

Socio-economic position of handloom households in India

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ABSTRACT

The handloom industry in India is one of the largest unorganized sectors and provides huge employment directly and indirectly after agriculture. It is distributed all over the country and highly concentrated in rural areas. The handloom sector is extremely concentrated in northeastern, southern, and eastern states. This paper is mainly concentrated on the involvement of different communities, housing status, income levels, and education levels to know the socioeconomic position and the prevailing situation of the handloom industry in India. This paper is examined based on secondary data. Most of the handloom workers' housing status, education level, and earning capacity are very poor.

Keywords: Distribution; Handloom industry; Handloom households; Kuchha house; Weavers.

1. INTRODUCTION

The term handloom is defined as “any loom other than power loom” (The Handlooms (Reservation of Articles for Production) Act, 1985). The concept of handloom production includes the process of operation by hand with a wooden structure which is called the loom. Indian handloom artistry is celebrated across the globe for its workmanship. The Handloom industry is one of the sizable unorganized sectors in India. In this sector, the family members' involvement is very essential in all the activities of production like in pre-loom, post-loom, and weaving. India has had a prosperous tradition, civilization, and culture of handloom weaving since time immemorial with the earliest evidence going back to the Indus Valley Civilization. Various written expositions relating to the Rig-Veda, Ramayana, Mahabharata, and Kautilya have mentioned that India has greatness for spinning and weaving and also has pride in the production of high-quality silk and cotton fabric ((Wilson Kax, 1979; Panda and Pradhan, 2012; Fourth national handloom sector, 2019-20).

It is a family-based industry and provides a great basis of sustenance to millions of artisans after agriculture. India is a country with diversity and is famous for its richness in culture and heritage. The handloom industry contributes to an even share of the Indian economy after agriculture. The handloom sector has the advantages of low energy consumption, less capital intensive, eco-friendly, skill-based, diversity of production, artistry, and pride in its designs. It is mainly sustained and developed by the skill transfer from the previous generation to the next generation. The handloom sector is decentralized and distributed across the country. The Indian handloom sector provides huge employment to rural and semi-urban workers. The Indian handloom industry occupies a lion share i.e. nearly 95% of the world market (Ministry of Textiles, 2017-18).

Indian handloom sector has the vast potential to create self-employment chances and bring distinguishing improvement in the standard of living of the handloom workers. The attractive and unique selling points of the handloom products are eco-friendly and manmade. The handloom industry requires low capital

investment, low energy, and high labor. The handloom industry creates vast employment and entrepreneurship but generates zero pollution. The handloom sector is facing strong competition from the power loom industry and mill industry. The handloom industry has the ability to produce products that are saleable in small volumes, have scope for innovations, shift over to the latest designs as per the market trend, be flexible to match supplier's requirements, and creation of excellent designs.

The Government of India passed the Handloom (Reservation and Articles for Production) Act, 1985 circulated with a view to protecting the artistry, tapestry, and attentiveness of the handloom weavers. In the first instance, 22 textile articles with definite technical descriptions were reserved for complete production by handlooms, but currently, only 11 articles are reserved for production in the handloom sector only. The main concept of the reservation order combined the special facet of handloom production with its labor-concentrated nature, eco-friendly, and seek to secure handloom recognition while becoming a cloth of the masses. The Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration & Protection) Act 1999, provides legal security to the goods which are recognized under this act. The act averts the imitation products and unauthorized use of these by others. Under this GI Act, so far, 57 handloom products have been registered for safeguarding the handloom artistry and aversion of imitated products (Ministry of Textiles, 201718).

