

Exploring the Socio-Economic Landscape of Handloom Workers in India: A comparative Study of the 3rd and 4th Handloom Census Reports.

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Abstract:

The handloom sector is one of the largest unorganised sectors after agriculture, with advantages such as less capital, minimal power consumption. At the same time, this sector faces multiple challenges, mostly marketing, infrastructure, and financial challenges. This study examines the socio-economic conditions of handloom workers in India, focusing on data from the 3rd and 4th Handloom Census reports. It highlights shifts in gender distribution, educational attainment, religious affiliation, social group representation, and dwelling unit characteristics. The findings reveal income disparities, particularly among low-income households, and significant improvements in the financial situation among handloom workers. The increasing prevalence of loom ownership indicates the sector's capacity for adaptation and expansion. The study emphasises the importance of gender inclusivity, educational enhancement, and financial support in the handloom industry, which can inform policymakers' decision-making processes. The study highlights the ever-changing socio-economic environment of a traditional craft relevance within India's cultural and economic legacy.

Keywords: Distribution; Handloom; Handloom Households; Socio- Economic Condition; Kuccha House; Looms

1. Introduction:

“To care about weaving, to make weavings, is to be in touch with a long human tradition. We people have woven, first baskets and then cloth, for at least ten thousand years. This book will give you many ways to become connected with that tradition.”

— Phylis Morrison

The handloom industry in India can be traced back to ancient times, making it a prevalent and traditional cottage industry (Sreenivas & Suman, 2016). Prior to the arrival of the 19th century, the global textile industry relied exclusively on the labour-intensive process of handloom weaving for the production of cloth to meet human needs. The ancient practices of hand spinning and weaving, which have been in existence for millennia, continue to evolve as enduring crafts and cottage industries (Sharma et al., 2021). The textile cottage industry encompasses various processes such as cotton cultivation, silk production, and the subsequent stages of bleaching, dyeing, finishing, hosiery manufacturing, lace embroidery, silk reeling, and silk twisting (Venkateswaran, 2014). The handloom industry in India is the most labour-intensive, export-oriented, and job-generating sector of the economy in the country's rural and semi-urban regions (Kaushik & Jain, 2015). This particular sector is considered to be one of the largest unorganized sectors, second only to agriculture. It possesses several advantages, such as being less reliant on capital investment, requiring minimal power usage, and being adaptable to meet market demands (Jain & Gera, 2017; Raju & Rao, 2014).

Within a framework defined by a dynamic cultural and economic landscape, the present study seeks to explain the various changes and persisting elements observed in the socio-economic circumstances of handloom workers. Those insights possess the potential to yield significant ramifications in the realm of policy formulation and the advancement of socio-economic development.

In undertaking this comparative exploration, our objective is to shed light on the transformations, trends, and consequences that arise within the socio-economic circumstances of handloom workers. These findings are not only instructive for policymakers but also serve as a testament to the resilience and adaptability of an industry deeply intertwined with India's cultural fabric.

The present study is to conduct a comparative analysis of the socio-economic conditions experienced by handloom workers in India. In order to conduct a comprehensive examination of the variations observed between the 3rd and 4th

Handloom Census reports, it is crucial to go into the complex nature of the data presented within these two distinct documents. By carefully studying the information contained within these reports, we can gain valuable insights into the shifts, modifications, and developments that have occurred within the handloom industry during the period under consideration.

2. Literature Review:

The handloom industry in India occupies a prominent position in the country's cultural and economic legacy, boasting a rich historical lineage spanning several centuries (Mishra & Mohapatra, 2020). The industry has made substantial contributions to the socio-economic landscape of the country over the course of its existence (Saini, 2023). Addressing the socio-economic circumstances of handloom workers and the subsequent transformations holds significant importance in formulating policies and implementing interventions aimed at enhancing their overall welfare (Chinnu & Sheeba, 2021).

2.1 Historical Significance of the Handloom Industry: The handloom tradition of India is intricately intertwined with its historical fabric, embodying a legacy that spans across multiple generations and serves as a testament to the opulent cultural heritage of the nation (Sreenivas & Suman, 2016; Kumar et al., 2022). The complex and elaborate designs, as well as the vibrant colours, displayed in Indian handloom fabrics are a remarkable testament to the remarkable skill and creative ability of the weavers (Abhyankar, 2023). These artisans have dedicated themselves to perfecting their craft over numerous generations, resulting in the exceptional quality and artistry found in their work. The handcrafted textiles in question not only fulfil the economic needs of numerous artisans but also carry significant cultural and symbolic value, representing the pride and identity of India's diverse communities (Anil et al., 2023). Historically, handloom weaving has been a crucial part of the livelihoods of rural and semi-urban populations, upholding the nation's diverse textile heritage (Mishra & Mohapatra, 2019; Shrivastava, 2020). This long-standing tradition has socio-cultural and economic effects that are evident even today (Nair & N, 2022).

2.2 Economic Contribution: The handloom sector in India holds significant economic importance (Vyshnavi & Nair, 2017). Handloom weaving, a traditional craft in India, has served as a significant source of employment for countless individuals, particularly those residing in rural regions, spanning numerous centuries (Sreenivas & Suman, 2016). The sector not only makes a substantial contribution to the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), but it also plays an important role in the preservation of India's diverse and culturally significant heritage (Nair & Chandramana, 2020). According to the Ministry of Finance (2022), it is notable to acknowledge that handloom products demonstrate a substantial degree of demand, both in the domestic market of India and on the global platform, and the increased demand has significantly contributed to the enhancement of India's export earnings and the rise of its foreign exchange reserves. The industry is the largest unorganized economic activity in the country and serves as a substantial source of non-agricultural rural employment (Datta & Agrawal, 2018; Amutha, 2021). The sector's contribution to the nation's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), as well as its role in income generation and employment opportunities, particularly in rural areas, further highlight its socioeconomic significance (Prathap & Naidu, 2015; Debbarma & Murugesan, 2022).

