



## **SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITIONS OF HANDLOOM WEAVERS: A CASE STUDY OF WEAVERS IN ZUANGTUI CLUSTER, AIZAWL, MIZORAM**

**Lalmalsawmi Renthlei** 

Department of Economics, Govt. Johnson College, Aizawl, Mizoram

Email: [mycerenthlei@rediffmail.com](mailto:mycerenthlei@rediffmail.com)

 Lalmalsawmi Renthlei: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8875-3984>

### **ABSTRACT**

*Handloom weaving, known to the Mizos right from the historic ages plays an important role in the economic development of Mizoram. It contributes significantly in generating employment opportunities and sustaining livelihood to the weavers. In the present study, an analysis is done on the socio-economic profile of handloom weavers and problems of this industry in Zuangtui Handloom Cluster that lies at the outskirts of Aizawl City, Mizoram. This study is conducted on the basis of both primary and secondary data sources. It reveals that the condition of the weavers is weak due to financial constraints, health problem and poor Government support.*

**Keywords:** *Handloom Weavers, Marketing Problems, Zuangtui, Design, Yarn.*

### **Introduction**

Handloom industry plays a significant role in the Indian economy. This industry after agriculture is the largest sector in India as it boosts in creating massive opportunities of employment especially for the working class. Over a period of time it has developed a lot with a rich cultural heritage that it created a dominant role in Indian textile industry. It has widely spread all over the country. It employs about 40

lakhs weavers and allied workers. This shows the dexterity and artistic ability of weavers to produce attractive products. It has major role in developing the livelihood of rural people and eradicating poverty as most of the weavers live in rural area. It is symbolic of Indian culture forming part of great heritage of art. The Indian cotton fabrics enjoyed worldwide patronage. The handloom sector forms both warp and weft of cultural fabric of India. It contributes

nearly 15% of the cloth production in the country and also contributes to the export earnings of the country. 95% of the world's hand-woven fabric comes from India.

In respect of Mizoram in particular, handloom industry occupies a distinctive and important place in the indigenous culture<sup>2</sup> of Mizoram. After agriculture, handloom industry is one emerging sector that has generated huge employment for the skilled and unskilled labour. Mizoram has huge potential for investment particularly in the field of handloom and handicrafts. In earlier times, Mizo women expressed their craftsmanship through the decorative weaving with the use of a loin loom or back strap loom, creating designs, patterns and motifs woven. *Puan* is the cloth, which is woven. 'Puan' in Mizo language can mean any piece of cloth, and even when it is tied on the waist and worn as a lower garment, it is still called 'puan'. A *puan* is normally about a yard in length and from 44 inches to 54 inches in breadth. The decorative weaving done on the surface of the cloth is known as *Zeh*. *Puan* were the only garments during the earlier periods, worn by both Mizo men and women.

Weaving still holds an integral part in the Mizo life. The handloom products are famous for the use of vibrant tribal color combinations which are very distinct from other traditional attires of the country. Intricate designs are made on the traditional textiles and the demands for these textiles are ever increasing. They are designed by copying motifs and patterns from other traditional textiles. *Puan* are also taken outside the state for exhibition cum sale.

## **Significance of the Study**

Handloom industry plays a crucial role in the socio-economic development of the rural masses in the north eastern region. Despite the largest concentration of handlooms in the country (more than 65% of the total looms) a majority (62%) of the looms in NE states are engaged in domestic production only. Majority of the weavers are women and through this, they have found a niche in the international markets of handloom. This has made them self-reliant financially and help them lead life with dignity and respect. There has been a lot of study on Thenzawl Cluster while there is a lack of it in the case of Zuangtui Cluster, Aizawl. This study is important in finding out the socio-economic conditions of weavers in Zuangtui Cluster who have been contributing a lot in handloom production in Mizoram especially Aizawl City.

## **Study Area**

Zuangtui Industrial Estate is located at the outskirts of eastern part of Aizawl City, Mizoram. The area comprises of various small-scale industries like Cotton Mills, Bakery, Flour mills and handloom industries. Zuangtui Handloom Cluster was developed by the Government of Mizoram in December, 2015. At present there are around 400 weavers.