Mainly the handloom industry is accumulated in the northeastern states of the country, after that, it is concentrated in the eastern states and southern states of the country. In India, the production of handloom fabric and designs is influenced by the religion, customs, and geography of the country. The handloom weavers produced a tapestry of designs and adverts in production that have been the delight of India for thousands of years. The working and operating in the handloom sector are absolutely dissimilar from that of the power loom industry. The handloom products range from excellent muslins to substantial blankets, from exquisite pastels to dirt-like tones, from attractive simple to astonishing, and from elegant fabrics,

which take a long time to weave, to favored items of heap production for daily use. The handloom fabric produced by each state varies, as each area in India is an expert in a dissimilar diversity of handloom products decided by the geography, tradition of the area, and the expertness of the workers. A few examples of handloom products spread across India are Kani Shawls, Pashmina Shawls, and Raffal Shawls in Jammu and Kashmir; Kanjeevarum Sarees in Tamil Nadu; Kutch Shawls in Gujarat; Eri Silk Sarees and Muga Silk Sarees in Assam; Banaras Brocade Sarees in Uttar Pradesh; Pochampally Tie & Dye Sarees, Narayanpet Sarees, Gadwal Sarees and Gollabhama Sarees in Telangana; Uppada Sarees and Mangalagiri Sarees in Andhra Pradesh; Tengali Sarees and Jamdani Sarees in West Bengal; Berhampuri Paata Sarees and Sambalpuri Ikat Sarees in Odisha; etc.

Some of the earlier studies on the handloom industry revealed that handloom weavers do not want to work in the weaving industry since it lowers their social standing and is disrespected by their friends, family, owners, and other stakeholders (Sasikala, 2019), and most the weavers are chosen this handloom profession due to poverty and unemployment (Shanthini, 2017). The handloom industry has been following ancient methods of production (Mishra, 2019). Most of the handloom workers are lying in the poverty and the reasons for the poverty are illiteracy, unemployment, increase in population, lack of farmland, manipulation by moneylenders, drinking habits, health problems, etc. (Mishra, 2018; Raju and Rao, 2014; Reddy et al., 2008; Balasubramanyam, and Muthumeenakshi, 2018), in addition to that the female workers are unaware of policies and programs (Edukondalarao, 2017). Furthermore, the handloom workers are working under sympathetic conditions such as the absence of air, natural light, poor ergonomic and working conditions, seasonal workload, more working, and less income (Tiwari, 2017; Srimannarayana, 2016) The industry is facing competition from the power looms and the mill sector (Kumar and Kaur, 2018).

Most of the skilled weavers migrated to Gulf countries due to the competition from other textile

sectors and other ways of earning (Hussain and Khan, 2016). The study by Wood (2014) found that the handloom weavers have not formed any self-sustaining active associations. Gradually many of the conventional pit looms were substituted with wooden-framed looms as a result of technological advancements, and the handloom industry as a whole transitioned from a village business to a factory one (Kurup, 2008). Even though, the industry is lagging behind technology (Sadanandam, 2016; Bortamuly and Goswamy, 2014).

The current study aimed to reveal the socioeconomic position of handloom households in India. For this purpose, the study concentrated to examine the involvement of handloom

households by different social groups, types of dwelling units, education levels, employment status, and levels of income. The present study is formed on secondary data.

The specified objectives are observed with the help of secondary data. The data relating to the involvement of social groups, housing status, level of education, employment status, and level of income of the handloom industry in India is collected from different sources viz. Government circulars and reports, research papers, articles, and online sources. The data is analyzed with the help of percentages and graphs. The ten states in which the handloom households are highly concentrated are shown separately, and the total of remaining states are shown as other states.

2. Socio-economic position of handloom households in India

The social cost-benefit ratio of all investments in the handloom sector goes up manifold. The banking penetration (have a bank account) among the handloom workers is highest in Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu, Rajasthan, whereas in Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Bihar, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, and Tripura have

lowest banking penetration (Ministry of Textiles, 2019-20).

In India, households belonging to all communities and religions have been working in the handloom sector. The distribution of handloom households belonging to different castes/communities across India is as follows:

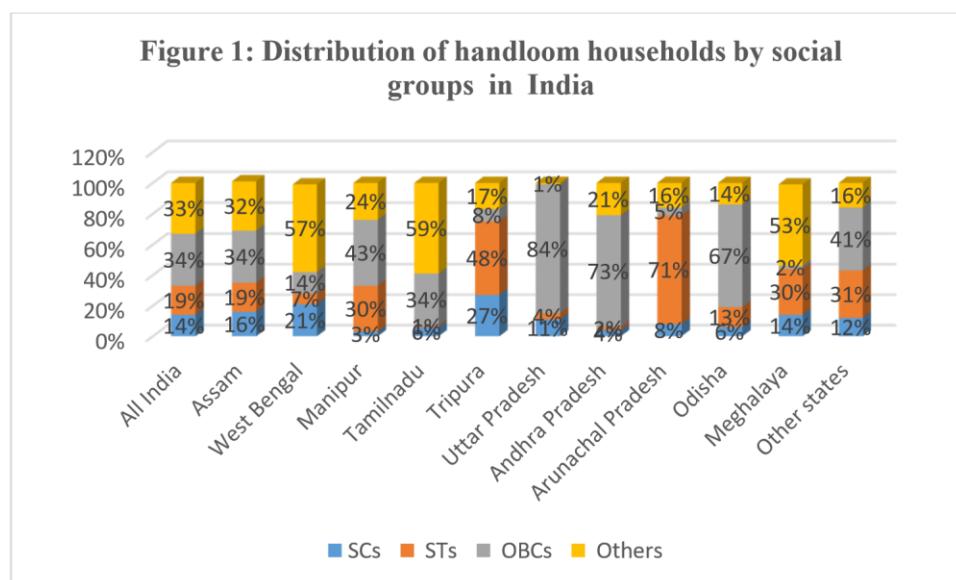
Table 1: Distribution of handloom households by social groups in India

(Figures in Lakhs)

	Social groups of handloom households					% of social groups of handloom households			
	Total	SCs	STs	OBCs	Others	SCs	STs	OBCs	Others
All India	31.45	4.49	6.02	10.56	10.38	14%	19%	34%	33%
Locality									
Rural	27.49	4.1	5.59	8.75	9.05	15%	20%	32%	33%

	Urban	3.96	0.39	0.43	1.81	1.33	10%	11%	46%	34%
Major States										
1	Assam	12.7	2.05	2.37	4.26	4.02	16%	19%	34%	32%
2	West Bengal	5.43	1.15	0.4	0.76	3.12	21%	7%	14%	57%
3	Manipur	2.22	0.07	0.66	0.96	0.53	3%	30%	43%	24%
4	Tamil Nadu	2.09	0.12	0.02	0.71	1.24	6%	1%	34%	59%
5	Tripura	1.37	0.37	0.66	0.11	0.23	27%	48%	8%	17%
6	Uttar Pradesh	1.31	0.15	0.05	1.1	0.01	11%	4%	84%	1%
7	Andhra Pradesh	1.23	0.05	0.02	0.9	0.26	4%	2%	73%	21%
8	Arunachal Pradesh	0.93	0.07	0.66	0.05	0.15	8%	71%	5%	16%
9	Odisha	0.63	0.04	0.08	0.42	0.09	6%	13%	67%	14%
10	Meghalaya	0.43	0.06	0.13	0.01	0.23	14%	30%	2%	53%
11	Other states	3.11	0.36	0.97	1.28	0.5	12%	31%	41%	16%

(Source: Compiled from 4th All India Handloom Census 2019-20, O/o Commissioner for Handlooms, Ministry of Textiles, Government of India (GOI))



Source: Table 1

Table 1 and Figure 1 exhibit that in India, most of the handloom households belong to the other backward castes (OBCs) and they are 11 lakhs i.e. 34%, the other castes (OCs) are 10 lakhs i.e.

33%, the scheduled tribes (STs) are 6 lakhs i.e. 19%,

and the scheduled castes (SCs) are 4 lakhs i.e. 14%. In Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, and Meghalaya, most of the households belong to OCs i.e. 59%, 57%, and 53% respectively. In Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, and Manipur, most of the households belong to OBCs i.e. 84%, 73%, 67%, and 43% respectively. In Arunachal Pradesh and Tripura, most of the households belong to STs i.e. 71% and 48% respectively.

