

An overview of Cotton Textile Industry at Dhaniakhali Block of Hooghly District

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Abstracts: West Bengal had a great heritage of cotton textile industry from the very ancient period of time. This work was traditionally done by rural artisans, they reflected their hope, aspiration, and their life style through their design, the brilliant mix of colours which is admired all over the world.

Dhaniakhali, one of the eighteen blocks of Hooghly district which is famous centre of handloom industry in the map of West Bengal. It is very difficult to find out the exact time period of origin of this industry but in the year 1933-1938 "Shusi" and "Shisankar" a kind of "Chadar" which was made from Resham Silk produced from Dhaniakhali. Then Dhotis and Sarees were produced by "Charkha". So Dhaniakhali had a very old and strong cultural heritage. This mechanism is done by a specific caste named "Tantubay", a large number of people belonging to this caste live in the surrounding villages and very efficiently conducting this age old heritage craft. But it is very unfortunate that this traditional industry is under threat of extinction. Therefore the main aim of this paper is to discuss various aspects related to the growth of this industry and at the same time highlighting the different problems and suggest different strategies for the survival of the industry.

Key Words: Dhaniakhali tant, Handloom, Power loom, Weavers, Innovation, Online sale.

I. Introduction

The Textile industry in India traditionally, after agriculture, is the only industry that has generated huge employment for both skilled and unskilled labour in textiles. The textile industry continues to be the second largest employment generating sector in India. It offers direct employment to over 35 million in the country. The archaeological surveys and studies have found that the people of Harrapan civilization knew weaving and the spinning of cotton four thousand years ago. Therefore the products generated by the cotton textile industry was highly famous all over the world which was mainly done by the rural people. But this industry faced the problem in the colonial period. During the late 17th and 18th century at the time of Industrial Revolution in Europe, India became the chief source of raw material and at the same time market place for the power loom generated products of England. Thus the colonial ruler ruined age old traditional process of spinning of yarn and weaving cloths. But this industry rejuvenated at the time of Swadeshi Movement which was headed by Aurobindo Ghosh.

II. Study Area:

Hooghly district is located in the southern part of West Bengal and the locational extent of the district is 22.8956° N, 88.4025° E. It covers an area of 3149 sq. km. This district consists of four Subdivisions namely - Chinsurah, Arambag, Serampore and Chadannagar. The study is conducted mainly in the surrounding villages of Dhaniakhali Block, this block is under Chinsurah Subdivision and lying in the north western part of the district.

III. Objectives Of The Study:

Keeping in view the above problems, this study is proposed to carry on with the following objectives.

- To evaluate the progress of Handloom Industry in Dhaniakhali block.
- To analyse the socio-economic conditions of the sample handloom weavers.
- To assess the adoption of technology and production of Handloom weaving.
- To observe the marketing facilities of handloom fabrics in the study area.
- To study the problems of Handloom weavers in the study area.
- To analyse the future prospects of the industry in the study area.
- To make strategies for survival of handloom industry of Dhaniakhali block.

IV. Database And Methodology:

The paper deals with both primary and secondary data. Primary data have been collected by surveying concerned population of Dhaniakhali and surrounding villages. The secondary data have been collected from

various co-operative societies of Dhaniakhali block namely- i) Somaspur Union Co-operative weavers Society Limited, ii) Dhaniakhali Union Tant Shilpi Samabay Samiti Limited, iii) Gurap Tant Samabay Samiti Limited, iv) Parambua Sahabazar Weavers Society Limited. The secondary data have also been collected from several offices of Hooghly district like- Handloom Development Office Chinsurah and Tarakeswar, B.D.O. To enrich the study various articles, journals, books on handloom industry, e-sources were consulted. Then the relevant data and information have been organised, classified, tabulated, analysed by statistical methods and represented through suitable cartographic techniques.

