88)   | 42856<br>(7.12)   | 601661<br>(19.13)   | 582988<br>(92.72)  | 45780<br>(7.28)   | 628768<br>(17.85)   | 485313<br>(94.49)  | 28294<br>(5.51)   | 513607<br>(19.21)   |
| Other backward class (OBCs) | 874864<br>(82.86)   | 181018<br>(17.14) | 1055882<br>(33.58)  | 1034545<br>(81.63) | 232763<br>(18.37) | 1267308<br>(35.98)  | 789682<br>(82.67)  | 165567<br>(17.33) | 955249<br>(35.73)   |
| Others                      | 904966<br>(87.14)   | 133593<br>(12.86) | 1038559<br>(33.02)  | 996366<br>(87.23)  | 145926<br>(12.77) | 1142292<br>(32.43)  | 739107<br>(88.51)  | 95952<br>(11.49)  | 835059<br>(31.23)   |
| Total                       | 2748445<br>(87.40)  | 396394<br>(12.60) | 3144839<br>(100.00) | 3053691<br>(86.69) | 468821<br>(13.31) | 3522512<br>(100.00) | 2356127<br>(88.12) | 317764<br>(11.88) | 2673891<br>(100.00) |

Source: Fourth all India handloom census 2019-20

Note: Figures in parentheses indicate percentages to total

Financial investment is the most important requirement for carrying out any business or running a unit of work smoothly. So, the person secures finance from various sources. The same is the case with the weavers. In this regard, the respondents are asked about the source of finance they have, which is the most important need to perform handloom weaving activities. The data pertaining to the particulars of the respondents' source of finance is given in Table-4. There are 13,587 handloom households belonging to the categories of cooperative societies, 9,193 households belonging to commercial banks, 1,667 households acquiring from friends or relatives, 6,916 households from the government 3,276 households getting from master weavers, 1,390 households derived from money lenders, 822 households obtained from others, and 2,587 households procuring from self-help groups (SHGs), who have to secure finance from available sources.

Because they work in a unit or under master weavers or middlemen, labour weavers and weavers under middlemen do not have to worry about finances. But the master weavers, independent weavers, and cooperative weavers should have a proper plan and financial arrangements to run the unit. The details about the source of finance secured by different categories of weavers can be known from the data. The table explains that the highest percentage of all categories of weaver households, constituting 34.45 percent of the total households (8,478 households in rural areas and 5,109 households in urban areas), belong to cooperative societies. Commercial banks have been the source of finance for 23.31 percent (6,584 households in rural areas and 2,609 households in urban areas) of total households, while 17.54 percent (5,560 households in rural areas and 1,356 households in urban areas) have secured finance from the government. The weavers' households obtained finance from the master weaver's account for 8.31 percent (1,718 households in rural areas and 1,558 households in urban areas), and self-help groups (SHGs) have also been the financial source for 6.56 percent (2,088 households in rural areas and 499 households in urban areas) of handloom households, while others have provided finance to very few weavers' households.

The overall result explains that the majority of the weavers' households prefer finance from places where financial sources are available, while the households prefer the best and safest source of finance for the unit.

Table-4  
Financial source-wise distribution of handloom households

| source of loan          | Rural | percentage | Urban | percentage | Total | percentage |
|-------------------------|-------|------------|-------|------------|-------|------------|
| Cooperative societies   | 8478  | 62.40      | 5109  | 37.60      | 13587 | 34.45      |
| Commercial banks        | 6584  | 71.62      | 2609  | 28.38      | 9193  | 23.31      |
| Friends /relatives      | 1442  | 86.50      | 225   | 13.50      | 1667  | 4.23       |
| Government              | 5560  | 80.39      | 1356  | 19.61      | 6916  | 17.54      |
| Master weavers          | 1718  | 52.44      | 1558  | 47.56      | 3276  | 8.31       |
| Money lenders           | 1100  | 79.14      | 290   | 20.86      | 1390  | 3.52       |
| Others                  | 546   | 66.42      | 276   | 33.58      | 822   | 2.08       |
| Self help groups (SHGs) | 2088  | 80.71      | 499   | 19.29      | 2587  | 6.56       |
| Total                   | 27516 | 69.77      | 11922 | 30.23      | 39438 | 100.00     |

