

# The Glorious Heritage At A Stake: A Case Study of Malda Weavers, West Bengal, India

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## ABSTRACT

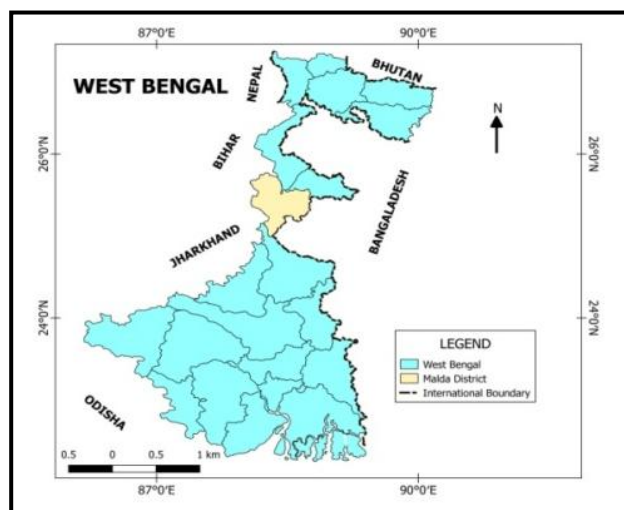
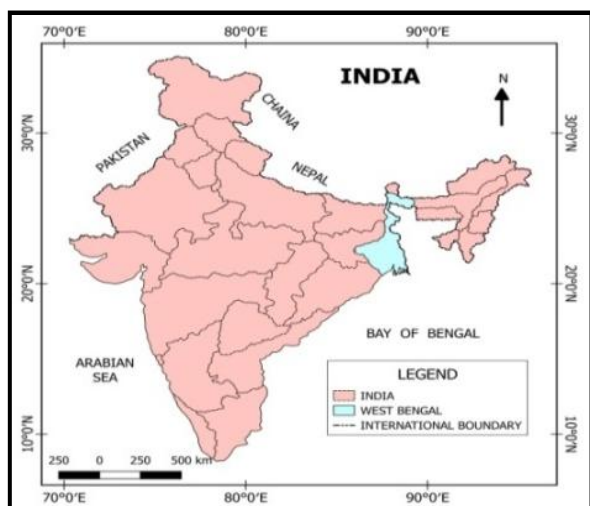
Weaving is the backbone of our rich cultural heritage. Handlooms are a key component of the economy of West Bengal. Once silk goods exported to different countries like East Africa, Turkey, Syria. Kaliachak- 1 and Kaliachak- 2, Sujapur, Jalalpur ,Mangalbari, Tanti para of old Malda are the remarkable weaving center of Malda district. The glory of this cottage industry is fading due to the problems of high rates of raw materials, low wages, outer competition and the famous demonetization policy with the added GST value. Therefore, Government policies and strategies are needed to bring back the glory of the heydays.