## **Objectives of the Study**

The objectives of the study are:

- 1) To study the socio-economic conditions of the handloom weavers of Zuangtui Handloom Cluster.

2) To examine the problems and prospects of the handloom industry in this cluster.

### Methodology

Based on primary data that was collected from 120 respondents by using a structured questionnaire and through an informal personal interview method and secondary data that was collected from books, periodic journals, articles related to the present research, this study was conducted.

**Primary Data:** Primary data are collected from 120 weavers working under societies or independent weavers. For data survey a structured questionnaire is used which contain simple, multiple choice questions. Observation method and personal interview method are also used for collection of primary data.

**Secondary Data:** Sources of secondary data like published and unpublished reports by the government, departments and societies of the handloom sector, books and periodic journals are used for collection of secondary data for this study.

### Data Analysis and Interpretation

The data is collected from 120 sample respondents by using a structured questionnaire and through personal interview. The data is analyzed by using percentage method on the basis of age, sex, marital status, educational level, income per month, type of product, various problems of handloom weavers, weaver's health etc.

**Table 1: Age of Weaver**

Sl. No.	Age Group	% of Respondents
1	Below 20	10
2	20 - 30	50
3	31 - 40	35
4	41 - 50	2.5
5	51 above	2.5
6	Total	100

*Source: Field Survey*

According to the above table, a majority of the respondents are in between the age of 20-30 years i.e. 50% of the total respondents, 35% of the respondents are in between the age of 31-40 years. It is observed that only 2.5% of the respondents are above the age of 41 years

**Table 2: Gender of Weaver**

Sl. No.	Gender	% of worker
1	Male	30
2	Female	70
3	Total	100

*Source: Field Survey*

Of the sample 120 weavers, 70% consists of female weavers whereas 30% belongs to male weavers. As weaving is mainly considered to be the work of women from historic period (Sangkima 2004), the composition of weavers shows the majority of female weavers in the study area as well. Most of the male weavers are from Myanmar.

**Table 3: Marital Status of Weaver**

Sl. No.	Marital Status	% of weaver
1	Married	45
2	Single	49
3	Widow/ Widower	2.5
4	Divorcee	3.5
5	Total	100

Source: Field Survey

According to the above data, 49% of the total weavers are single and 45% are married, 2.5 % are widow or widower and 3.3% are divorcee.

**Table 4: Educational Level of Respondents**

Sl. No.	Educational Level	% of weaver
1	1 to 5	45.8
2	6 to 10	36.6
3	11 to 12	14.3
4	Graduates	3.3
5	Total	100

Source: Field Survey

Regarding the educational level of the weavers, all the respondents are literates. Among these respondents 45.8% are below 5<sup>th</sup> class and 36.6% are in between class 6 to 10 while 14.1 % belongs to higher secondary and very few 3.3% are graduates.

**Table 5: Category of Weaver**

Sl. No.	Category of weaver	% of weaver
1	Independent weaver	15.8
2	Under middlemen	70.8
3	Co-operative weaver	13.4
4	Total	100

Source: Field Survey

According to the above data, 15.8% of the respondents are independent weavers who have their own looms and do the weaving in their own house whereas 70.8% are weavers under middlemen and only 13.3% are co-operative weavers.

**Table 6: Working Hours Per Day**

Sl. No.	Working hours	% of weavers
1	Upto 6 hours	0.83
2	6 to 8 hours	2.5
3	8 to 10 hours	30.8
4	10 hours above	65.8
5	Total	100

Source: Field Survey

In terms of hours spent per day in weaving, 65.8% of the respondents work more than 10 hours a day; 30.8% work for 8 to 10 hours per day and 2.5% work for 6 to 8 hours a day and hardly 1% work upto 6 hours a day.

**Table 7: Monthly Income of the Respondents**

Sl. No.	Monthly income	% of weavers
1	Upto 15000	58.3
2	15001 - 20000	5.8
3	20001- 25000	23.3
4	Above 25000	12.5
5	Total	100

Source: Field Survey

According to the above data, about 58.3% earn a monthly income of upto Rs 15000/- and 5.8% earn between Rs 15001 to 20000; 23.3% earn a monthly income between Rs 20001 and 25000/- and 12.5% earn monthly income above Rs 25000/-.