2.3 Socio-Economic Challenges: Despite its historical and economic importance, the handloom sector faces various socio-economic challenges (K. & Sindhu, 2023). These challenges include the lack of modernization and technological advancements in the industry, which hinders its competitiveness in the global market (Amaravathi & Balanagalakshmi, 2022; Balakrishnan, 2020; Eknath, 2023). The handloom sector also struggles with limited access to credit and financial support, making it difficult for weavers to invest in their businesses and improve their livelihoods (Sharma et al., 2021; Majumdar et al., 2017; Rama, 2021; Bag & Behera, 2020; Bari et al., 2015; Bhat & Choure, 2014; Jain & Gera, 2017). These challenges underscore the need for a comprehensive understanding of the socio-economic conditions within the sector. By having a comprehensive understanding of the socio-economic conditions within the sector, organisations can better identify and address the specific challenges they face (Mishra & Mohapatra, 2019). This knowledge allows for the development of targeted strategies and interventions that can effectively improve socio-economic conditions and drive positive change within the sector (Samadhiya & Agrawal, 2022).

2.4 Government Initiatives: The recognition of the handloom sector's significance has prompted the Indian government to implement a series of policies and initiatives aimed at strengthening and advancing this traditional craft (Shrivastava, 2020). According to the Ministry of Textiles (2023), these programmes encompass a range of interventions aimed at providing financial support, skill development opportunities, and market linkages, with the ultimate goal of empowering individuals and communities. Financial support encompasses a range of resources, such as microloans and grants, which serve as valuable tools for entrepreneurs seeking to initiate or enhance their business ventures (Singh & Kumar, 2016). These provisions afford individuals the opportunity to secure necessary funds, thereby facilitating the establishment or

growth of their enterprises. Skill development programmes provide individuals with training in a wide range of fields, including technology, art, and craftsmanship (Mahalingam & Balakrishnan, 2020). These programmes aim to equip participants with the essential tools and knowledge required to thrive in today's highly competitive market (Rachappa & Naik 2017). In addition, it is important to understand that market linkages play a crucial role in facilitating the connection between producers and potential buyers (Kumar et al., 2021; Khatoon, 2016). This connection allows producers to effectively sell their products and services at fair prices, thereby contributing to the establishment of sustainable livelihoods. The analysis of the effectiveness of these policies and their impact on handloom workers is a crucial component of this research activity. (Mishra & Mohapatra, 2019). Through a comprehensive analysis of the results derived from skill development programmes and market linkages, policymakers are able to identify specific areas that require enhancement and subsequently make well-informed decisions to optimise the overall effectiveness of these initiatives.

This literature review serves as an in-depth foundational work for understanding the socio-economic circumstances of handloom workers in India and the substantial challenges they encounter within their chosen occupation. To provide a comprehensive understanding of the handloom sector, this study delves into a broad analysis of scholarly articles, research papers, and case studies. These sources collectively offer insights into the living conditions, income levels, and social status of handloom workers, highlighting the complexity and diversity of challenges faced within this dynamic and culturally significant industry.

Research focusing on the socio-economic conditions of handloom workers in India primarily relies on data obtained from handloom censuses, reports from the Ministry of Textiles, and scholarly studies, such as the 3rd and 4th Handloom Census reports. These sources have been instrumental in understanding the sector's dynamics, shedding light on the historical and contemporary realities of handloom workers. However, while these sources provide valuable insights, there is a critical need for a comparative analysis that can discern trends and changes over time. This analytical approach bridges the gap between historical perspectives and the evolving socio-economic conditions that handloom workers face in contemporary India.

3. Significance of the study:

This study intends to provide a complete understanding of how the socio-economic conditions of handloom weavers in India have evolved over time, specifically during the third and fourth All India Handloom Censuses. More precisely, this research will focus on the time period between the third and fourth All India Handloom Censuses. This research aims to illuminate the dynamic interplay between tradition and change within the handloom industry, serving as a guidepost for informed policies and initiatives that uplift the lives of those who craft India's textile heritage.

4. Objectives of the study:

- To conduct a comparative analysis of the socio-economic conditions experienced by handloom workers in India.
- To analyse the differences observed in the data presented in the 3rd and 4th Handloom Census reports.

5. Methodology of the study:

The research methodology for this study involved the adoption of a comparative research design to analyse and compare the changes in the socio-economic conditions of handloom weavers in India, specifically referring to data from the third and fourth Handloom Census reports.

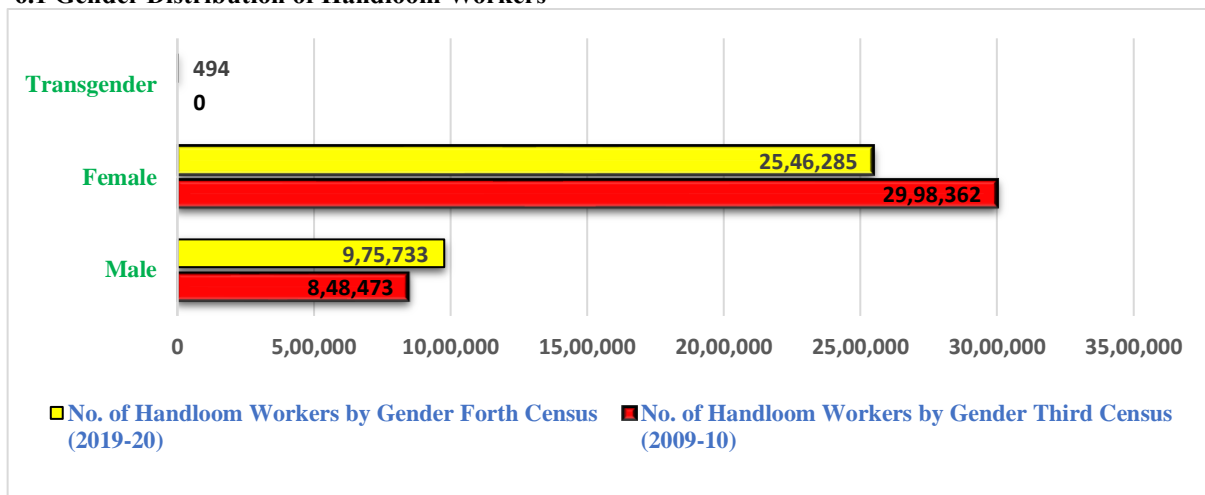
This study predominantly relies on secondary data obtained from various reputable sources, including:

The 3rd All India Handloom Census (2009–10) was sourced from the Office of the Development Commissioner for Handloom, Ministry of Textiles, Government of India; the 4th All India Handloom Census (2019–20) was obtained from the Office of the Development Commissioner for Handlooms, Ministry of Textiles, Government of India; and an annual report from 2015–16 to 2021–22 from the Ministry of Textiles, Government of India. These sources collectively form the foundation of the data analysis and comparative assessment in this research study.

6. Result & Discussion:

In this study, the socio-economic status of handloom workers in India has been compared, which is based on data from the 3rd and 4th Indian Handloom Census. The objective is to report on the observed changes in their status over time. In order to assess the socio-economic status of handloom workers, a comprehensive analysis has been conducted, encompassing several key factors. These factors include geographical region, gender, religious affiliation, social group, type of dwelling units, ownership of housing, income derived from handloom-related activities, indebtedness and the purpose of such debts, sources of loans, possession of looms, educational attainment, and employment status. By considering these various aspects, a deeper understanding of the socio-economic conditions of handloom workers can be obtained.

6.1 Gender Distribution of Handloom Workers

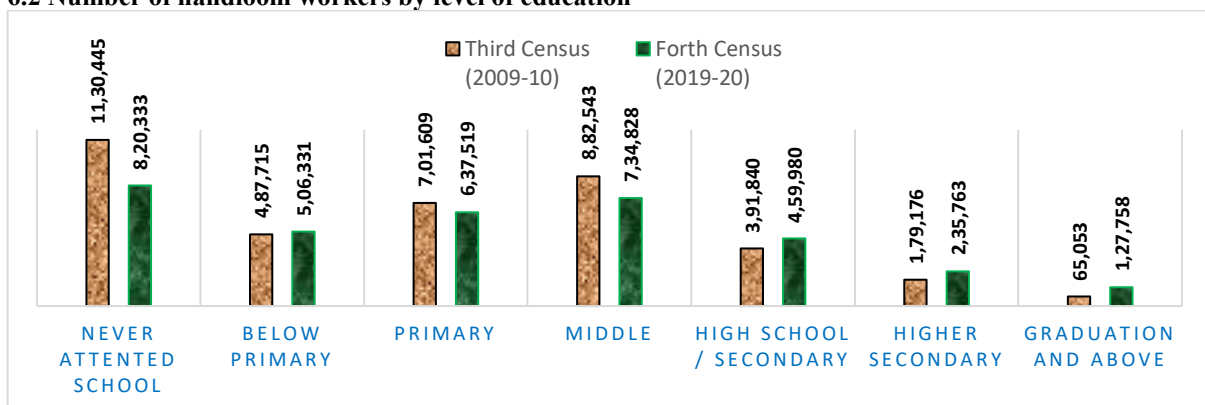


Source *Third All India Handloom Census 2009-10

*Fourth All India Handloom Census 2019-20

The graph 6.1 shows a significant increase in male handloom workers in India, from 8,48,473 to 9,75,733, indicating a significant increase in male involvement in the sector. However, the number of female handloom workers declined from 29,98,362 to 25,46,285 over the same period. The third census did not include data on transgender handloom workers, but the fourth census included 494 transgender individuals actively involved in handloom work. The total count of handloom workers in India decreased from 38,46,835 to 35,22,512, primarily due to a decrease in female workers. This highlights the need for policies and opportunities promoting gender inclusivity in the handloom industry.

6.2 Number of handloom workers by level of education



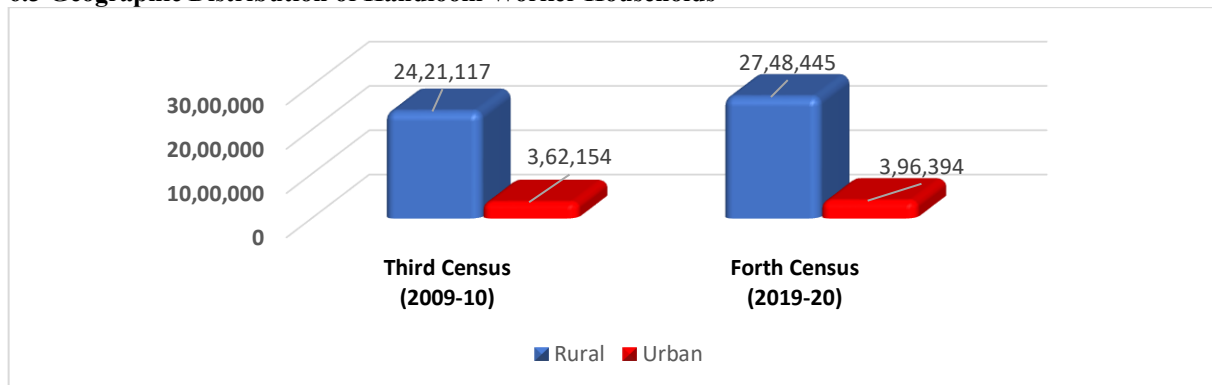
Source *Third All India Handloom Census 2009-10

*Fourth All India Handloom Census 2019-20

The graph 6.2 shows the comparative analysis of the educational attainment of individuals involved in the handloom sector in India, incorporating data from the third census (2009–10) and the fourth census (2019–20). The data indicates a notable decline in the population of individuals who have not received any formal education, with the figures dropping

from 11,30,445 to 8,20,333. The primary education level exhibited a marginal rise from 487,715 to 506,331, while the primary education level witnessed a decline from 701,609 to 637,519. The data indicates a decline in middle-level education from 882,543 to 734,828. The aforementioned statement suggests the presence of promising prospects for the enhancement of skill sets and the emergence of socio-economic opportunities within the sector.