V. Historical Background Of Handloom Industry In Dhaniakhali:

The exact time of origin of this handloom manufacturing centre is very difficult to find out because of scarcity of reliable data, but it can be said that in the year of 1933-38 some clothes (a kind of "Chadar") were being produced using silk as a raw material, this "Shushi" Chadar was so fine in texture that it was compared to the famous "Dhakai Maslin" silk. Then Dhotis and Saries were being produced using both the cotton and silk yarn, this cotton yarn was mainly imported from abroad. The products were sold abroad in some quantities to the far-off countries by means of European firms like Walker Gouard, Shaw Wallace etc. There were also some percentage of middle man who linked the local artisans to Calcutta firm.

But after the second world war due to various political issues the Dhaniakhali handloom industry faced the problem of raw material. In this period the "Somaspur Union Co-operative weavers Society Limited" and also "Dhaniakhali Union Tant Shilpi Smabay Samiti Limited" were came into existence in the year of 1946 to supply quality materials to the weavers.

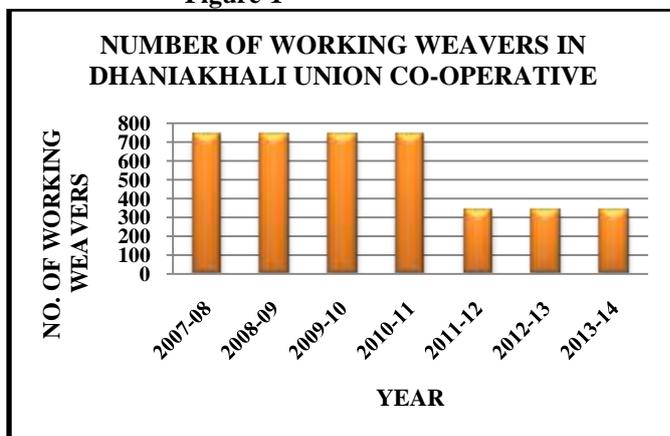
The cotton textile industry of Dhaniakhali was efficiently conducted by the rural artisans lived in the surrounding villages like- Somaspur, Harpur, Brindabanpur, Dhaniakhali, Talbona, Konan, Mahamaya, Mirjanagar etc. This was purely a cast based profession (Tantubay in Bengal).

At the present time there are four working co-operatives namely- i) Somaspur Union Co-operative weavers Society Limited, ii) Dhaniakhali Union Tant Shilpi Smabay Samiti Limited, iii) Gurap Tant Samabay Samiti Limited, iv) Parambua Sahabazar Weavers Society Limited. These co-operatives provide yarn and design to the weavers and paid them accordingly. All other marketing systems are conducted by the co-operatives. In the previous year the brand Dhaniakhali Dhoti and Saries were sold in Farasdanga (Chandannagar), Mangala Hat of Howrah, Barddhaman, Asansole etc. Then a district based Government organisation named "Hooghly Artisen" associated with Dhaniakhali handloom industry for marketing purpose, later at the State level "Tantuj", "Manjusha", "Bangashree" and at the national level "Handloom House" also associated with this age old handloom centre.

VI. Present Condition Of The Handloom Industry Of Dhaniakhali Block:

The handloom sector plays an important role in the economic development of the rural poor in the state. It contributes significantly by generating more employment opportunities and providing bread to the rural poor. But it is very unfortunate that despite of various Governmental scheme this industry suffers from various aspects. "Dhaniakhali tant" is one of the most famous name in the handloom field of West Bengal and due to its coarse texture, but the surprising fact is that though there are enough demand the productivity and also the number of weavers are decreasing day by day. According to Tarun Var, (surveyed weaver of Dhaniakhali) 40-50 years ago a weaver earned double than a teacher or govt. employee but the situation has completely changed at the present time. So the new generation are totally unwilling to accept weaving as a profession, 90% of the working weavers are at the age of 45 or more which is one of the main cause for low productivity.