Source: Fourth all India handloom census 2019-20

Table-5 shows that 12,42,699 weavers (30.36 percent of the total) use cotton 1 to 20, of which 90.42 percent is in rural areas and 9.58 percent is in urban areas, 6,00,122 weavers (14.66 percent of the total) use cotton 21 to 40, of which 89.75 percent is in rural areas and 10.25 percent is in urban areas; and 5,24,956 weavers (12.82 percent of the total) use cotton 41 to 80 and cotton above 80.

Wool yarn is used by 3,23,569 weavers (7.90 percent), with 89.37 percent in rural areas and 10.63 percent in urban areas; muga silk is used by 1,78,046 weavers (4.35 percent), with 83.31 percent in rural areas and 16.69 percent in urban areas; and mulberry silk yarn is used by 1,21,478 weavers (2.97 percent), with 63.45 percent in rural areas and 36.55 percent in urban areas. Acrylic wool is also used by 87,838 weavers (2.15 percent), with 90.48 percent living in rural areas and 9.52 percent living in urban areas, while linen yarn is used by 58,241 weavers (1.42 percent), with 94.98 percent living in rural areas and 5.02 percent living in urban areas.

Viscose blends, 19,237 households (0.47 percent), out of which 77.94 percent are in rural areas and 22.06 percent are in urban areas; Tussar silk, 37,031 households (0.90 percent), out of which 81.92 percent are in rural areas and 18.08 percent are in urban areas; and jute, 18,580 households (0.45 percent), out of which 69.91 percent are in rural areas and 30.09 percent are in urban areas; these three items of yarn consumption are marked below one percent.

The identified reason for the decrease in cotton yarn consumption was that, as power looms began producing cotton fabric materials such as gamcha, dhoti, cotton saree, and so on at a lower cost, demand for handloom-woven articles declined and, as a result, consumption of cotton yarn decreased. It was also observed that consumption of wool yarn, polyester yarn, and silk yarn has decreased compared with the third handloom census.

Table-5  
Distribution of handloom households by usage of yarn

| Usage of yarn | Rural   | Percentage | Urban  | Percentage | Total   | Percentage |
|---------------|---------|------------|--------|------------|---------|------------|
| Cotton 1to20  | 1123588 | 90.42      | 119111 | 9.58       | 1242699 | 30.36      |

|                 |         |       |        |       |         |        |
|-----------------|---------|-------|--------|-------|---------|--------|
| Cotton 21to40   | 538608  | 89.75 | 61514  | 10.25 | 600122  | 14.66  |
| Cotton41to80    | 479385  | 91.32 | 45571  | 8.68  | 524956  | 12.82  |
| Cotton above 80 | 346082  | 90.89 | 34700  | 9.11  | 380782  | 9.30   |
| Viscose blends  | 14993   | 77.94 | 4244   | 22.06 | 19237   | 0.47   |
| Muga silk       | 148323  | 83.31 | 29723  | 16.69 | 178046  | 4.35   |
| Eric silk       | 75805   | 84.03 | 14404  | 15.97 | 90209   | 2.20   |
| Mulberry silk   | 77075   | 63.45 | 44403  | 36.55 | 121478  | 2.97   |
| Tussar silk     | 30336   | 81.92 | 6695   | 18.08 | 37031   | 0.90   |
| Linen           | 55318   | 94.98 | 2923   | 5.02  | 58241   | 1.42   |
| Wool            | 289184  | 89.37 | 34385  | 10.63 | 323569  | 7.90   |
| Acrylic wool    | 79474   | 90.48 | 8364   | 9.52  | 87838   | 2.15   |
| Polyster blends | 99819   | 93.09 | 7412   | 6.91  | 107231  | 2.62   |
| Jute            | 12990   | 69.91 | 5590   | 30.09 | 18580   | 0.45   |
| Zari            | 59732   | 59.35 | 40917  | 40.65 | 100649  | 2.46   |
| others          | 172913  | 85.30 | 29801  | 14.70 | 202714  | 4.95   |
| total           | 3603625 | 88.04 | 489757 | 11.96 | 4093382 | 100.00 |