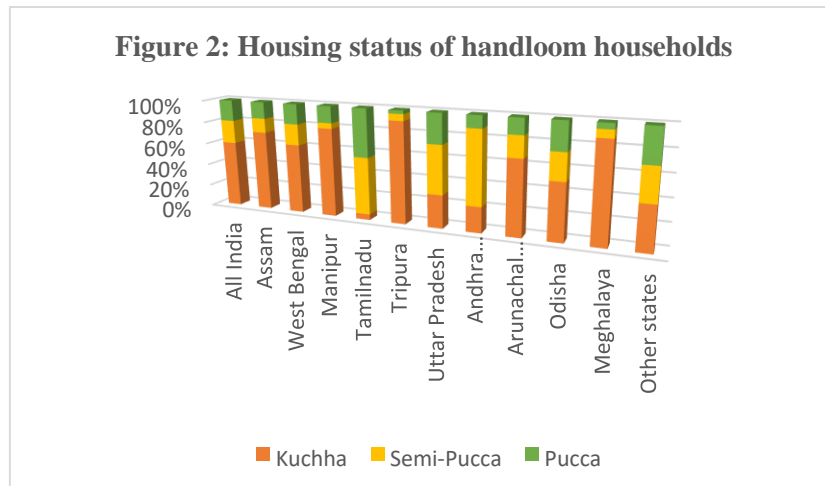
The handloom workers' houses in India consist of Kuchha houses, Semi-pucca houses, and Pucca houses. The Kuchha house means the walls and roof are made of non-pucca materials (unburnt bricks, bamboo, mud, grass, leaves, reeds, thatch, etc.). The semi-pucca house means either the walls or the roof but not both, made of pucca materials. The pucca house means the walls and roof are made of pucca materials (concrete, cement, oven-burnt bricks, stone, iron, etc.). The distribution of handloom workers' housing status is shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Housing status of handloom households in India

(Figures in Lakhs)

		Total handloom households	Housing status of handloom households			% of housing status of handloom households		
			Kuchha	Semi-Pucca	Pucca	Kuchha	Semi-Pucca	Pucca
	All India	31.45	18.92	6.66	5.87	60%	21%	19%
Locality								
	Rural	27.49	17.73	5.11	4.64	65%	19%	17%
	Urban	3.96	1.19	1.55	1.22	30%	39%	31%
Major States								
1	Assam	12.7	9.16	1.67	1.87	72%	13%	15%
2	West Bengal	5.43	3.39	1.05	0.99	62%	19%	18%
3	Manipur	2.22	1.78	0.10	0.34	80%	5%	15%
4	Tamilnadu	2.09	0.11	1.08	0.91	5%	51%	43%
5	Tripura	1.37	1.25	0.08	0.04	91%	6%	3%
6	Uttar Pradesh	1.31	0.39	0.57	0.35	30%	44%	27%
7	Andhra Pradesh	1.23	0.28	0.81	0.14	23%	66%	11%
8	Arunachal Pradesh	0.93	0.62	0.18	0.13	67%	19%	14%
9	Odisha	0.63	0.32	0.15	0.16	51%	24%	25%
10	Meghalaya	0.43	0.38	0.03	0.02	88%	7%	5%
11	Other states	3.11	1.24	0.94	0.92	40%	30%	30%

(Source: Compiled from 4th All India Handloom Census 2019-20, O/o Commissioner for Handlooms, Ministry of Textiles, GOI)



Source: Table 2

Table 2 and figure 2 display that in India, most handloom households are Kuchha houses. The Kuchha handloom houses are 19 lakhs i.e. 60%, Semi-Pucca houses are 7 lakhs i.e. 21% and Pucca houses are 6 lakhs i.e. 19%. In most of the northeastern states, more than 80% of handloom houses are Kuchha houses such as in Tripura, Manipur, and Meghalaya. In Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, and Uttar Pradesh major houses are Semi-Pucca houses i.e. 66%, 51%, and 44% respectively. The highest number of Pucca houses of handlooms houses exist in Tamil Nadu only i.e. 43%. It shows that the handloom workers are economically developed where most of the handloom houses consist of Pucca houses and Semi-Pucca houses such as in Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, and Uttar Pradesh.