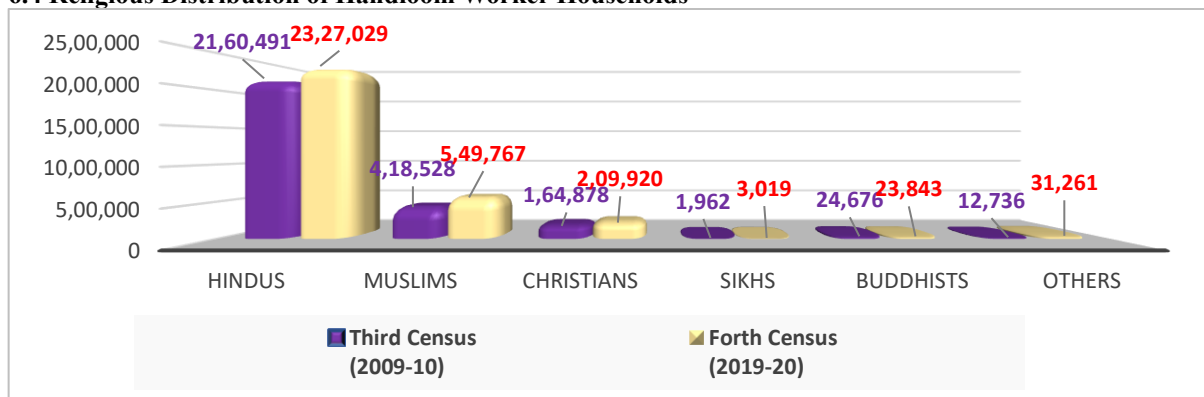
6.3 Geographic Distribution of Handloom Worker Households



Source *Third All India Handloom Census 2009-10
*Fourth All India Handloom Census 2019-20

The graph 6.3 shows the population of handloom worker households in India, focusing on their distribution in rural and urban areas. Data from the third and fourth censuses shows a significant increase in rural handloom engagement, from 24,21,117 to 27,48,445. In urban areas, the number of households engaged in handloom work increased from 362,154 to 3,96,395. The overall count of households engaged in handloom work across India increased from 2783271 in the third census to 3144839 in the fourth census. This growth in occupations and activities highlights the enduring significance of the handloom sector in India's socio-economic framework.

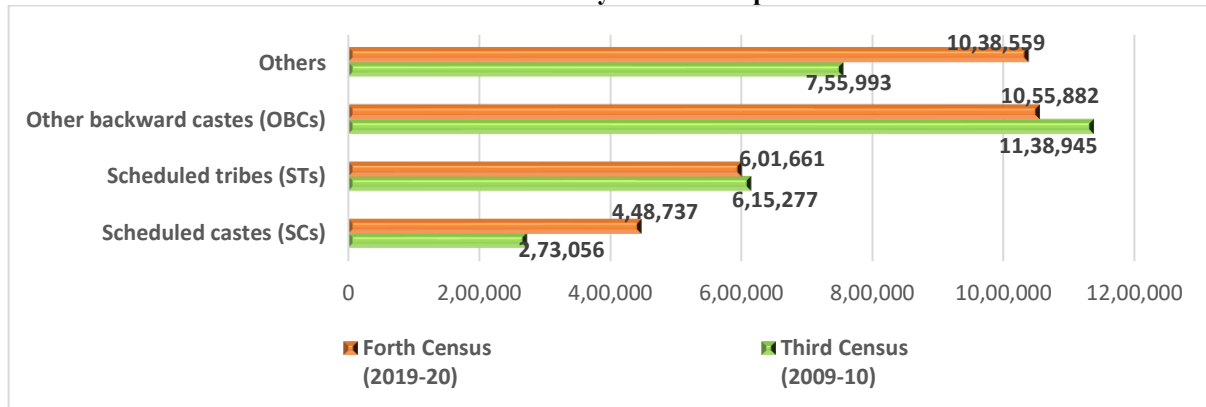
6.4 Religious Distribution of Handloom Worker Households



Source *Third All India Handloom Census 2009-10
*Fourth All India Handloom Census 2019-20

The graph 6.4 shows the religious distribution of households involved in handloom work in India, based on two censuses: 2009–10 and 2019–20. The majority of households engaged in handloom work were Hindu, with 23,27,029 households in the fourth census. Muslim households saw a significant increase, from 4,18,528 households to 5,49,767. Christian households saw growth, while Sikh households saw a rise from 1,962 to 3,019. Buddhist households saw a slight decrease. The category of "others" saw a notable increase, with the number of households growing from 12,736 to 31,261. This data highlights the religious diversity within the handloom workforce and the significant expansion of the sector, as individuals from diverse religious backgrounds actively engage in handloom activities, significantly influencing the socio-economic fabric of the nation.

