

# THE HANDLOOM INDUSTRY OF MANIPUR AND ITS CHALLENGES – AN OVERVIEW

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## Abstract

*The Handloom Industry is a vital part of Manipur's economy and culture, contributing significantly to the State's overall growth and development. Weaving is regarded as an art form and is deeply rooted in the traditional and cultural practices of the people of Manipur, especially the womenfolk. The weavers have mostly inherited their craft from their ancestors and have been preserving it for generations. The Handloom sector provides livelihood to the people of the State, especially in rural areas. The State has also produced a variety of products that are popular across the country and abroad. Manipur is renowned for its exquisite handloom products that are woven with intricate designs and vibrant colours. However, the Industry has been affected by various challenges, such as inadequate infrastructure, lack of marketing support, competition from powerloom sector, lack of credit facilities, etc. that have threatened its survival.*

*This study aims to give an overview of the present Handloom Industry of Manipur with special reference to its challenges.*

**Keywords:** Handloom Industry, Manipur, Challenges and Weavers.

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## INTRODUCTION:

Manipur is a small State located in the North Eastern Region of India. The State is known for its thriving traditional handloom industry and rich cultural heritage. The State has a long history of producing hand-woven textiles and the art of weaving is an integral part of the social and economic fabrics of Manipur. This sector provides employment and a livelihood opportunity to the people, especially women for many years. According to the 4<sup>th</sup> All India Handloom Census 2019-20, weavers make up 2,12,481 of the State's workforce, while allied occupations employ 12,203 people.

However, the handloom sector in the State is facing various challenges. Attempts are being made to resurrect and develop the sector despite the challenges. The State Government has launched a number of plans and initiatives to give the weavers financial aid and training. To enhance the infrastructure and facilities accessible to weavers, the government has also built a number of weaving Centres and handloom clusters. Additionally, non-governmental organisations and private enterprises are working towards creating a market for handloom textiles and promoting them through various channels.

## OBJECTIVES:

The study is based on the following objectives:

1. To study the present status of the handloom industry in Manipur.
2. To identify the challenges faced by the Handloom Industry in Manipur.

## THE HANDLOOM INDUSTRY OF MANIPUR – AN OVERVIEW

The Handloom Industry in Manipur is primarily a cottage industry that is mainly run by women weavers. The industry is mainly concentrated in the rural areas and the weavers use traditional handlooms, which are made of wood and bamboo. The Loin Loom, Throw Shuttle Loom, and Fly Shuttle Loom are the three primary types of looms used by weavers of the State. The weaving process is a time consuming and labour-intensive task that requires a high level of skill and patience. The main yarns used by weavers are cotton, silk, wool, etc. The fabrics are dyed naturally using natural dyes extracted from local plants and trees, which give them a unique and vibrant colours.

The weavers of Manipur have a rich history of creating exquisite and intricate handloom textiles that have gained recognition. Some of the famous handloom products of Manipur are:

- Phanek (Sarong),
- Rani Phee (an expensive shawl made from silk)
- Innaphee (a type of shawl)
- Wangkhei Phee (a type of shawl made from cotton)
- Moirangphee
- silk saree
- Saphee Lanphee (a traditional shawl that were presented to victorious warriors after a war by the King)
- Khudei (dhoti), etc.

Among the handloom products, three have been given Geographical Indication (GI) tag by the government for its protection. The three products are namely Moirangphee, Wangkhei phee and Saphee Lanphee.

According to the Fourth Handloom Census 2019-20, the number of female weavers constitute the highest with 2,04,503 against their male counterparts which accounts for only 7,936. The transgender weavers have a negligible number of 37 weavers. Weaving in the State is a female dominated sector.

**Table 1: Distribution of weavers by type of employment**

Types	Weavers	Percentage
Independent Weavers	2,06,322	97.1 %
Co-operative Society	487	0.23 %
Master Weaver	5,446	2.56 %
Others	226	0.11 %
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,12,481</b>	<b>100 %</b>

(Source: Fourth Handloom Census, 2019-20)

The above data shows that 97.1 % of the weavers work individually. The weavers who work under master weavers and co-operative society constitute 2.56% and 0.23% respectively. The weavers who work under another organisation (Khadi and Village Board and State Handloom Development Corporation) constitute 0.11 % only. The weavers of the State are working using their own finance and earning income independently.