Figure-1



Source: Handloom Development Office, Chinsurah.

Table-1

Year	No. of working weavers
2007-08	733
2008-09	733
2009-10	736
2010-11	735
2011-12	333
2012-13	333
2013-14	333

It can be said from fig.-1 that there was a rapid decrease of working weaver in 2011-2012 financial year. According to the weavers they realised that it is more profitable to join in “Hundred days work scheme” under MGNREGA rather than weaving clothes. To view the present condition some weavers suspect that if some immediate measures are not be taken then it would be very difficult to save the handloom industry of Dhaniakhali from extinction.

VII. Problem Faced By Dhaniakhali Handloom Industry:

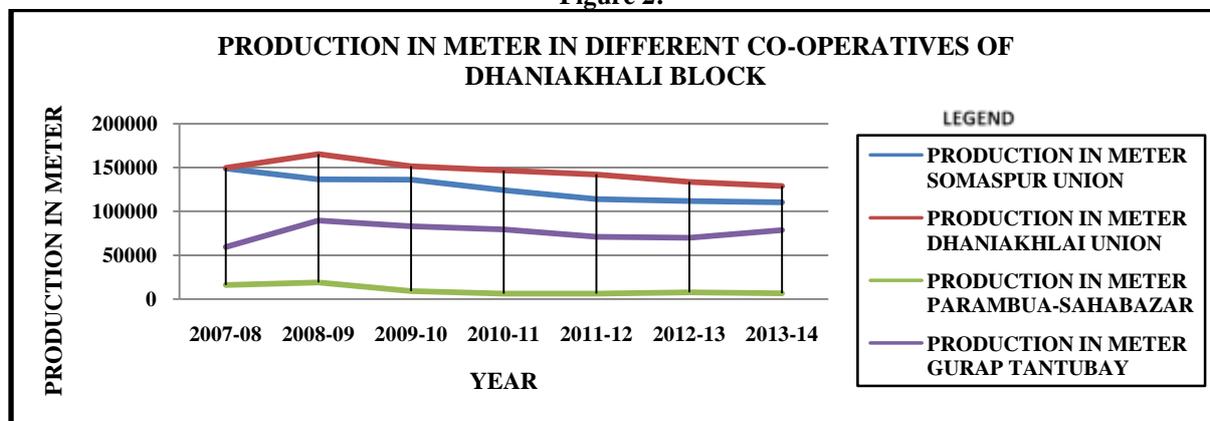
After conduction door to door survey of the weavers and also after visiting the four working co-operatives of Dhaniakhali Block, it can be said that now a days this industry becomes a decaying industry as it faced several problems related production, marketing and many more. The main problem of this industry are as follows:

1. The main problem of Dhaniakhali cotton textile industry is low productivity, the number of weavers are reduced day by day. The next generation are not willing to accept weaving as a profession due to the uncertainty of the industry. It can be said from figure.-2 that the overall production trend of these four co-operatives is lowering down gradually.

Table 2: Production in Meter

YEAR	PRODUCTION IN METER			
	SOMASPUR UNION	DHANIAKHLAI UNION	PARAMBUA-SAHABAZAR	GURAP TANTUBAY
2007-08	149124	150091.05	16219.5	59560
2008-09	136814	165634	19019	89854
2009-10	136438.35	151646	9168.5	83204.5
2010-11	124402	146861	6446	79604.5
2011-12	114143.45	142396	6286.5	71071.5
2012-13	111706	133729	7854	70326.5
2013-14	110329.5	129153	6704.5	78760

Figure 2:



Source: Handloom Development Office, Chinsurah

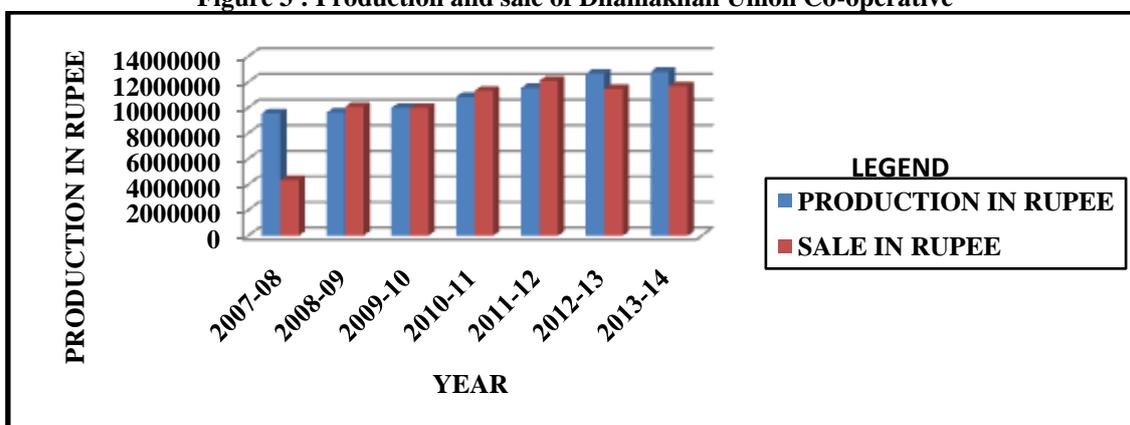
2. This cotton textile industry specially the weavers are highly depended on the female member of their family, because the weavers can not use the yarn given from the co-operatives or the Mahajans directly as this raw yarn need to be processed through different steps which are done only by the female members of the family. But the tragic story is that this female members of weavers family are completely deprived from any kind of wage form any sources.
3. This handloom industry is a very laborious industry. After getting the raw yarn the weavers have to follow several process such as – Noli Bata, Sana Gantha ,Tant Fitting, Palui Anta etc. sometimes outsiders or professional labours are appointed to conduct these process. Not only that it takes at least 20 to 25 days before the actual weaving is started. But neither the co-operatives nor the Mahajan take this cost into account.
4. From the production performance of the societies, it is clear that they have no self sufficiency in respect of capital. They are dependent on government loan for their production. Their production status is almost in stagnant state.

- The co-operative societies are indifferent in enlarging their marketing sphere. They are mainly dependent on retail sale. They have no sale outlet in big cities or other places, even after surveying in the shops it is found that there are no saling outlet in the Dhaniakhali itself where only the Brand Dhaniakhali Sarees are sold. They join the government expo, melas, and exhibitions as they gain some benefit from these. They have no activity to boost up the marketing scope. For example the Gurap Tantubay Samabay Samity limited has joined Suri Chaitra mela and Tant Bastra Pradarshani mela only, in 2008. Huge stock piles are found in the stores of the societies.

Table 3: Production and sale of Dhaniakhali Union Co-operative.

YEAR	PRODUCTION IN RUPEE	SALE IN RUPEE
2007-08	9557225	4343607
2008-09	9630140	10066014
2009-10	9991500	9998711
2010-11	10845476	11319766
2011-12	11547875	12105070
2012-13	12658980	11475860
2013-14	12799260	11693350