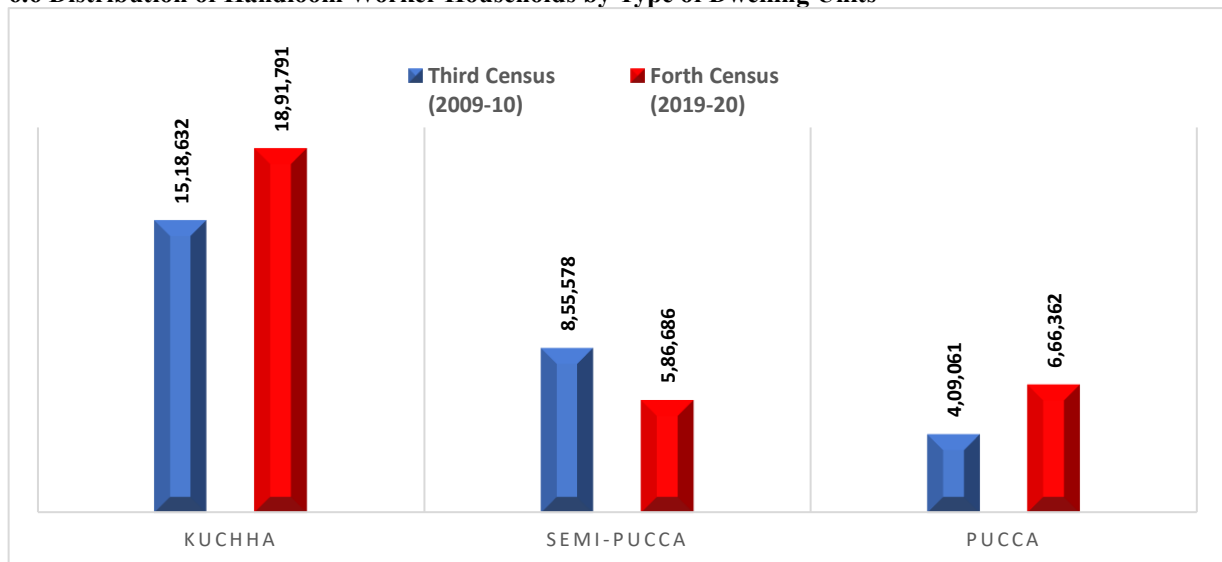
6.5 Distribution of Handloom Worker Households by Social Groups



Source *Third All India Handloom Census 2009-10
*Fourth All India Handloom Census 2019-20

The graph 6.5 shows the comparison of handloom-working households in India by social category. The data comes from the third and fourth censuses. Scheduled Caste (SC) households doing handloom employment have increased significantly. The count increased from 2,73,056 to 4,48,737, indicating increased SC handloom participation. The number of Scheduled Tribe (ST) homes declined slightly from 6,15,277 to 6,01,661. The number of OBC households dropped from 11,38,945 to 10,55,882. However, "other" households rise from 7,55,993 to 10,38,559. This study illuminates the changing dynamics of social group representation in handloom worker homes. It shows that Scheduled Castes (SCs) have increased their handloom industry participation, whereas other social groups have either remained stable or fluctuated.

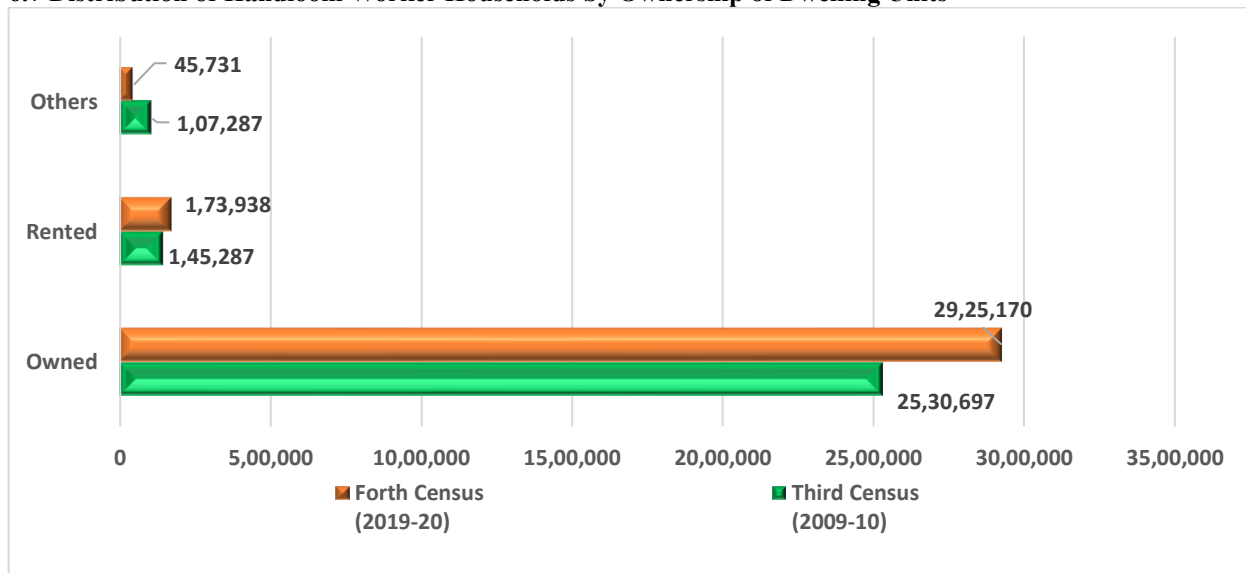
6.6 Distribution of Handloom Worker Households by Type of Dwelling Units



Source *Third All India Handloom Census 2009-10
*Fourth All India Handloom Census 2019-20

The graph 6.6 shows a comparative analysis of handloom work households in India, based on the third and fourth census. The data shows a significant increase in kuccha dwelling units, with the number of such households rising from 15,18,632 to 18,91,791. However, semi-pucca dwelling units, which are partially permanent, experienced a significant decline, with the number of semi-pucca dwellings decreasing from 8,55,578 to 586,686. Pucca dwelling units saw a notable increase from 409,061 to 666,362. The study suggests a shift in living conditions for handloom workers, indicating a shift towards more stable and enduring housing arrangements.