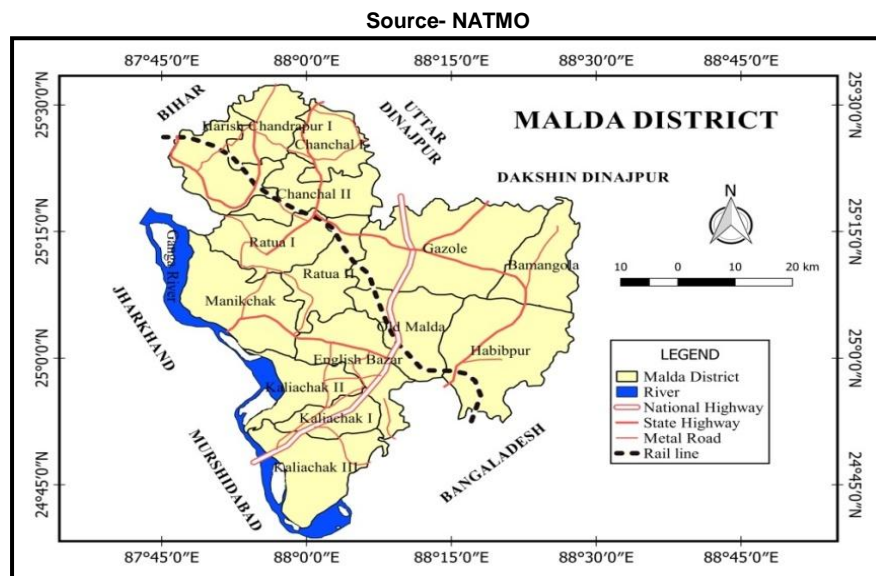
## 1. Introduction

Handloom is the most established cottage industry in India, which is chaotic in nature. In India, about 27.83 lakh handloom family units are occupied with weaving and partnered exercises, out of which 87 percent are situated in rustic regions and remaining 13 percent in urban zones (Handloom Census of India, 2009-10) . Nothing makes an Indian lady look as wonderful as a saree does. Along these lines, saree is considered adorable clothing for ladies to maintain their simplicity, elegance and culture. India is wonderful for its social legacy and weaving symbolizes its bask-bone. It is scattered, spread crosswise over a huge number of towns and towns in the nation. Around 10 million individuals legitimately rely upon this industry to take out their employment, while a lot progressively a great many individuals rely on auxiliary occupations associated with the handloom industry (Emmanil, 2012 and Bortamuly, et al., 2012). The references from the explorers and the travelers like Huan Tsang, Bernier, Garriri, Travernier, Marcopolo include the glory of Indian handloom. India has the largest cottage industry contributing 25% of total income. West Bengal is the major traditional state of sericulture in India. Malda, the entering

district for northern part of West Bengal, is the most popular in export of jute and silk products. Malda silk is famous from the time of the Muslim rulers. There has always been a huge demand for its weavers. Mulberry cultivation, Silkworm rearing, silk reeling and silk weaving with handloom weaving are practiced here. Varieties of handloom, Tant, Tussar, Jamdani Sarees are made to reckon. The district has a distance of about 347km from the capital of the state, Kolkata. Malda is exceptional for its Silk products and for the handloom materials. The magnificence of this sector is being marred due to the poor financial condition and the related issues like low wages, exacerbated by GST regime, and low skills of excellence and need to bring back the scattered weavers under one roof. This roof can be a co-operative society or union driven by the State or the Country (Rao, AV.,1973), and the socio-economic condition can be improved with solution to the major problems faced by the weavers (Das, S., 2015). The accompanying paper gives the information to comprehend the weavers' circumstances. Subsequently, it helps to watch the significant stakes of the weavers. The reports of the papers help me to justify the findings.

## 2. Location of the Study Area





### 3. Study Area

The study area is Malda District, West Bengal. Malda is the entrance of North Bengal. Geographically the study area is located between 25°32'08" N and 24°40'20" N Latitude and in between 88°28'10" E and 87°45'50" E longitude. The Community Development Blocks which come under this geographical area are Harish Chandrapur-1, Chanchal-I, Chanchal-II, Ratua-1, Ratua-II, Manickchak, English Bazar, Kaliachak-I, Kaliachak-II, Kaliachak-III, Habibpur, Old Malda, Bamongola, and Gazole (Fig-1). The study area covers 3733 sq.km. according to 2011 Census.

### 4. Methodology and Data source

The pre-field study has been done with the help of literatures, articles, reports of the particular study area. It helps to make a list from the collected data and maps with other documents are also prepared. The field study has been done with the help of questionnaire in direct interviews. Only primary data have been used in this study. After collecting data percentage were calculated and necessary statistical and cartographic techniques were used in this work. Thus, the study carries both quantitative and qualitative approaches.

### 5. Objectives

Thus, the study deals with the following objectives:

- To analyze the weaving pattern of the cluster,
- To study the socio-economic condition as well as the income level of the weavers,
- To observe the Co-operative based development pattern,
- To determine the current problems of the silk artisans as well as the handloom weavers on the back drop of its rich legacy.
- To measure derive the prospects of the cottage industry as a dependable livelihood.

## 6. Result and Discussion

### 6.1 Condition and type of weavers

There are three types of weavers:

- i) **Entrepreneur-** They do work by own capabilities. They buy raw materials and weave those designs that they need and then market their products through proper channel.
- ii) **Labourer-** They work under the master weavers. They get raw materials and make designs. Then they give the finished products to the master weavers in return of their wages.
- iii) **Co-operative fold weavers-** They attach to the co-operative societies. They do everything under a fixed wages rate.