Figure 3 : Production and sale of Dhaniakhali Union Co-operative

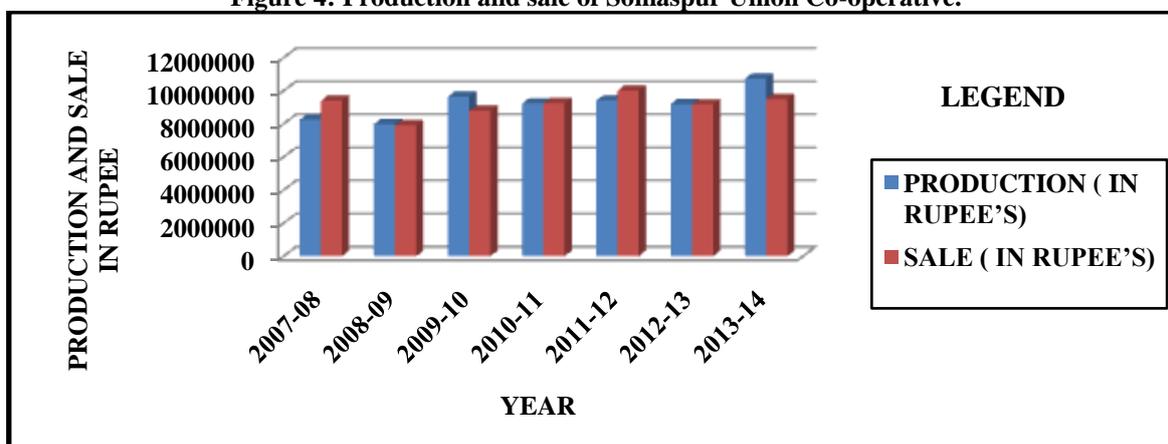


Source: Handloom Development Office, Chinsurah

Table 4: Production and sale of Somaspur Union Co-operative.

YEAR	PRODUCTION (IN RUPEE'S)	SALE (IN RUPEE'S)
2007-08	8249006	9388524.25
2008-09	7980153	7900392
2009-10	9644226	8778048
2010-11	9228506	9236337
2011-12	9409850	1000755
2012-13	9191621	9167660
2013-14	10721826	9497079

Figure 4: Production and sale of Somaspur Union Co-operative.



6. Dhaniakhali sarees are famous for its coarse texture which are mainly used by the housewives for daily use purpose, so the price rate of this sarees are low enough but as the taste and demand changed and various types of clothes (salwar, kurta, designer ware etc.) were introduced in the market naturally the demand of this age old handloom is reduced.
7. There is no innovation of designs of this handloom products. They are practicing the traditional designs from the beginning. These societies have no CAD trained designers. They provide the designs from their own perception.
8. The “Brand Dhaniakhali Sarees” are identified by a particular design name “Khejur Chari”, but in the name of Dhaniakhali Sarees a group of greedy merchants produce low quality sarees from other handloom centres which not only affect the reputation of this centre but also create tough competition in the market. The government and also the co-operatives are indifferent to stop this parallel activities.
9. Sometimes the Government Organisations create economic crisis as they do not pay the money after purchasing the products from the co-operatives.
10. Increasing rate of the raw material is another burning problem of this industry, but the fact is that the wage rate of the weavers is not increased accordingly due to tough competition with other sarees produced from power loom. The data, given by Somaspur Union Cooperative Weavers Society Limited, show that before 8/12/2009 the cost of yarn per mora for 100 count, 80 count 60 count and 40 count were rupees 31.00, 31.00, 27.50 and 33.75 respectively. These became rupees 32.00, 32.00 and 36.50 respectively from 8/12/2009.

VIII. Prospect Of Dhaniakhali Cotton Textile Industry:

Though the Dhaniakhali Handloom industry is suffered from various problems but if this industry can overcome these problems then there are many scope to expand the industry and for this following measures should be adopted,

1. The government and the co-operatives also should take very strict measure to stop those parallel activities which affect the reputation of Dhaniakhali sarees.
2. Societies should implement proper plan, policies for the weavers so that next generation of the weavers are attracted to accept weaving as profession.
3. The present day is called the day of internet, if the government and the society take proper measure to sale their products through online retail shops, then they can reach to a vast population and this way the industry can enlarge their marketing sphere.
4. The co-operative should try to establish their own centres not only in the big cities but the Dhaniakhali also.
5. The government should take initiative to protect the this traditional industry from extinction by giving training the weaver about new technology, arranging various melas exhibition so that the weaver can reach the population.
6. The co-operative society should restructure their wage system and take the female members of the weaver’s family into consideration to boost up the industry.
7. Contemporary designs, fabrics should be introduced instead of traditional design. Introduction of new types of dressing materials, except sarees, is also prescribed.