Source: Fourth all India handloom census 2019-20

The details of handloom products' major source of sales are shown in the table-6. It can be seen from the table that 21,66,155 households (64.05 percent) have gotten sales through local markets (92.25 percent in rural areas and 7.75 percent in rural areas), 5,94,841 households (17.59 percent) have gotten sales through master weavers (74.96 percent in rural areas and 25.04 percent in rural areas), and 2,96,347 households (8.76 percent) have gotten sales through cooperative societies (75.89 percent in rural areas and 24.11 percent in rural areas). 34,740 households (1.03 percent) organised sales fairs or exhibitions (91.45 percent in rural areas and 8.55 percent in rural areas), and 12,692 households (0.38 percent) generated income through exports, which account for only a small portion of sales (92.36 percent in rural areas and 7.64 percent in rural areas). 5,783 households (0.17 percent) depended on sales through e-commerce (89.35 percent in rural areas and 10.65 percent in rural areas). 2,71,192 households (8.02 percent) have been dependent on other modes of sales (89.35 percent in rural areas and 10.65 percent in rural areas).

Handloom exhibitions, national handloom expos, and handloom camps have been conducted to understand the handloom households for the sale of handloom products and generate income.

Table-6  
Distribution of handloom households reporting major source of sales of their major products

| Sales                        | Rural   | Percentage | urban  | Percentage | Total   | Percentage |
|------------------------------|---------|------------|--------|------------|---------|------------|
| Local market                 | 1998379 | 92.25      | 167776 | 7.75       | 2166155 | 64.05      |
| Master weavers               | 445883  | 74.96      | 148958 | 25.04      | 594841  | 17.59      |
| Cooperative society          | 224893  | 75.89      | 71454  | 24.11      | 296347  | 8.76       |
| Organized fairs / exhibition | 31768   | 91.45      | 2972   | 8.55       | 34740   | 1.03       |
| Exports                      | 11722   | 92.36      | 970    | 7.64       | 12692   | 0.38       |
| e-commerce                   | 5167    | 89.35      | 616    | 10.65      | 5783    | 0.17       |
| others                       | 242320  | 89.35      | 28872  | 10.65      | 271192  | 8.02       |
| Total                        | 2960132 | 87.53      | 421618 | 12.47      | 3381750 | 100.00     |

Source: Fourth all India handloom census 2019-20

Every person selects his profession or occupation with the hope of earning a certain amount of income from it so that he can eke out a living. However, the range of income varies depending on the person's skills and abilities. Hence, the ranges of income are classified according to the category of handloom workers' households presented in Table-7.

According to the fourth handloom survey, the majority of handloom workers' households weavers, 25,83,311 (82.14 percent), have an annual income of less than Rs. 5,000, with 88.95 percent living in rural areas and 11.05 percent living in urban areas; the second highest income earners, 15.84 percent of handloom household weavers (4,98,159), have an annual income of Rs. 5,000-10,000, with 79.37 percent living in rural areas and 20.63 percent living in urban areas 0.14 percent (4,536) of handloom household weavers' monthly income ranges between Rs. 20,001 and Rs. 25,000 with 67.2 percent in rural areas and 32.8 percent in urban areas; 0.16 percent (4,965) of

handloom household weavers' monthly income ranges between Rs. 25,001 and Rs. 50,000 with 86 percent in rural areas and 14 percent in urban areas; and 0.01 percent (263) of household weavers' monthly income ranges between Rs. 5,001 and 10,000.