### 6.2 Pattern of the Cluster

The whole process of making a Saree goes to the following stages:

- **Core Cluster Actors-** The weavers and the master weavers are present here. They work and divide earnings amongst themselves.
- **Master Weavers-** They do everything under the instructions of the Mahajans. Mahajans give those designs, raw materials and credits. Sometimes the master weavers go to the local hut to sell finished products. In Malda, the study shows there are nearly 40-50 master weavers. They do work in their thatched roof semi pucca room with hardly 3 to 4 looms.
- **Weavers-** Majority of weavers are from Tantuvay or Muslim communities.
- **Dyers-** Dyeing is done in dyeing units. The yarn traders employ the large and medium scale units for dyeing where as the small-scale unit does the job work for the master weavers.
- **Designers-** Designers design their work with creativity and imagination. For lack of exposure, formal degree of education, their works are limited and traditional.

### 6.3 Socio-economic condition

Handloom industry is the most unorganized and oldest industry in India. Approximately 30 lakh weavers are directly or indirectly engaged to weaving. Rural people with lower

education and knowledge are the remarkable weavers in West Bengal.

respectively. Whereas, in the urban periphery, the ratio is obtained 55.78% and 44.22% respectively.

**Table 1: Sex wise distribution of workers**

Gender	Rural (%)	Urban (%)
Male	48.62	55.78
Female	51.38	44.22
Total	100	100

Source: Based on primary data, 2019

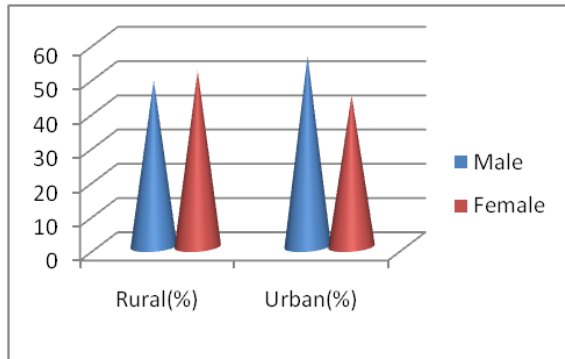


Diagram 1

Table 1: and diagram 1: reveal that female co-operation is surprisingly high. Due to the lowest wages male workers are going outside. The data shows in rural sector, the percentage of male and female workers are 48.62% and 51.38%

**Table 2: Age wise distribution of workers**

Age group	Rural (%)	Urban (%)
Below 18 years	16.23	14.44
18-40 years	31.44	35.23
41-60 years	41.22	42.22
Above 60 years	11.11	8.11

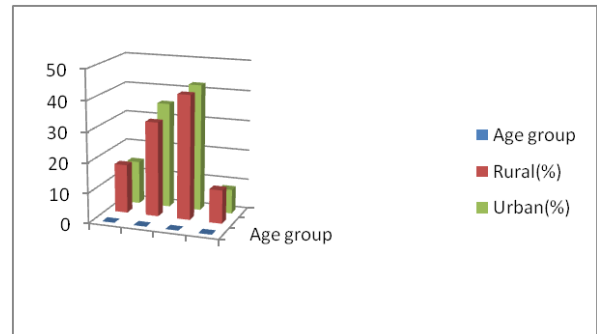


Diagram: 2

Table 2: and diagram 2: state that the age groups of 41-60 years are highly efficient in weaving. The ratio of the middle age group of 18-40 years is not satisfactory, due to the migration for wages and better job opportunity. Child labour has a great value in weaving industry. The data shows nearly 18% belong to the age group of childlabour.

**Table 3. Educational level of the weavers**

Education level	Never attend to school	Primary education	Upper primary education	Madhyamik level	Higher secondary and others
Weavers (%)	12.48	48.28	27.22	9.02	3.0