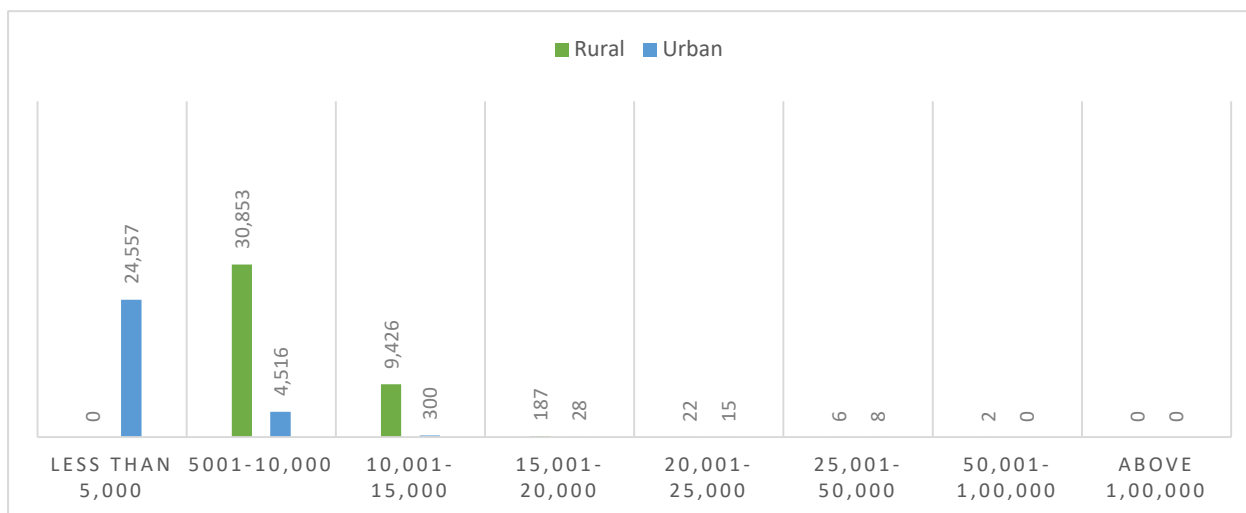
**Table 2: Handloom Household and their source of Loan**

Source of Loan	Weaver
Friends/Relatives	1,097
Master Weaver	26
Money Lenders	285
Co-operative Society	49
Government	28
Commercial Banks	30
Others	60
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,575</b>

(Source: Fourth Handloom Census, 2019-20)

As seen in the above table, only 1,575 handloom household out of the total 2,21,855 in the State took loan from various sources for their weaving activities. This shows that the remaining households use their own fund for their weaving activities. Even though there are various Government credit facilities and schemes, most of the weavers still depend on their own source of finance.

**Fig 1: Distribution of Handloom households and their Income from Handloom Related activities**



(Source: Fourth Handloom Census, 2019-20)

The income of handloom weavers are very less with 1,76,492 household reporting less than Rs 5,000 earning per month. Only 2 household reported earning between Rs 50,001-Rs 100,000 per month. The number of Households earning above Rs. 1,00,000 per month is nil. The earning capacity of the weavers are very low and needs to be increase with proper financial and marketing assistance.

Regarding the sale of their products, majority of the handloom households reported selling their products in the local market (i.e. 2,06,828 of the total 2,21,855 in the State). This means that the markets are locally concentrated. Those who exported their product constitute only 70 of the total household. This means that even though the handloom products are famous and in demand outside the State and abroad, the products are not able to reach those markets due to lack of market access.

## CHALLENGES FACED BY THE HANDLOOM INDUSTRY OF MANIPUR

Despite its rich heritage and economic significance, the handloom industry of Manipur faces several challenges that have hindered its growth and development. Some of these challenges are as follows:

### 1. Lack of Modernization:

The handloom sector in the State is largely dependent on traditional techniques and equipment. The weavers have been using the old traditional form of looms that are not only time consuming but they also limit the production capacity. The lack of modernization has made it difficult for the weavers to compete with machine-made products, which are faster and cheaper. The lack of easy access to credit and technical support from the Government has also hindered the modernization of the handloom Industry.

