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**PROBLEMS OF THE HANDLOOM INDUSTRY IN MANIPUR:
A STUDY OF THREE DISTRICTS**

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Keywords

*Handloom Industry,
Manipur,
Weavers' Problems,
Marketing
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Abstract

The handloom industry is one of the most significant sources of livelihood and employment in Manipur, particularly for women, yet it continues to face multifaceted challenges that threaten its sustainability. This study examines the major problems confronting the handloom industry in three valley districts of Manipur—Imphal-East, Imphal-West, and Bishnupur. The study is empirical in nature and is based on both primary and secondary data. Primary data were collected from 400 handloom weavers through personal interviews using an open-ended questionnaire during the field survey conducted from August 2023 to January 2024. A multi-stage sampling technique was adopted to select the respondents.

The findings reveal that handloom weavers face severe production, marketing, financial, and health-related problems. Key issues include dependence on traders and middlemen, low and irregular wages, delay in payments, lack of proper marketing channels, rising raw material costs, limited access to credit, inadequate government support, outdated looms, lack of training, and intense competition from power loom and imitation products. Occupational health problems, particularly musculoskeletal disorders and chronic back pain, are widespread due to prolonged working hours and poor working conditions. The paper emphasizes the need for effective implementation of the Handloom Reservation Act, improved marketing infrastructure, and better access to credit



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	and technology, enhanced government support, and increased awareness of welfare and health insurance schemes to ensure the sustainable development of the handloom sector in Manipur.
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1. INTRODUCTION

“I believe that where there is pure and active love for the poor there is God also. I see God in every thread that I draw on the spinning wheel.” Mahatma Gandhi, Young India, 1926.

For millions more individuals in India, the handloom industry is their way of life. Due to numerous issues that are operating behind the scenes, this industry's brilliant history has given way to a dubious and unclear present. After the agricultural sector, this extremely unorganized industry offers the most job prospects in the nation. One of the biggest states in India that produces handloom goods is Manipur. The study's primary goal is to identify the main issues pertaining to marketing and production because the handloom business is now dealing with a number of issues. For this reason, an open-ended questionnaire about the main issues is used. Both primary and secondary data sources form the basis of the analysis.

2. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

To identify the various problems of handloom industry faced by sample units and offer suggestions for solving such problems.

- **Statement of the problem**

There exist numerous challenges confronted by handloom weavers; consequently, the objective of this study is to examine the issues categorized into three principal domains, namely input-related production and marketing-related challenges, as well as health-related concerns. The marketing-related challenges encompass a deficiency of modernized looms, competition from alternative sectors, an absence of innovative designs, insufficient marketing infrastructure, a lack of promotional and advertising efforts, inadequate subsidies, dual obligations for female weavers, insufficient working capital, and a general lack of awareness. The health-related concerns include ailments such as cervical and shoulder discomfort, musculoskeletal disorders, lumbar pain, pain in the knees and thighs, respiratory ailments, gastrointestinal issues, cardiovascular conditions, and acid reflux. Collectively, these challenges adversely impact the economic standing of handloom weavers. This study critically analyses how these various issues or factors influence the growth and advancement of the handloom industry.

3. METHODOLOGY

The current investigation has been executed within the geographical confines of Imphal-West, Imphal-East, and Bishnupur districts of Manipur, recognized as a significant hub for the handloom industry. This inquiry is fundamentally empirical in essence. The empirical data have been amassed to scrutinize the predominant challenges faced by the handloom sector through the administration of a market survey focused on handloom garments, employing a structured schedule. Additionally, secondary data have been employed to examine the principal issues pertinent to the context of



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Manipur. For the purpose of gathering primary data, a multi-stage sampling methodology has been implemented. In the initial stage, three districts, namely Imphal-East, Imphal-West, and Bishnupur, have been selected from the totality of valley districts in Manipur, utilizing data procured from the Weavers Service Centre in Imphal. In the subsequent stage, the Municipal Council and the Community Development Block have been identified from these three districts, predicated on the substantial concentration of weavers. The third stage involves the selection of villages and wards from each designated development block and Municipal Council. In the concluding stage, weavers are randomly chosen at the village and ward levels from each of the selected districts. The Field Survey was conducted from August 2023 to January 2024. A total of 150 samples were gathered from Imphal-East, 130 from Imphal-West, and 120 from Bishnupur, culminating in an overall sample size of 400 weavers across all districts. The technique employed for data collection was personal interviews utilizing an open-ended questionnaire addressing the significant challenges confronting the handloom industry.

4. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Sinha (2003) in her article observed that handlooms and handicrafts are still pre-dominate types of activities undertaken by the women entrepreneurs and the women entrepreneurs faced problem of financing and lack of adequate knowledge and business ideas.

