

GLOBALISATION

Pushes Varanasi Weavers To Hunger & Death

Tarun Kanti Bose

चतुर्दिशा

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People's Vigilance Committee for Human Rights
Asian Human Rights Commission

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Preface

There was an increasing demand for an independent document on the impact of globalisation on Varanasi weavers. The present booklet is an attempt to satisfy such a demand. I am thankful to Tarun Kanti Bose who went deep into the weavers colonies, interacted with the artisans, weavers and activists and through that emerged '*Globalisation pushes Varanasi Weavers to Hunger & Death*', which is an indictment to the neo-liberal policies pursued by the Indian Government since 1990s pauperising weavers, their children dying and dependents committing suicides. Meant for activists, academicians, policy makers, it also seeks to answer experts, especially who are votaries of economic reforms. Though India might be booming for them but you don't see it among weavers, farmers or people pushed to the margins.

The author is a senior journalist and writer on issue-based subjects who is deeply involved in grassroots activism and has been part of many of the social and political struggles. As an independent researcher he has conducted many in-depth research studies.

It tells the story how Varanasi weavers are suffering in the globalised economy, where the demand for their exquisite product is shrinking in the market faced by the onslaught of cheap imported alternatives. Government's insensitivity and Civil Society Organisation's slackness had worsened the situation pushing the weavers to brink of survival to face hunger, joblessness, gross underemployment, impoverished living conditions, chronic ailment and exploitation.

I am especially indebted to Siddique Hassan, Convenor, *Bunkar Dastkar Adhikar Manch* for taking the author to the interiors of the weavers' colonies. His organisational acumen and his capacity as a true weavers leader, demonstrated convincingly in his intrinsic link with their issues and his resolve to put up a brave front against it.

This document is description of Banarasi silk industry and analyses how the globalisation had been a death blow to the ancient Indian craft. But it also carries a message of hope depicting through the struggles launched by the weavers.

Varanasi

Dr. Lenin Raghuvanshi

UNDERSTANDING BANARASI SILK INDUSTRY

Woven by the highly skilled weavers of Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh, Banarasi silk sarees are the result of artisans' mastery in inter twining gold with yarn to produce zari. The tradition is estimated to be 8 to 10 centuries old. Since beginning, Banarasi sarees were woven on handlooms, which made it famous for its artistic designs, beautiful butis and exclusive motifs. However, over the past two decades, these sarees are also being woven on powerlooms.

During the last two decades, the structure of the Banarasi silk saree industry has undergone some important changes. The silk saree industry structure is a complex web of many actors like weavers, master-weavers, traders, raw material suppliers (who are big businessmen), and people involved in dyeing silk, designing, card making (which are used in the handloom to guide the silk according to the design), and zaridozi (embroidery). Though changes have taken place in the structure of the industry and in the relationship between various actors involved in handloom production in the cluster, it continues to be primarily feudal in character.



Looms Laying Idle

There are two types of loom owners. One is an independent producer who buys the raw material and sells finished sarees. The other type is one who is attached to a particular trader who provides design and raw material to loom owner. The payment in the case of the former is on the basis of price negotiation while in the case of latter it is a fixed conversion charge (piece rate). Many traders are also owners but they contract out their looms to weavers.

A visit to Bajardiha, Lallahpura and Bhaghwa Nala shows that saree weaving have been followed as an occupation during the last 30 to 40 years. As Ram Prasad Rajbar, an elderly weaver in Bhaghwa Nala said, "Weavers of my generation and prior to ours, used to go to the loom installed at the master's or *Gaddidar's* house. Even now also, some of the weavers from Bhaghwa Nala go to *Gaddidar's* house and earn about 80 per cent. But most of us prefer to work on the looms at our houses, as we can involve the entire family in the production process. Our women and girls do the nari bharana, a continuous process when the yarn for the weft is reeled on small cylindrical object. The weft-yarn is used in a shuttle called *dharki*, which is thrown from one to other side while weaving. Boys in our household help in the weaving process by throwing this shuttle while sitting beside the adult weaver on the loom. This is also a method by which the weaving skills are taught to the children."

But most of us prefer to work on the looms at our houses, as we can involve the entire family in the production process.