6.7 Distribution of Handloom Worker Households by Ownership of Dwelling Units



Source *Third All India Handloom Census 2009-10
*Fourth All India Handloom Census 2019-20

The graph 6.7 shows a comparative analysis of the distribution of households of handloom workers in India, categorised by the ownership status of their dwelling units. The data utilised in this analysis is derived from the third and fourth census. It is worth noting that a significant proportion of households engaged in handloom work possess their own dwelling units. Specifically, the number of such households has observed an upward trend, rising from 25,30,697 to 29,25,170. The data reveals a notable increase in the number of households residing in rented units, with a rise from 145,287 to 173,938. The category labelled "Others" encompasses households that possess alternative forms of ownership. Notably, there has been a significant decrease observed within this category, with the number of households declining from 107,287 to 45,731. This observation suggests a prevailing sense of stability within this sector and has the potential to contribute positively towards enhancing the living conditions of these individuals.

According to the findings of the third handloom census, it has been determined that the average annual earnings of households engaged in handloom activities amount to Rs. 36,498, which means a monthly income of Rs. 3,041.

6.8 Income from handloom activity

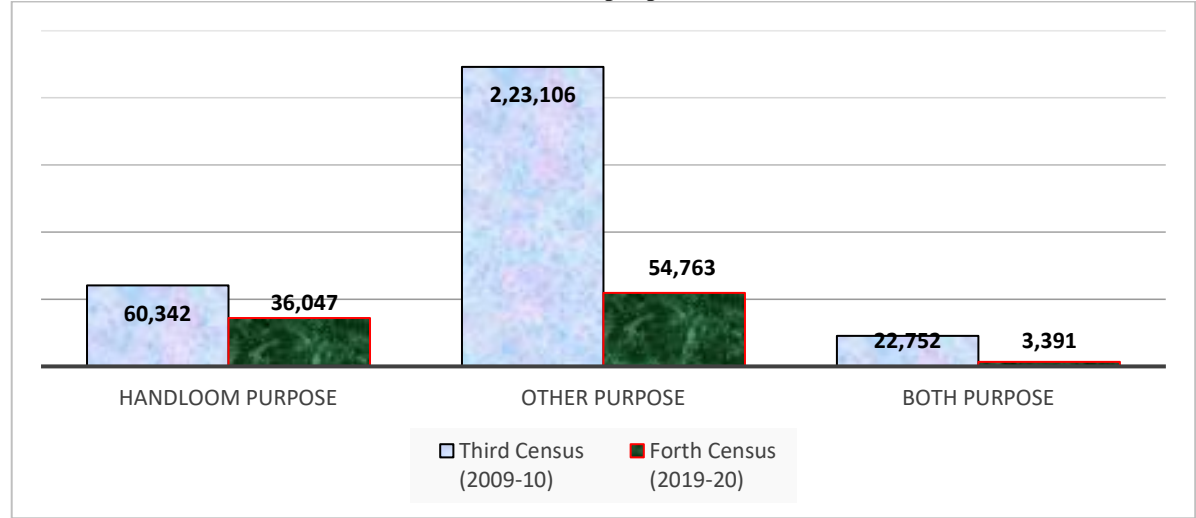
Income Per Month	Handloom Households
Less than 5000	21,09,525
5001-10000	8,24,021
Above 10,000	2,11,293

Source: Fourth All India Handloom Census 2019-20

The 4th Handloom Census in India reveals that 21,09,525 households have a monthly income below 5000 rupees, indicating low-income households in the handloom sector. The next income bracket, ranging from 5001 to 10,000 rupees, comprises 8,24,021 households, indicating a major portion of the population earning very low incomes.

The third and fourth handloom census in India reveal significant income disparities within the handloom industry. The average annual earnings for households in the sector are Rs. 36,498, resulting in a monthly income of Rs. 3,041. The fourth census shows a significant majority of 21,09,525 households with monthly incomes less than 5,000 rupees, indicating low-income households. The data also shows that 8,24,021 households have incomes between 5,001 and 10,000 rupees per month. A considerable proportion of households face challenges making ends meet due to their modest earnings, while a relatively limited segment of the workforce attains comparatively higher income levels.

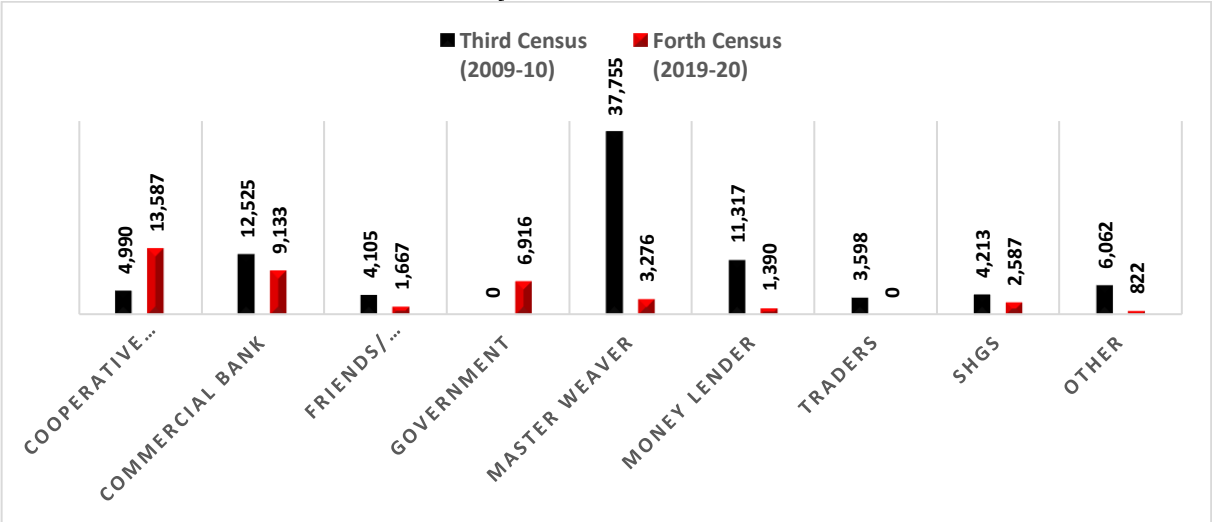
6.9 Distribution of handloom households in debt and purpose of debt