A study in Varanasi identified that the predominant challenges encountered which include insufficient working capital, escalating prices of raw materials, intense competition from the power loom industry, inadequate organizational capacity, and a deficiency of policy support, the influence of middlemen; furthermore, it is found that handloom weavers express dissatisfaction regarding the financial remuneration associated with this specific qualified occupation, as they receive minimal income, coupled with a notable absence of governmental assistance in this context. The study also found that the most weavers work long hours, suffered from health issues and often found rely on other secondary occupations to supplement their earnings (Paul, Biswas & Bhattacharya, 2024).

A study report on Problems and Prospects of Handloom Sector in India examines the challenges and opportunities faced by the handloom sector, particularly in generating employment within a competitive global environment. The major area of focus include the effectiveness of institutional support raw material availability, credit accessibility for weavers, and marketing systems. The study details the socio-economic profile of weavers across various states and found that the weavers are living with low literacy, poverty, and dependence on middlemen (Mishra, S. K. K., Srivastava, & Shariff, 2016). A study in Maharashtra highlights the major issues faced by paithani weavers such as exploitation by middlemen, competition from imitation products (Mahajan, 2021).

The challenges associated with input resources encompass elevated costs of raw materials, insufficient access to credit facilities, a deficiency in available labor, and an inadequate supply of looms. A similar study in Assam highlighted that the handloom sector is impacted by a multitude of challenges, including low livelihoods, a crisis, rising input costs, insufficient access to credit



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facilities, marketing constraints, and ineffective governance within cooperative societies. The paper also mentioned suggestions for the Government to improve handlooms which include opening more outlets by the government, exhibitions and trade fairs, loans to set up a shop, etc. (Jyoti, 2013). The challenges associated with output and marketing encompass issues such as the absence of modernized looms, competition arising from alternative sectors, insufficient innovative designs, inadequate marketing infrastructure, deficiencies in promotion and advertising initiatives, lack of financial subsidies, the dual burden borne by women, scarcity of working capital, and a deficit in awareness (Kalam & Babu, 2023).

One of the main problems faced by the handloom weaver is related to their lack of education which sometimes made mistakes while reporting to government during enumeration. Another is the ineffective implementation of Handloom Reservation Act which put hurdle to the weavers and the failure of welfare schemes to weavers (Debnath, 2022). This sector is beset by a multitude of challenges associated with technology, availability of resources, insufficient financial capital, and an inadequate marketing infrastructure, among other issues (Singh, 2014).

Many studies have identified financial problems faced by weavers. In a study in Kerala, it was determined that the artisans engaged in weaving express dissatisfaction concerning their financial remuneration derived from this specialized skill, as they received only a minimal income. Furthermore, they experience a significant deficiency in support from governmental entities in this context (Divya, Gopika, Krishna, 2020).

A study in Uttar-Pradesh on Handloom weavers in handloom Co-operative society found that the main problems faced by the weavers were due to illiteracy, poor marketing, designing, skill Up gradation, competition with Power loom, lack of skilled workers, financial constraints, health problems and poor government support. Another main obstruction to handloom industry is the gradual switch to power driven looms to increase productivity and earning for better livelihood (Srivastava, 2019).

5. ANALYSIS OF RESULT AND FINDINGS

➤ **Problems faced by weavers in Production and Marketing**

● **Problem due to crisis**

The most crucial problems faced during the survey period were traders or entrepreneurs not collecting finished products for more than six months from weavers who were from less affected areas of the conflict that has been prevalent in Manipur from May 2023. And remained unemployed with no earnings. Some weavers who used to weave one tribe which is party to the conflict products could not be able to send the products and lost market and earnings.

● **Lack of Proper Marketing channel**

The paramount challenge faced by the weavers concerns their lack of direct control over marketing channels. The main reason is related to taking risks that come up with the direct sales of the product. This can be attributed to the lack of exposure of weavers and the lack of educational attainment



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related to running a business, and this is also related to the lack of capital. A small number of weavers choose direct sales methods to consumers and in the local markets. It is only a few weavers who are associated with the Handloom Cooperation and Directorate. The main reason is that to sell their products to the Handloom Cooperation or directorate, weavers are required to maintain a standard size as given by the official, and the majority of weavers lack awareness and knowledge to tie up with the official.

- **Dependent on traders or middlemen**

The central problem faced by weavers is their dependency on traders for yarn. Independent weavers regularly purchased yarn on credit from the local traders, and weavers received payment based on the amount of cloth they produced in that particular turn or month. Weavers enter into an informal contract and are forced to sell the products exclusively to the traders. This creates a sense of exposure instead of being a facilitator that binds the weavers and loss independence in fear of losing the marketing channel.