Asked about the production process involved in Banarasi silk sarees, Intermediate passed Kauser Ali, a young weaver of Bajardiha replied, "Specific designs are created by designers or *bunkars*, who work on their own or are employed by the *Gaddidars*. Then the designs are sent to specialised shops that alter the designs into a series of punch cards. These punch cards are sewed in a specified series and are installed into the jacquard device atop the loom, which guides the yarn (warp) according to the design⁵. The sarees are also woven on power looms. Though there are still some designs which cannot be woven on the power looms, many of the Banarasi saree designs are copied and used by the power loom owners. On a handloom, a saree can take one to two days to be woven. But one person can weave four such sarees on a power loom in a single day, if the electricity supply is not erratic.

" However, sarees woven in power looms and handlooms have their own market niche. Though the power looms products are increasingly sold by being misrepresented as handlooms."

" *Sarees* woven in power looms and handlooms have their own market niche. Though the power looms products are increasingly sold by being misrepresented as handlooms." Rather, it has added to the woes of the weavers and compounded their economic hardships as they are unable to compete on price with the machine-made fake product. Though the Handloom Reservation Act prohibits 11 items (including sarees) from being woven on power looms, but there is no evidence that it was being enforced," said Siddique Hassan, Convenor, Bunkar Dastkar Adhikar Manch (Forum for Rights of Weavers & Artisans) (FRWA)

However, the production of a *Banarasi saree* on a handloom undergoes many processes. The silk yarn called *Katan* is reeled, bleached and dyed. The dyed yarn is prepared for *Tana* (warp) and *Bana* (weft). In case of warp reeling *Tana Tanana* four to five persons are needed. The length of yarn reeled on a five feet long warp cylinder is sufficient for six lengths of a saree (33 metres). Yarn for the weft is reeled on a small (few centimetres long) cylindrical object and the process is called Nari bharna. Many such reels are needed to complete a saree. It is used in shuttle *Dharki* as also to bring out the designs Buti on the sarees. Nari bharna is almost a continuous process so far the loom is running. All other processes are one-time set-up jobs. Once set-up, six sarees are produced in a row i.e. till the warp yarn is exhausted. The design set-up on Jacquard lasts till next design is introduced.

The weavers, the main workers, who do the actual job of weaving a sari, can be separated into distinct categories.

■ Self-employed Weavers:

Weavers under this category have their own loom and buy their own raw material on credit from the raw material supplier. They weave the actual saree and then sell it to the trader or exporter directly or through middleman. The trader may sometime, help them in getting the raw material on credit. These weavers can be an individual weaver or a master-



Self -employed weaver

weaver, who design and weave and even get other weavers to weave on his handloom or on the weaver's own handloom. The Master weavers supply material, design, colours, and the ideas. These weavers engage wage earners and looks after the complete operation of the weaving process and the marketing of the fabric. The weaver earns meagre wages for the preparation of sarees, which may take him 5-6 days to 12-15 days. Therefore, this weaver has no option but to work hard to weave a saree in a shorter duration to earn more. This renders weaving an activity in which weavers are exploited. While they work harder, they in fact contribute to the greater profit of the Master weavers. *Gaddidars* and Master Weavers have access to the market and the demand trends. The numbers of these traders are only around three hundred. Hindus dominate the trading community while weavers are mostly Muslims. The weaver is only concerned with the production and is cut off from the market. They depend upon the traders for design and sale of their produce. In the city, the looms owners are mostly Muslims of weaving community living in different pockets/mohallas. The number of such weavers and master-weavers are on the decline over the last decade.

■ **Contract Weavers:** Individual weavers, who get raw material from the trader or master-weaver and weave a saree for wages. Wages are determined on the basis of the intricacy of the design and bargaining capacity of the weaver, which has weakened considerably during the last decade as the industry is facing a slump. If the weaver is working un-



Contract Weavers

der a master-weaver, his wages are even lower as the master-weaver takes a cut. Weavers who work under a master-weaver earn only 80% of the wages they would have received if they were working directly under a trader.

Most of the traders are members of the cooperatives and also have their own business in the form of a registered firm. The poor weavers are rarely members of these societies and even if they are members they get no benefit except for getting job-work weaving orders placed by the traders.