Source: Based on primary data, 2019

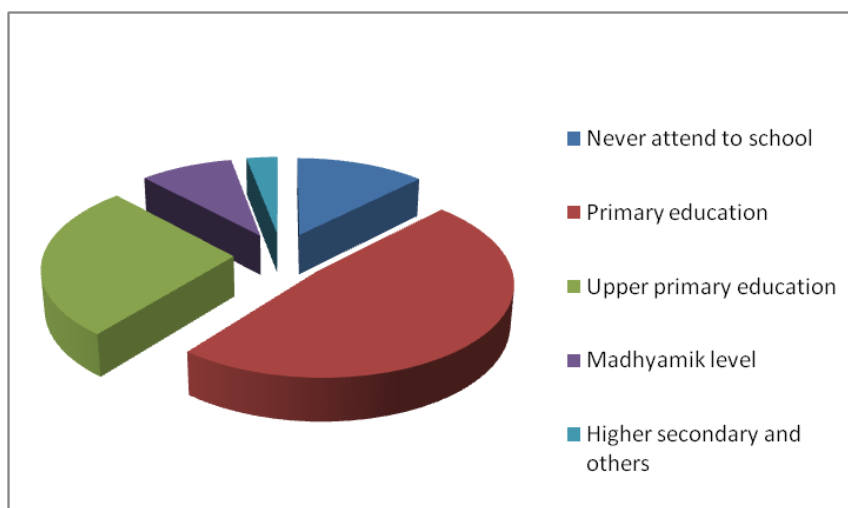


Diagram: 3

Table 3: and diagram 3: represent that the literacy rate amongst the weavers is low. Most of the workers are primarily educated comprising of 48.28%. Workers have the proportion of 27.22% of upper primary degree. Only 3% of weavers have completed their higher secondary and other level of education. The surprising fact is that the 12.48% of weavers never attend

to the school and are not able to put their signature on documents.

**Table 4. Income level of the weavers**

Monthly income (Rs)	Rural (%)	Urban (%)
Below 2500	32.28	17.25
2501-5000	30.64	35.42

5001-7500	18.58	38.78
Above 7500	18.50	16.55

Source: Based on primary data, 2019

Table 4: and diagram 4: shows that the wages may vary from rural to urban. In rural sector 32.28% get the wages below Rs. 2500. The percentage in this group is lesser in urban sector comprising of 17.25%. The proportion varies to 32.64% and 35.42% respectively in the income group of 2501-5000. The income group of 5001-7500 has high ratio of urban weavers at 38.78%. The high wage rate of above Rs. 7500 contains lower share of weavers. Thus, the differentiated level of income also makes differences in the standard of living of the weavers.

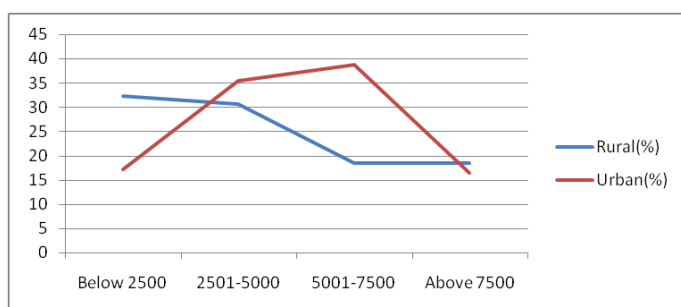


Diagram: 4

#### 6.4 Problems

The major problems for the both weavers and reelers are following:

- **Partition-** The partition of Pakistan and Bangladesh made the weavers' lives vulnerable. Due to relocation and absence of patrons, the silk and handloom industries declined in production. Only very few were able to continue.
- **Increasing rate of raw material-** From the last 50 years the price of raw material has been constantly increasing. Therefore the poor weavers could not continue. Also the profits from the finished product also decrease due to the price hike of raw material.
- **Mulberry silk worm** has a time span of 70 days. So in a year five harvests are done. November- April is the favourable season where May- October is the unfavorable season due to the wet summer days. It is difficult to rear cross breed or hybrid due to the high temperature and moisture of Malda district. So it becomes difficult to supply good quality of cocoon. Thus, there always been having a scarcity of raw materials.
- **Lack of skill-** Most of the weavers have either no or very low knowledge about the pattern. It takes 30 days to give proper training to the weavers. But after getting trained, the skilled weavers go away to different states for high wages.
- **Production rule-** 11 items of clothes are reserved only for handloom industry in our country. As per rules, it is punishable offence to weave these 11 items in power loom and mill. Although these items are weaved very openly and in large numbers in power loom. Therefore the silk and handloom industries can't compete with them.