- **Low Wages and Delay in Payment**

In the weaving industry, earnings are not fixed and are based on a piece rate system. It depends on the skill, type of product produced by weavers, and the type of weavers, whether they are independent or hired weavers. Earning also depends on the timely completion of work within the time frame, i.e., in a month. The greater the hard work the weavers put in, the higher their earnings. For hired weavers, they are only paid wages, and their wages are low per piece of product and they only weave low price cloths. For those working in private society, their wages are low because most of them are unskilled weavers and produce fabrics like *ningtha*, *pheijom*, *fadi*, etc., that incur low wages per piece. During off-peak seasons, weavers experienced detained in receiving wages, thereby increasing their financial hardship.

- **Impact by covid**

During the period of the pandemic, weavers did not stopped working and engaged in the production from the stock of yarn from traders' storehouse, and the finished products are taken from home by traders. The major challenges faced by weavers were related to inadequate financial resources and a lack of other basic necessities. The wages and earnings were very irregular due to a decline in demand, and most of the final products were piling up at the traders' houses before the products were sold off during religious and marriage ceremonies.

- **Escalation of raw-material cost**

The procurement of raw materials for handloom production presents significant challenges for weavers, primarily due to the pricing structure and restrictions on purchase quantities. . It is reported from the weavers that the yarn price was hiked after the implementation of GST (Goods and Services Tax) on handloom goods. It is observed that traders increase the prices of yarn by Rs 100 to 500 above the market price in Imphal Market, which reduces the profit margins to weavers. Furthermore, the imposition of restrictions by the Government Handloom office, which prohibits weavers from



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purchasing smaller quantities using the yarn card, exacerbates the issue. Another major problem is related to restrictions on purchasing small quantities of yarn using a yarn card from the Handloom office. Weavers reported that they waste a day and transportation to procure yarn from the handloom office, too.

- **Limitations in Production and Diversifications**

The production of goods by local weavers is predominantly confined to traditional designs, with limited diversification into other product categories such as curtains, school uniforms, dress materials, door mats, tablecloths, and decorative items, which are commonly produced in other states

- **Lack of Training**

The study shows that Government training received by the weavers is for a short duration like 10 to 30 days, and is received by only a few number of weavers. Weavers learnt the art of weaving from family and neighbours, producing similar products and designs where the skilful weavers act as the informal teacher. Weavers belonging to remote areas like Kakching Khunou, 53 km away from Imphal, are not able to weave profitable products like rani Phee or wangkhei due to a lack of skills.

- **Lack of Government support**

The governmental assistance provided to the cohort of weavers is constrained and is unable to encompass the substantial weavers. From the research area, it is predominantly a select few weavers who are associated with clusters that have reaped the benefits from the government in terms of complimentary looms, solar kits, and accessories. Those weavers located in remote villages beyond Imphal have yet to receive any governmental benefits. It has been frequently reported from the perspective of the weavers that the benefits provided by the government do not reach the intended genuine beneficiaries. Instead, these benefits often end up benefitting the acquaintances or relatives of agents and government officials. Also from the weavers side often it is reported that the benefits government provided does not go to the genuine beneficiaries and went to the near and dear one of the agent or to the government officials.

- **Lack of Publicity and Promotion**

Artisans possessing a Pehchan card exhibit a deficiency in awareness concerning the subsidized yarn accessible at the governmental handloom office. Furthermore, their understanding of governmental schemes and associated benefits remains markedly limited.

- **Lack of Technology**

The swift advancement of technology and the implementation of automation within the contemporary textile industry have facilitated the large-scale production of diverse high-quality synthetic and cotton textile goods, thereby securing a competitive edge over handloom products. Despite the occurrence of rapid technological and procedural transformations on a global scale, the practices within the domestic handloom sector have remained comparatively unchanged, resulting in an inability to satisfy the prevailing market demands.

- **Lack of access to credit and Financial support**



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The primary challenge encountered by weavers pertains to a significant lack of financial resources. One of the major difficulties faced by the weavers is related to obtaining loans from Government banks. Additionally, weavers suffered from a lack of capital to invest in their weaving business. This compelled many weavers to work under traders and led them to enter into informal contracts, often losing their own independence in working and getting profits.