IX. Measures Which Are Taken By The Co-Operatives:

Dhaniakhali cotton textile industry has accepted several changes according to demand of the market, besides the legendary Dhaniakhali Tant the societies are also producing Dhuti, Polyester Shirting etc. Apart from Check, Dura Saree the Taasar silk with buti, Tie-and-Dye design saree and cross border Naxa saree by using Jacquard Machines are also produced. Some measures are taken by the society to rejuvenate this traditional handloom industry are as follows:

1. The co-operatives are taking some initiative to introduce new designs, so various types of contemporary sarees (Ganga-Yamuna, Rangabati, Baha, Janmabhumi, appliqué work ect.) are being produced in small quantity. The societies also import Katki Yarn and designs from Maniabandh district of Orissa and beautifully mix the design of these two heritage sarees. Experimentation are also made by using Muga and Art silk in Dhaniakhali handloom.

2. The co-operatives of Dhaniakhali also forwarded their stuffs and weavers including the women weaver members for training and also participate in the district and state level Handloom Competition for design, weaving etc.
3. There are several welfare measures adopted by the Samaspur Union Co-operatives of Dhaniakhali:
 - The society has introduced provident fund for its all weaver members and stuff since 1977-78. At present total 538 weavers are brought under this scheme.
 - The co-operatives have implemented “Medical Allowance” scheme for its working members and stuff, it is 2% of yearly income.
 - The societies also pay “ Festival allowance” to its weaver member, at present average 12 days income pays under this scheme.
 - There are “ education Grant” for two students of each weavers and stuff, the societies pay special assistance for higher education like Medical, Engineering, Master degree etc.
 - The societies pay “ Marriage ceremony Grant” for daughter’s marriage to each working weavers and stuff.
 - There are special assistance for ‘Physically Handicapped’ weavers also, now a days 6 persons are enjoying this benefit under Samaspur Union Co-operative.
4. The co-operatives of Dhaniakhali are sometime benefitted by Government allowance.

• **Various schemes of Government enjoyed by the Somaspur Union Co-operative :**

Name of the scheme	Benefit
Mahatma Gandhi Boonkar Bima	Premium – Rs. 80/year
Handloom Development Centre & Quality Dying Unit (HDC & QDU)	HDC <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exhibition participation • Margine money 4 lakh • Sale centre QDU <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Construction of dying house • Improvement of dying appliances
Project Package Scheme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Common facility centre • Purchase of loom accessories
DHKPY(Dindayal Hath Karga Protsahan Yojona)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purchase of loom accessories • Training • Purchase of design • Advertisement

X. Conclusion

Cotton handloom has its own demand because of the beautiful designs, quality, fine texture, exact size and attractive fret works of its products. These qualities of handloom products are not accessed in the power loom mechanism. This paper is mainly based on extensive field work, though handloom weaving is has many strength and can be competitive under specific condition but the seed of crisis is inherent in the sector. This can be traced to three major factors – the poor performance of the co-operative sector and the poor economic condition of the weaver. But the ray of hope is that both the Central Government and the State Government are quite active to rejuvenate this sector, providing number of schemes for handloom production and marketing. The Central Government through Ministry of Textiles, Office of the Development Commissioner (Handloom) implement numbers of schemes such as Integrated Handloom Development Scheme, Hank Yarn Subsidy Scheme , marketing and design support, Health and life insurance scheme etc. The West Bengal Government also intend to highlight the handloom through Biwsa Bangla Project and also try to make Dhaniakhali as a Handloom Hub. The handloom products of Dhaniakhali have large demand as well as marketing scope because of its widespread name and fame and strong culture heritage. We hope that this handloom centre will be able to elevate its present stagnant condition by overcoming its present problems and will revive its past glory.

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