- **Marketing strategy-** There is no strategy to promote the products. Low marketing strategy with low skill and knowledge of excellence make the business unprofitable. To promote the products weavers mostly depend on private traders or middlemen. It is the reason for not getting decent prices of the finished goods.
- The chief marketing channels of the silk co-operative societies are Tantuja, Tantushree, Bangashree, Tangail Samabayika. They often purchase silk yarns and other raw materials from the nearest district, Murshidabad and from private reelers.
- **Wages-** The present weaving wages is so low that the weavers are not being able to meet their needs. Most of the reelers or weavers are engaged in reeling or weaving activity under the mahajans and middlemen at a fixed wage rate basis. In our study area wage rate is about Rs 200-250 in 2016. But after demonetization and added GST value the rates are declining. It is observed that the young weavers are going out to other states for high wages. Some of the weavers from Maharajpur are also going to China for high income.
- **Unavailability of credits-** The commercial banks are less interested in giving credit to the reelers or weavers. Unorganized artisans can't even dream of getting and paying bank loans. Therefore, to solve the crisis they often take loan from Mahajans or the private firms in highest interest rates.
- **Lack of modernization-** The looms are not well equipped with modern facilities. Weavers have to use the charkhas or the hand oriented spinning machines. Due to the primitive equipments and technology, the rate of production decreases.
- **No brand value-** Though Malda has its fame in supply of silk and handloom products, but it has no brand value. The silk often goes to Beneras, Bhagalpur, Karnataka. Thus the finished products carry the brand name of these states. So, it is necessary to take a step forward to conserve the heritage of Malda by giving it brand value.
- **Change of Profession-** Due to the excess loads, competition from large looms, low level of income, time consuming nature of work, most of the weavers are changing their livelihood. Most of them are shifting to the 100 days of work scheme. Some of them go to the other states for construction work.
- **Demonetization-** In 2016, the demonetization policy adversely affected the weavers. The demand was backed by the cash, especially for those who were in unorganized sector. Temporarily production was adversely affected due to shortage of raw materials,
- **GST-** Bengal is traditionally famous for cotton textile Sarees. The entire crisis emerged due to the introduction of Goods and Services Tax (GST) in August, 2017. Reportedly, a 5% GST on cotton textile has been charged and the weavers who relied on this industry faced a tough situation. Work orders from Mahajans or the wholesalers have dried up. The weavers with low knowledge faced problems to prepare their bills with the GST and felt lost due to the

lack of information and guidance. The weavers who had earned 6000 per month simply got 2000 after added GST.

- **High price of the finished product-** The price of hand woven clothes are much higher than that of the mill clothes.
- **Government inefficiencies-** The government doesn't bother about the weavers' situation. Schemes are not executed properly. All of the money with all modern facilities do not reach the grassroots. It hurts the weavers as well as the industries.

## 7. Adaptation Strategy and Possibilities

The following strategy should be taken to serve the purpose;

- i) An organized effort should be done to protect the poor weavers and reelers to make them self sufficient in earning profits.
- ii) The government can help the weavers by giving those machineries, raw material, and technical guidance in a cheap rate which they require. The government can also buy the finished products directly from the reelers and weavers.
- iii) A Central Organization should be set up to eradicate the middle man. The organization should be free from corruptions and aggressions of powerful private traders.
- iv) Direct bank loan in low rate of interest is needed.
- v) All infrastructural facilities like the place of work must have eco friendly condition with proper shading, linking with roads etc. Health issues should be checked and secured.

There is great news that in the year 2014, the country's first Silk Park is proposed to set up in Malda on 40 acre of land. The vision is to promote PPP mode in order to harness the expertise of private sector for integration of design and construction, operation and maintenance and financing of Integrated Silk Park.

## 8. Conclusion

After the partition of India, numerous weavers from Bangladesh came to Malda and made a great effort to set themselves up afresh. Since ancient times, Malda is renowned for its silk and handloom industry. Presently handloom industry has fallen under grievous circumstances. Individuals, who live here are generally poor. Employment in the silk industry is becoming confined to the middle age segment and women workers since the individuals in the 18-44 years bracket find themselves unable to continue living there because of the absence of employment asset and are subsequently constrained to seek employment in other states.

Despite a great number of issues, individuals of Malda are still trying their level best to resuscitate this industry. The new models of Saree have elicited a keen interest from the market. If our Central Government, especially the ministries involved with Cottage Industries encourages them, this demand will increment at a steady rate. In view of this interest, the present dingy state of this occupation ought to be changed by legitimate procedures with the assistance of Central and State Government. Different plans for aiding for weavers like Annapurna yojana, IAY, Old Age Pension, Health Insurance Scheme, Mahatma Gandhi BunkarBima Yojana (M.G.B.B.Y) and Weavers' Credit Card and so on ought to be applied properly to aid these individuals in fulfilling their dreams.

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