- **Usage of age-old looms**

The major challenges faced by weavers relate to the usage of age-old looms, which create constraints during the working process. It is reported that weavers suffered loss of products due to termite infestations and fungal infections affecting the looms

- **Competition from machine made products**

The proliferation of semi-automatic looms has introduced products that employ traditional designs, which has raised significant concerns regarding compliance with the Handloom Reservation Act. Specifically, the production of *Phanek* through these mechanized means has intensified competition with handloom weavers. This increased output from semi-automatic looms poses a potential threat to the livelihood of traditional artisans, as the volume and availability of machine-made products are likely to undercut the market for handloom goods. Without prompt intervention by government authorities, this trend could result in substantial economic losses for handloom weavers in the near future. It is imperative that policies are enacted to protect the interests of these artisans and preserve the cultural heritage associated with handloom weaving.

- **Availability of cheap imitate product**

In recent times, there has been a noticeable surge in the sales of imitative products, particularly those sourced from other states that offer these items at significantly lower prices under the brand name "*Rani Sabi*." This trend poses a substantial threat to the livelihood of local weavers, who often rely on the sale of authentic handloom products for their economic stability. The competitive pricing of these imitative goods not only undermines the market for local artisans but also raises concerns about the sustainability of traditional weaving practices. The proliferation of cheaper alternatives can diminish consumer appreciation for the craftsmanship and cultural significance of genuine handloom textiles.

- **Health related problems**

The majority of complaints were related to back pain .Occupational health problems arise from prolonged working hours and poor posture during work. These issues are primarily linked to repetitive movements of the hands and legs, long periods of sitting, and the overall work environment. Weavers are particularly at risk for work-related musculoskeletal disorders (WMSDs), with low back pain (LBP) being the most prevalent issue. Additionally, some health hazards associated with handloom workers include problems with eyesight, early cataracts, loss of vision, high or low blood pressure, heart issues, lung damage, filariasis, arthritis, and other musculoskeletal disorders. Weavers face a variety of health issues, including pain in the arms, legs, back, shoulders,



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ankles, wrists, fingers, upper back, lower back, thighs, and neck. They also commonly report conditions such as anaemia, musculoskeletal disorders, asthma, haemorrhoids, arthritis, headaches, vision problems, and neuropathic pain. Additionally, some studies have identified respiratory issues among weavers. In the textile industry, weavers are often exposed to chemicals during the dyeing process, which can further impact their health.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Weaving is an important sector avenue for poverty alleviation and generate employment. The study found that the socio-economic conditions of the weavers in the valley districts still remain unsatisfactory, and the majority remain in poverty. The study found that weavers in the study area are suffering from health issues mostly related to occupational diseases. The textile sector in India has consistently encountered significant challenges pertaining to marketing, as these particular products necessitate specialized marketing approaches. Women can increase devoting time to weaving if the household work time is reduced. This need social awareness to understand weaving as full time work from home job and need family members support and help.

➤ Remedial measures

- The government can encourage e-commerce platform to weavers through awareness so that they can manage marketing directly and encourage weavers to become full-fledged entrepreneurs.
- There is also threat from power loom, mills and imitation products from other states so proper rules and Handloom reservation act should be properly implemented that gives protection to handloom products.
- The policy makers may take initiatives to channel the market directly with the weavers by initiating market hubs for their finished product, to take steps to facilitate the collection of products for sale to Handloom Corporation, and giving platform for online market platform to sell at national and international market.
- Weavers should adopt new clothing items to weave including school uniform, curtains, office foot mats.
- The Government should impose the Handloom Reservation Act strictly. The protection of handloom weavers is needed to prevent encroachment by power loom weavers on the market for handloom products and help safeguard the economic interests of weavers..
- Yarn banks should be developed near the major cluster areas and at the head-quarters of every district so that weavers could easily buy yarn
- The Government should develop weavers' exclusive pension schemes and make them aware of schemes like Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Maandhan (PM-SYM) to get a pension after retirement from work.



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- It highlights the need for government action to raise awareness among weavers regarding various health insurance schemes. Efforts should be made to inform weavers about both central and state-sponsored schemes, so they can effectively utilize these resources.
- For elderly weavers, provisions for free medical check-ups, ear plugs, and eye exams should be established.
- The government should intervene to provide only quality maintained yarn to weavers so that weavers can produce quality cloth.
- Weavers require more information. The government programs and assistance must be readily accessible, allowing them to derive maximum benefit. Additionally, the provision of information and government assistance should be in a manner that maximizes accessibility and benefit for the weavers.

7. AUTHOR(S) CONTRIBUTION

The writers affirm that they have no connections to, or engagement with, any group or body that provides financial or non-financial assistance for the topics or resources covered in this manuscript.

8. CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

9. PLAGIARISM POLICY

All authors declare that any kind of violation of plagiarism, copyright and ethical matters will take care by all authors. Journal and editors are not liable for aforesaid matters.

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