**Table 8: Experience in handloom weaving**

Sl. No.	Years of experience	% of weavers
1	0 - 5	70
2	6 - 10	20.8
3	11 - 15	4.16
4	15 above	5
5	Total	100

Source: Field Survey

Regarding the years spent on weaving, 70% of the weavers have an experience of weaving upto 5 years; 20.8% have an experience of 6 to 10 years and 14.16% of them have an experience of 11 to 15 years and 5% have an experience of weaving for more than 15 years.

**Table 9: Health Problems**

Sl. No.	Sickness	% of weavers
1	Eye sight	9.16
2	Back pain	24.1
3	Knee pain	6.6
4	Joint pain	3.5
5	Others	33.3
6	NIL	23
7	Total	100

Source: Field Survey

According to the above data, the most common health problem is back pain which 24.1% of the weavers have; 9.16% have an eye sight problem, 6.6% having knee pain; 3.3% with joint pain; 33.3% complain about other illness like stomach problem, headache, nerve problem etc. and interestingly about 28% have no complaint about their health.

**Table 10: Product Type Table**

Sl. No.	Product type	% of weavers
1	Puanchei/ Ngotekherh	2.5
2	Thilchhah	80.9
3	Puanzeh	16.6
4	Total	100

Source: Field Survey

In the case of product type, 80.9% of the weavers produce ‘*thilchhah*’<sup>3</sup> plain and ‘*thilchhah*’ designed; 16.6% of them produce ‘*puanzeh*’ and only 2.5% are producing traditional *Puanchei* or *Ngotekherh*.

**Table 11: Marketing problems**

Sl. No.	Marketing problems	% of weavers
1	Yes	8.3
2	No	91.6
3	Total	100

Source: Field Survey

According to the above data, 91.6% of the weavers have no problems regarding marketing of their produce whereas 8.3% of them have marketing problems.

**Table 12: Financial problems**

Sl. No.	Financial problems	% of weavers
1	Yes	21.6
2	No	78.3
3	Total	100

Source: Field Survey

According to the above data, 78.3% of the weavers have no problems regarding finance and 21.6% of the weavers have financial problems.

**Table 13: Landholdings**

Sl. No.	Land holdings	% of weavers
1	Agricultural land	4.16
2	Land for household	9.16
3	No land	86.6
4	Total	100

Source: Field Survey

According to the above data, 86.6% of the weavers have no landholdings whereas 9.16% have landholdings for household and 4.16% have landholdings for agriculture.

**Table 14: Possession of assets**

Sl. No.	Assets possessed	% of weavers
1	Television set	2.5
2	Mobile handset	79.16
3	None of the above	18.3
4	Total	100

Source: Field Survey

In terms of asset possession, 79.16% have mobile handset and 2.5% have Television set and 18.3% have none of the above assets at all.

**Table 15: Bank account holder**

Sl. No.	Account holder	% of weavers
1	Yes	34.16
2	No	65.83
3	Total	100

Source: Field Survey

According to the above data, 65.83% do not have bank account and 34.16 have the same. The figure is less for account holder mainly because Burmese weavers / foreigners fall into this category.

**Table 16: Assistance from Government**

Sl. No.	Assistance from Government	% of weavers
1	Yes	13.3
2	No	86.6
3	Total	100

Source: Field Survey

According to the above data, only 13.3% of the weavers have got assistance from Government and it was found out that they are the co-operative weavers only and the rest, 86.6% working as independent weavers, have not availed any assistance from the government.

**Table 17: Designing**

Sl. No.	Designing	% of weaver
1	Own design	8.3
2	Design ordered by buyers	12.5
3	Market demand	79.16
4	Total	100

Source: Field Survey

According to the above data, only 8.3% of the weavers produce their own design. This shows that only few weavers possess skills in designing new motif that has not been available in the market to attract buyers and 12.5% produce design ordered by the buyers of that particular product. 79.16% of the weavers produce

design according to the demand prevailing in the market.