### 2. Lack of proper market channels:

The handloom sector is an unorganized one and as such there is no proper channels through which the weavers sell their products. The weavers mostly sell in the local market closest to them or they rely on middlemen who exploit them by offering low prices for their products. The lack of direct access to markets has made it difficult for the weavers to get a fair price for their products.

### 3. Lack of publicity and promotion:

Another significant challenge facing the handloom industry in Manipur is the lack of publicity and promotion. The handloom products are unique and have a significant cultural and historical value. However, due to the absence of proper publicity and promotion, the products have not been able to reach a wider audience. The lack of exposure to the market has also resulted in low demand and inadequate pricing for the handloom products.

#### **4. Lack of access to credit and financial support:**

The weavers often do not have awareness of the Government credit schemes and rely on loans from money lenders at high interest. They often face difficulties in getting loan or financial assistance from banks and financial institutions. This lack of access to credit hinders the weavers' ability to expand their business and invest in modern tools and equipment.

#### **5. Competition from machine-made products.**

The industry faces stiff competition from the machine-made products that are cheaper and faster to produce. The machine-made products are often mass-produced and such products lack the unique designs and quality of handloom products. However, many consumers are price sensitive and are willing to compromise on quality for lower prices.

#### **6. Lack of Government support:**

The handloom sector of the State has not received adequate support from the government. The government schemes and programs for the development of the handloom sector have not been effectively implemented. The weavers have not received the benefits of these schemes and programs. This has limited their capacity to invest in their business.

By addressing these challenges, the handloom sector can become more sustainable, profitable and more supportive to the livelihoods of the weavers who depend on it.

### **SUGGESTIVE MEASURES TO IMPROVE THE HANDLOOM SECTOR IN MANIPUR**

To overcome the challenges in the Handloom sector of Manipur, the government needs to take proactive steps to support the sector. The government needs to create a conducive environment for the handloom sector by providing financial assistance, access to modern technology, marketing support to the weavers and promoting the sector at the national and international levels. The following suggestions have been made for the overall growth and development of Handloom sector in the State:

#### **1. Modernization:**

The handloom sector needs to modernize its production methods to increase efficiency, reduce cost and improve quality. This can be achieved by introducing modern technologies such as computer aided design and manufacturing.

#### **2. Provide Financial Assistance:**

The Government and other organisations should provide easy access to loans, subsidies and other financial assistance to help weavers invest in their business and improve their production capacity.

#### **3. Improve market accessibility:**

There should be efforts to connect weavers with national and international markets. This can be achieved by increasing the visibility of handloom products through exhibitions, trade fairs and online platforms.

#### **4. Encourage innovation and training:**

Weavers should be encouraged to innovate and experiment with new designs and techniques to appeal to modern consumers. Training programs can be organised to improve their skills and help them adopt modern technologies.

#### **5. Reduce the role of middlemen:**

The Government and other organisations should work to reduce the role of middlemen who often exploit weavers by paying them low prices for their products. Direct marketing channels should be established to enable weavers to sell their products directly to consumers.

#### **6. Skilled Labour:**

Handloom requires skilled labour to maintain quality and improve efficiency. Government can facilitate skill development programs, which will attract more people to the industry and make it more sustainable.

#### **7. Quality Standards:**

The handloom products need to maintain quality standards to meet customer expectations and gain trust. Government can ensure quality control by setting up testing and certification labs and encouraging weavers to adopt standard operation procedure.

#### **8. Increase awareness:**

Efforts should be made to raise awareness among consumers about the value of handloom products and the importance of supporting the industry. This can be done through campaigns and initiatives that showcase the unique craftsmanship and cultural heritage of Manipur's Handloom industry.

By implementing these suggestions, the handloom industry can overcome its challenges and thrive in the future.

### **CONCLUSION:**

The Handloom industry is a vital part of Manipur's economy and culture. The growth and development of this sector are crucial for the State's overall development. However, despite its various challenges, the handloom industry also has several prospects including increased demand for handmade and eco-friendly products, emergence of e-commerce platforms, its unique designs, employment generation, women empowerment, etc. Further, the State Government needs to establish market linkages and marketing opportunities for wider markets and greater benefits for the weavers of the State. Efforts should also be made to increase their efficiency and productivity through the application of modern amenities and technologies. By taking proactive steps, the Government can create a sustainable handloom sector. This is highly essential for the State's economic growth and development.

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