The distribution of handloom workers' level of education in India is shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Levels of education of handloom workers in India

(Figures in Lakhs)

	Total Workers	Level of education of handloom workers							% of level of education of handloom workers							
		Never attended school	Below primary	Primary	Middle	High school/Secondary	Higher secondary	Graduation & above	Never attended school	Below primary	Primary	Middle	High school/Secondary	Higher secondary	Graduation & above	
All India	35.23	8.20	5.06	6.38	7.35	4.60	2.36	1.28	23%	14%	18%	21%	13%	7%	4%	
Locality																
Rural	30.54	7.11	4.44	5.33	6.56	4.00	2.05	1.05	23%	15%	17%	21%	13%	7%	3%	
Urban	4.69	1.10	0.62	1.05	0.79	0.60	0.31	0.22	23%	13%	22%	17%	13%	7%	5%	
Major States																
1	Assam	12.84	2.87	1.34	1.76	3.42	1.97	1.09	0.39	22%	10%	14%	27%	15%	8%	3%
2	West Bengal	6.31	1.33	1.74	1.30	1.02	0.47	0.24	0.21	21%	28%	21%	16%	7%	4%	3%
3	Manipur	2.25	0.28	0.16	0.28	0.62	0.46	0.27	0.18	12%	7%	12%	28%	20%	12%	8%
4	Tamil Nadu	2.44	0.43	0.36	0.78	0.37	0.26	0.12	0.12	18%	15%	32%	15%	11%	5%	5%
5	Tripura	1.38	0.23	0.27	0.30	0.36	0.15	0.04	0.03	17%	20%	22%	26%	11%	3%	2%
6	Uttar Pradesh	1.91	0.96	0.20	0.33	0.18	0.11	0.08	0.05	50%	10%	17%	9%	6%	4%	3%
7	Andhra Pradesh	1.77	0.56	0.22	0.42	0.20	0.24	0.07	0.06	32%	12%	24%	11%	14%	4%	3%
8	Arunachal Pradesh	0.95	0.30	0.06	0.13	0.19	0.15	0.08	0.04	32%	6%	14%	20%	16%	8%	4%
9	Odisha	1.18	0.12	0.22	0.33	0.22	0.18	0.08	0.03	10%	19%	28%	19%	15%	7%	3%

10	Meghalaya	0.43	0.17	0.06	0.06	0.07	0.04	0.02	0.01	40%	14%	14%	16%	9%	5%	2%
11	Other states	3.77	0.95	0.43	0.69	0.70	0.57	0.27	0.16	25%	11%	18%	19%	15%	7%	4%

Source: Table 3

Table 3 and Figure 3 show that the majority of the handloom workers in India have never attended school. They are 8 lakhs i.e. 23%, least of the handloom workers have studied graduation & above and they are 1 lakh i.e. 4% only. The handloom workers studied below primary school are 5 lakhs i.e. 14%, up to primary school are 6 lakhs i.e. 18%, up to high school are 5 lakhs i.e. 13% and up to higher secondary school are 2 lakhs i.e. 7%. Only in Manipur and Tamil Nadu, is the percentage of handloom workers studied graduation & above more than the All India level i.e. 8% and 5% respectively. Whereas in Uttar Pradesh and Meghalaya, the percentage of handloom workers who never attended school (illiterates percentage) is very high and more than All India level i.e. 50% and 40% respectively.

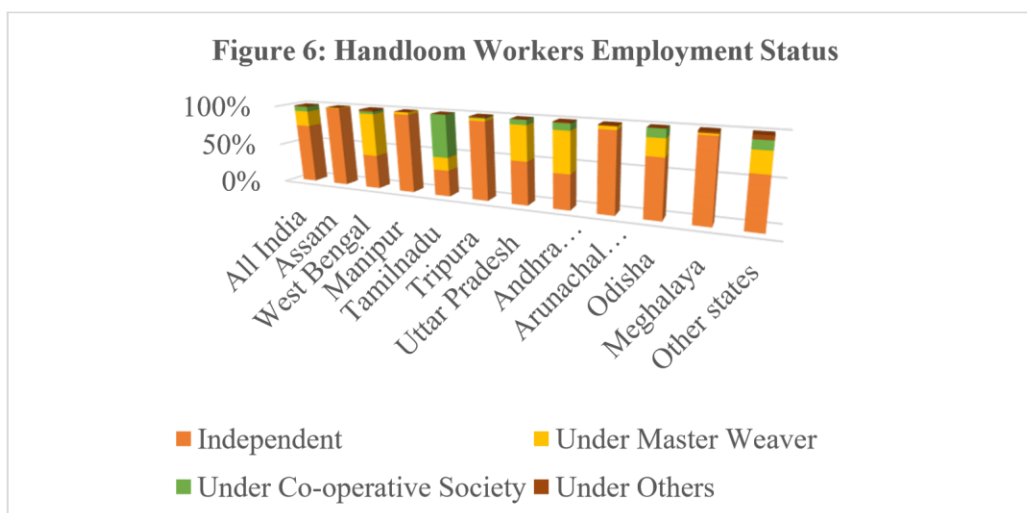
In India, the handloom workers are working differently, some are working independently, some are under the master weavers, some are under cooperative societies, and the rest of the workers are under others. The employment status of handloom workers in India is as follows:

Table 4: Employment status of handloom households in India

(Figures in Lakhs)

	Total households	Independent		Under Master weaver		Under Cooperative Society		Under Others		
		Households	% of Households	Households	% of Households	Households	% of Households	Households	% of Households	
All India	31.45	25.77	73%	6.84	19%	2.23	6%	0.39	1%	
Locality										
Rural	27.49	23.58	77%	5.03	16%	1.6	5%	0.33	1%	
Urban	3.96	2.19	47%	1.81	39%	0.63	13%	0.06	1%	
Major States										
1	Assam	12.7	12.67	99%	0.12	1%	0.01	-	0.04	-
2	West Bengal	5.43	2.65	42%	3.35	53%	0.18	3%	0.13	2%
3	Manipur	2.22	2.17	96%	0.07	3%	0.01	-	-	-
4	Tamilnadu	2.09	0.77	32%	0.4	16%	1.26	52%	0.01	-
5	Tripura	1.37	1.32	96%	0.04	3%	0.01	1%	0.01	1%
6	Uttar Pradesh	1.31	1	52%	0.8	42%	0.11	6%	-	-
7	Andhra Pradesh	1.23	0.75	42%	0.86	49%	0.15	8%	0.01	1%
8	Arunachal Pradesh	0.93	0.9	95%	0.04	4%	-	-	0.01	1%
9	Odisha	0.63	0.82	69%	0.24	20%	0.12	10%	-	-
10	Meghalaya	0.43	0.41	95%	0.01	2%	-	-	0.01	2%
11	Other states	3.11	2.31	61%	0.91	24%	0.38	10%	0.17	5%

(Source: Compiled from 4th All India Handloom Census 2019-20, O/o Commissioner for Handlooms, Ministry of Textiles, GOI)



Source: Table 4.

Table 4 and Figure 4 reveal that 73% of the handloom workers in India are working independently i.e. 26 lakhs, 7 lakhs are working under the master weavers i.e. 19%, only 2 lakhs are working under co-operative societies i.e. 6% and rest of the workers are working under others. In the northeastern states, more than 90% of workers are working independently. In Assam, 99% of workers, in Manipur and Tripura 96% of workers, and in Arunachal Pradesh and Meghalaya 95% of workers are working independently. In West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh majority of the handloom workers are working under the master weavers i.e.

53%, 49%, and 42% respectively and it is more than the All India percentage. In Tamil Nadu only the role of cooperative societies is very high, 52% of the handloom workers are working under co-operatives, which is very higher than the All India level. In the rest of the states, the number of handloom workers working under cooperative societies is very negligible.

To study the economic position of the handloom households, it is very essential to know the household income, size of the household, and total days worked per year. The details of handloom households' income from handloom related activities per month are shown in Table 5.