According to the overall handloom census, the highest percentage of all income ranges of handloom household weavers have annual incomes of less than Rs. 5,000 while the lowest percentage of household weavers have annual incomes of less than Rs. 5,000. Master household weavers get the highest average monthly income and the highest annual incomes, whereas labour household weavers get the lowest average monthly income and the lowest annual incomes.

It is clear that the variation in income levels among those with lower income levels was caused by factors such as a lack of raw materials, a lack of money, poor quality raw materials, upgrading technology and training, and so on.

Table-7  
Number of handloom workers household by income

| By Income       | income from all sources |                   |                     | income from handloom related activities |                               |                                |
|-----------------|-------------------------|-------------------|---------------------|---|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|
|                 | Rural                   | Urban             | Total               | Rural                                   | Urban                         | Total                          |
| Less than 5000  | 1883747<br>(89.3)       | 225778<br>(10.7)  | 2109525<br>(67.08)  | 2297871<br>(88.95)<br>(121.98)          | 285440<br>(11.05)<br>(126.43) | 2583311<br>(82.14)<br>(122.46) |
| 5001-10000      | 685615<br>(83.20)       | 138406<br>(16.80) | 824021<br>(26.20)   | 395372<br>(79.37)<br>(57.67)            | 102787<br>(20.63)<br>(74.26)  | 498159<br>(15.84)<br>(60.45)   |
| 10001-15000     | 124456<br>(88.58)       | 16053<br>(11.42)  | 140509<br>(4.47)    | 42557<br>(89.5)<br>(34.19)              | 4995<br>(10.5)<br>(31.12)     | 47552<br>(1.51)<br>(33.84)     |
| 15001-20000     | 25774<br>(85.94)        | 4215<br>(14.06)   | 29989<br>(0.95)     | 5006<br>(85.62)<br>(19.42)              | 841<br>(14.38)<br>(19.95)     | 5847<br>(0.19)<br>(19.50)      |
| 20001-25000     | 14196<br>(81.27)        | 3271<br>(18.73)   | 17467<br>(0.56)     | 3048 (67.2)<br>(21.47)                  | 1488<br>(32.8)<br>(45.49)     | 4536<br>(0.14)<br>(25.97)      |
| 25001-50000     | 11492<br>(58.22)        | 8246<br>(41.78)   | 19738<br>(0.63)     | 4270<br>(86.00)<br>(37.16)              | 695<br>(14.00) (<br>(8.43)    | 4965<br>(0.16)<br>(25.15)      |
| 50,000-1,00,000 | 2547<br>(88.96)         | 316<br>(11.04)    | 2863<br>(0.09)      | 179 (68.06)<br>(7.03)                   | 84 (31.94)<br>(26.58)         | 263 (0.01)<br>(9.19)           |
| Above 1,00,000  | 618<br>(85.01)          | 109<br>(14.99)    | 727 (0.02)          | 142 (68.93)<br>(22.98)                  | 64 (31.07)<br>(58.72)         | 206 (0.01)<br>(28.34)          |
| Total           | 2748445<br>(87.40)      | 396394<br>(12.60) | 3144839<br>(100.00) | 2748445<br>(87.40)<br>(100.00)          | 396394<br>(12.60)<br>(100.00) | 3144839<br>(100.00)            |

Source: Fourth all India handloom census 2019-20

Note: Figures in parentheses indicate percentages to total & handloom income percentage to total.

### Conclusion

Handloom sector is part of India's cultural heritage and depicts the abundance and diversity of India as well as the dexterity of the weavers; however, it is part of India's cultural heritage, and the handloom sector and handloom weavers are facing many problems. Weavers also faced problems such as ageing people, a lack of skilled weavers, a lack of active members, a lack of training, and poor knowledge about modernised technology. So many major difficulties faced by the handloom sector. The socio-economic condition of handloom weavers is very poor in the analysis, especially on the basis of social group, financial sources, usage of yarn, source of sales, basis of income, and insufficient number of looms. The results reflect that for the handloom industry to be sustainable, the handloom weavers' market has to be expanded and organized. The handloom sector plays an important role in the state economy.

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