Source *Third All India Handloom Census 2009-10
*Fourth All India Handloom Census 2019-20

The graph 6.9 reveals a significant decrease in debt among households of handloom workers in India, specifically for handloom-related purposes. The number of households with debt decreased from 60,342 in the previous census to 36,047 in the current census. However, there was a significant decrease in households with debt for other purposes, from 223,106 to 54,763. This indicates a decrease in the proportion of households carrying debt for both handloom and other purposes. The number of households burdened by debt specifically related to handloom activities has decreased from 22,752 to 3,391. This suggests an improvement in the overall financial situation within the handloom sector and a reduced reliance on debt for various purposes.

6.10 Distribution of handloom households by source of loan

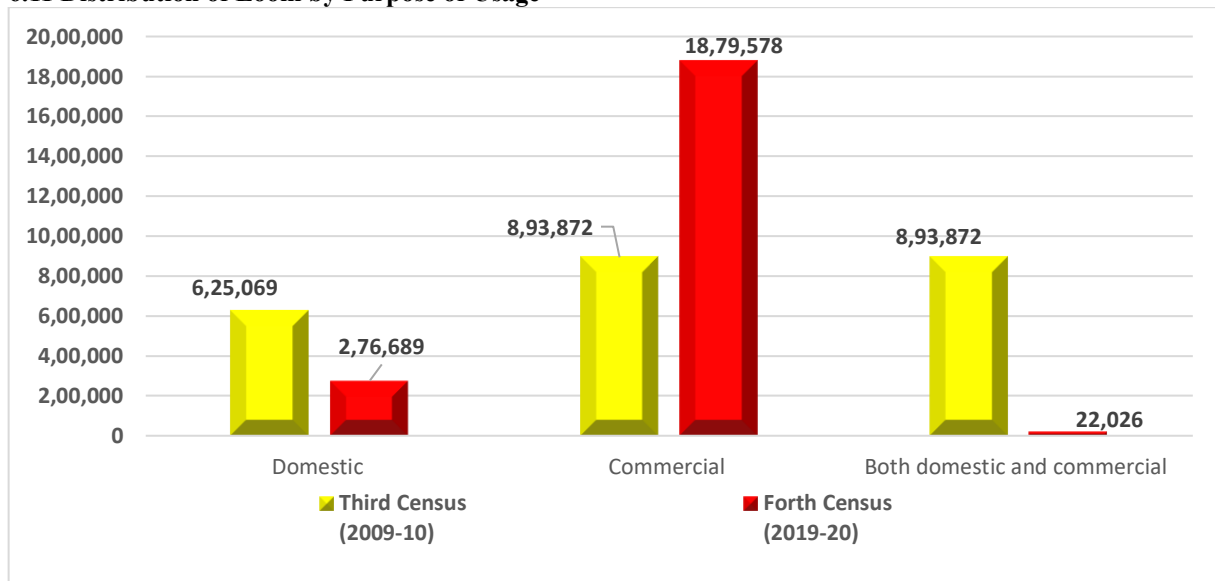


Source *Third All India Handloom Census 2009-10
*Fourth All India Handloom Census 2019-20

The graph 6.10 presents a comparative analysis of loan sources for handloom worker households in India, based on data from two censuses: the third from 2009–10 and the fourth from 2019–20. The fourth census showed a significant rise in cooperative societies as the primary means of obtaining loans, with the number of households using this method increasing from 4,990 to 13,587. However, the third census showed a decline in households relying on commercial banks, with a decrease from 12,525 to 9,133. Borrowing from friends and relatives also decreased. The government played a prominent role in providing loans to individuals, with 6,916 households identified as beneficiaries. The number of households receiving loans from master weavers decreased from 37,755 to 3,276. Money lenders and traders also experienced

declines in their activities. Self-help groups (SHGs) emerged as a notable avenue for providing loans to 2,587 households. The data highlights the dynamic nature of loan sources available to handloom worker households, with a shift towards cooperative societies and government initiatives. Traditional sources like master weavers, money lenders, and traders have also experienced a decline in prominence.

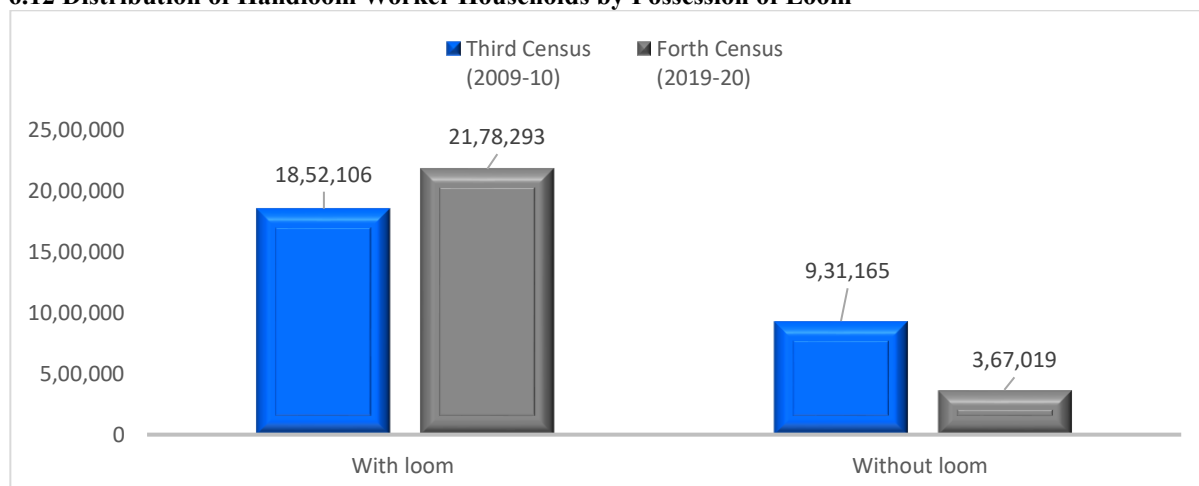
6.11 Distribution of Loom by Purpose of Usage