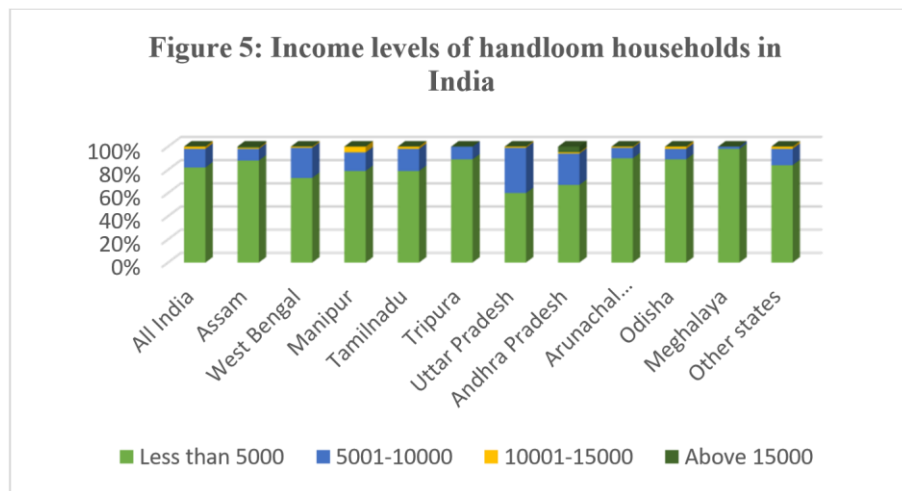
Table 5: Income levels of handloom households from handloom related activities per month in India

(Households figures in Lakhs)

		Less than ₹ 5000		₹ 5001-10000		₹ 10001-15000		Above ₹ 15000	
		House holds	% of House holds	House holds	% of House holds	House holds	% of House holds	House holds	% of House holds
All India		25.83	82%	4.98	16%	0.48	2%	0.16	-
Locality									
Rural		22.98	84%	3.95	14%	0.43	2%	-	-
Urban		2.85	72%	1.03	26%	0.05	1%	0.03	1%
Major States									
1	Assam	11.22	88%	1.24	10%	0.16	1%	0.08	1%
2	West Bengal	3.94	73%	1.41	26%	0.06	1%	0.02	-

3	Manipur	1.76	79%	0.35	16%	0.1	5%	0.01	-
4	Tamil Nadu	1.65	79%	0.4	19%	0.05	2%	-	-
5	Tripura	1.22	89%	0.15	11%	-	-	-	-
6	Uttar Pradesh	0.78	60%	0.51	39%	0.02	1%	-	-
7	Andhra Pradesh	0.82	67%	0.33	27%	0.02	1%	0.06	5%
8	Arunachal Pradesh	0.84	90%	0.08	9%	0.01	1%	-	-
9	Odisha	0.56	89%	0.06	9%	0.01	2%	-	-
10	Meghalaya	0.42	98%	0.01	2%	-	-	-	-
11	Other states	2.62	84%	0.43	14%	0.05	2%	-	-

(Source: Compiled from 4th All India Handloom Census 2019-20, O/o Commissioner for Handlooms, Ministry of Textiles, GOI)



Source: Table 5

Table 5, and Figure 5 show that in India most of the handloom households are earning less than ₹

5,000 per month i.e. 82%, 16% of handloom households are earning between ₹ 5,001 - 10,000,

and 2% are ₹ 10,001 – 15,000 and above ₹ 15,000 earnings are very negligible i.e. only 16 thousand handloom households. Only in Andhra Pradesh 5% of handloom households i.e. 6 thousand and in Assam 1% i.e. 8 thousand are earning more than ₹15,000. In Meghalaya 98% of the handloom households are earning less than ₹ 5,000, in Arunachal Pradesh, 90%, Odisha 89%, Assam 88%, and 79% in Manipur and Tamil Nadu are earning less than ₹ 5,000. It reveals that more than 80% of handloom households are earning below one lakh rupees per annum, which indicates that they are economically poor and lie below the poverty line.

3. CONCLUSION

It is feasible to draw a conclusion from the above analysis and its interpretation. It is found that the

handloom sector exists throughout the country but is not equitably distributed, as much of the handloom sector is concentrated in the northeast states of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Tripura, and Meghalaya, partly in the eastern coast of West Bengal, Odisha, Andhra Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu. In addition to that, all communities have participated in this industry, but the highest participation rate is from the BC community. The infrastructure facilities are very poor because the least percentage of handloom households have pucca houses. Most of the handloom workers' levels of education and income levels are very poor. Therefore it is required to design empowerment policies to educate handloom workers, provide credit facilities, supply yarn at subsidized rates, and integrate them with modern marketing tools to work independently and enhance their income levels.

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