### **Findings**

Zuangtui Handloom Cluster has two types of problems - Input related problems and Weavers related problem

Input related problems may include:

- *Delay in supply of yarn:* Sometimes the supply of yarn may be delayed for the recognised authority. Then the society cannot produce the product at the right time. Automatically they are forced to go to purchase the yarn from local source that tends to reduce the quality of product.
- *High cost of production:* Co-operative societies are facing the problem of limited finance for their operation just as in the case of “A report of survey on handloom sector in Kerala” submitted by Department of Economics and Statistics of Government of Kerala (2009). In the case of Zuangtui Cluster, financial support received by the co-operative weavers is so meager to have huge impact on the socio-economic conditions of the weavers. Cost of production sometimes increases compared to previous year. This may lead to shortage of finance. In order to solve these problems, the apex authority should take remedial action.
- *Inadequacy of supply of yarn:* Sometimes there is inadequacy of supply of yarn in terms of colours of different variety that affects the entire production of the cluster. Due to the

unavailability of good quality cotton yarn, they have to use only the yarns available i.e., acrylic and rayon. These yarns are not suitable for hot regions; thus, the products are not saleable in many parts of the country. This similar problem was found in the case of a study done by Venkateswar, A (2014) when he studied the socio-economic conditions of the handloom weavers and the problems faced by the handloom weavers.

Weaver’s related problems include:

- *Lack of skilled weavers:* Skilled and efficient labours are centralized figure of every organisation. In the case of weavers, there is no need to achieve high qualification and high skill. Naturally, that will lead to a headache to cooperative society.
- *Lack of training:* It is the duty of the government to arrange advance training to co-operative weavers’ societies. The state government hardly conduct training for the weavers.
- *Poor knowledge about modernised technique and low performance of co-operative sector:* Due to lack of training and updating, the knowledge of weavers is very limited and they have no idea about modernized technique and design. This is major hindrance of development in this field. The same case was found in the study of D. Srinivasa Rao and Dr. N. Sreedhar (2017) about “socio economic condition of handloom weavers in Gannavaram Mandal of Krishna district in Andra Pradesh.

This study is based on extensive field work that indicates that though handloom weaving has many strengths and can be competitive under specific condition, the seeds of the crisis are inherent in the sector. These can be traced to two major factors - the low performance of the co-operative sector and the very low economic condition of the weavers. Even in the case of Zuangtui, there has been low performance of co-operative sector that aggravates the poor economic condition of the weavers.

### **Suggestions**

Regarding the above problems, the state government should pay more heed to the development of handloom industry in the region. Due to the small size of the houses, condition of weavers' work place is pathetic and problem of congestion in the work place is serious. Government should provide better infrastructure for the weavers.

Most of the weavers are Burmese that says a lot about the work culture of the local people. They lack hard work and perseverance that the Burmese have in taking up weaving activity. Government should organize awareness campaign about the feasibility of handloom weaving in Mizoram as a whole.

The youths of the state should be encouraged and inspired through sensitization programmes to take up self-employment opportunity in the field of handloom weaving.

Regular training programme in designing should be conducted for the

weavers so that their products become more marketable in national as well as international market.

### **Conclusion**

Handloom occupies a vital place in Mizoram economy in shaping the socio-economic fabric of society. This study indicates that though the Handloom industry offers a massive amount of employment opportunities, it is facing a lot of problems especially socio-economic problems like poor economic condition of the weavers, input related problems and the poor performance of the cooperative sector. Eventhough it plays vital role in reducing poverty, increasing employment, and enhancing household income and consumption in the state, this sector faces various challenges in the field of creative and innovative design that would increase the market value of the product both in local and national market. Therefore, financial, technical and policy supports of the Government for development of handloom industry in Mizoram is the need of an hour.

### **Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup>Annual Report 2017-18, Ministry of Textiles, Government of India.

<sup>2</sup>It is a distinctive culture that the indigenous people practice from time immemorial.

<sup>3</sup>Double-woven cloth.

<sup>4</sup>India.gov.in national portal of India 2009.

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