Source *Third All India Handloom Census 2009-10
*Fourth All India Handloom Census 2019-20

The graph 6.11 presents a comparative analysis of the loan utilisation patterns among handloom worker households in India, based on data collected during the third census (2009–10) and the fourth census (2019–20). In the context of the fourth census, a noteworthy decline is evident in the number of loans acquired for domestic purposes. Specifically, there has been a decrease from 625,069 households to 276,689 households. In contrast, there was a notable surge in loans specifically intended for commercial purposes, with the number of households availing of such loans increasing significantly from 893,872 to 1,879,578. The number of households availing of loans for both domestic and commercial purposes witnessed a notable increase, reaching a total of 22,026 households, as reported in the fourth census. The data presented herein demonstrates a noteworthy trend towards the utilisation of loans for commercial activities, suggesting a potential growth in entrepreneurial pursuits or business-related endeavours within households of handloom workers. Conversely, there has been a marked decline in the use of loans for domestic purposes.

6.12 Distribution of Handloom Worker Households by Possession of Loom



Source *Third All India Handloom Census 2009-10
*Fourth All India Handloom Census 2019-20

The graph 6.12 shows a comparative analysis of the possession of looms among households of handloom workers in India, incorporating data from both the third census (2009–10) and the fourth census (2019–20). In the fourth census, a significant rise in the number of households equipped with looms was observed, with figures increasing from 18,52,106 to 21,78,293. In contrast, there was a notable reduction in the number of households lacking looms, with a decrease observed from 931,165 to 367,019. The data presented in this study demonstrates a notable upward trend in the ownership of looms within households of handloom workers. This finding implies that there has been an enhanced availability of the fundamental equipment required for handloom operations. Consequently, this development holds the potential to foster growth and ensure the long-term viability of the handloom sector.

7. Findings:

Comparing the third and fourth All India Handloom Censuses' socio-economic situations of handloom workers in India revealed numerous notable findings:

- The number of male handloom workers has increased from 848,473 to 975,733. However, female handloom workers fell from 2,998,362 to 2,546,285. In the handloom sector, gender distribution has changed.
- Educational attainment: Those without formal education have declined while those with primary education have increased slightly. However, middle-level schooling has declined. These tendencies reflect skill and socioeconomic growth.
- Geographic Distribution: Rural and urban households involved in handloom work increased, highlighting the sector's importance in both.
- Religious Diversity: Handloom work involves diverse religious households. The sector's contribution to religious diversity is seen in rising Muslim and "other" families.
- Social Group Representation: SC and "other" families have grown in the handloom sector.
- Housing Conditions: Kuccha dwelling units have increased while semi-pucca units have decreased. Pucca housing units have grown, signifying better living circumstances.
- Dwelling Unit Ownership: Many handloom households now own their homes, indicating increased stability and living conditions.
- Income: Most households make less than 5,000 rupees per month, emphasising the low income of many handloom workers. This means the sector needs income-boosting initiatives.
- Debt Trends: A considerable fall in handloom and other family debt indicates improving financial conditions for handloom workers.
- Cooperative societies and government efforts are becoming major credit sources, whereas money lenders are declining.
- Loan Purpose: Handloom households are using loans for commercial purposes, suggesting increase in entrepreneurship and business.
- Loom Ownership: Loom ownership has increased, improving access to handloom equipment and the sector's long-term stability.

8. Conclusion:

This research paper presents a comparative analysis conducted in this study, which focuses on examining the socio-economic conditions of handloom workers in India. The analysis is based on data obtained from the third and fourth All India Handloom Censuses. By comparing the findings from these two censuses, we gain valuable insights into the ever-changing nature of the handloom sector in India. The handloom industry, renowned for its profound historical and cultural significance, encounters a multitude of socio-economic challenges. It is worth noting that there has been a noticeable shift in gender dynamics, characterised by a substantial rise in male involvement. This trend underscores the imperative for the implementation of policies that are inclusive of all genders.

The observed advancements in housing conditions, the increase in ownership of dwelling units, and the notable decrease in household debt collectively signify positive strides in the socio-economic well-being of handloom workers. The upward trajectory of revenue generated from commercial activities, coupled with the expansion of cooperative societies as viable sources of loans, represents encouraging developments for the economic advancement of the sector.

In light of the favourable advancements, it is important to note that the data highlights the enduring prevalence of low-income levels among a considerable proportion of handloom workers. In order to optimise the well-being of handloom

workers, it is imperative to implement specific policies and interventions that effectively tackle income disparities and promote entrepreneurial endeavours within the sector.

The research findings presented in this study provide valuable insights into the socio-economic conditions of handloom workers in India. These insights have the potential to inform policy development and interventions that are specifically designed to enhance the livelihoods of this vulnerable group. By shedding light on the intricate dynamics of the handloom sector, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by handloom workers and offers a foundation for targeted initiatives aimed at improving their socio-economic well-being. The handloom industry possesses profound historical significance as well as a notable economic contribution and socio-cultural importance. Consequently, it is imperative to bestow careful attention and support on this sector to ensure its sustained growth and foster socio-economic development.

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