■ **Loomless Weavers:** Weavers, who do not have their own looms, are employed as a wage earner on a handloom by the trader or master-weaver, where they are supplied the raw material and weave the saree. Another kind of loomless weaver is the one, who has been given a loom by the trader installed at their home and they take raw material from the employer and weave a saree. The loom continues to be owned by the trader and weavers is paid only wage. Loomless weavers are typically found in rural areas.

■ **Cooperative Society Members:** Weavers, who are members of cooperative societies, But according to weavers, a majority of the cooperatives are controlled and 'owned' by the traders themselves. Most of the traders are members of the cooperatives and also have their own business in the form of a registered firm. The poor weavers are rarely members of these societies and even if they are members they get no benefit except for getting job-work weaving orders placed by the traders. However, to ameliorate the conditions of the weavers, the government intervened and established co-operatives. The objective was to end the isolation of weavers from the market and vertically integrate them with the source of supply of raw material on the one hand and with the actual market on the other.

Aspects of micro-credit were also incorporated in their functioning. Being plagued with mismanagement and corruption, cooperatives failed in their appointed task. Benefits failed to reach the poor weavers. A few among the weavers having a clout to wield pocketed benefits by floating fictitious co-operatives. These handfuls of

beneficiaries within the Muslim weavers emerged as another set of traders calling themselves as Master Weavers rather than *Gaddidars*.

They use this terminology as a justification for obtaining continued benefits from the co-operatives. Thus the industry has now two sets of traders, Hindus as *Gaddidars* and Muslims as Master Weavers. For the poor weavers, both *Gaddidars* and Master Weavers are one and the same and are being perceived as belonging to the same flock. The *Gaddidars* / Master Weavers get workers cards issued from the silk cooperatives, and obtain silk raw material from the cooperatives as workers. The cooperatives claim that after accounting for all the working expenses, the profit is distributed among the weavers at the end of the year. Unfortunately this is not the case. Weavers share is used as a working capital, bank loans and for various other schemes.

The members are supposed to be provided with insurance, and have access to the Thrift funds. The Master weavers, with the help of dummy memberships of the cooperatives, try to appropriate the benefits which are actually given by the Government to the cooperative societies. The provision of insurance and various other funds exist only on paper. Instead of ameliorating the plight of the weavers, it can be inferred that the Government run cooperative institutions created further misery for them, by helping create another set of exploiters - the master weavers. The cooperative intervention has made a very conspicuous difference in their lives. It has created islands of affluence in an otherwise poor locality of weavers. One will find a sprinkling of palatial buildings sharply contrasting with the poor dilapidated houses of the weavers in the decaying Madanpura, where most of the Master Weavers are living. Another fall out of this affluence was displacement of poor weavers living in the adjoining houses of the Master weavers. The locality is so dense that there is no place left for expansion. Thus the poor weavers were offered 'attractive' prices to sell their houses to their affluent neighbours. The displaced weavers migrated to rural areas. Paucity of space to accommodate the growing population also led to migration of weavers to rural areas.

Post to the visit to Bajardiha, Lallahpura and Bhaghwa Nala, it could be deduced that the individual weaver, who is at the centre stage of the Banarasi silk industry is the most exploited among all, who uses one's own material, loom, design and colour. The most critical problem for the weavers is the sale and marketing of the fabric, which they accomplish

directly or through the Gaddidar, the middleman or the trader. The Gaddidars control the production and marketing of silk fabrics and have considerable influence upon the social, cultural, economic and political life of the weaving community.

Individual weavers have poor connections at the raw material market and at the retail market of silk fabrics. When weaver like us go to the Gaddidar with a finished product, he points out to many defects namely, stains, defective design or pattern, motifs, etc. After considerable haggling, we strike the final deal. We are often given a post-dated cheque of a faraway bank. In need of immediate hard cash, we go to the commission agent with the cheque and get money after paying 2-3 percent commission. In the need of hard cash, we sell our product directly, but are forced to accept a cheap rate," points out Muhammad Suleiman of Bajardiha.

Till the recent past, the Banarasi silk saree trade was almost entirely in the hands of Hindu traders, whose shops are located in the Kunjgali locality in the city. Weaving, on the other hand, was entirely in the hands of Muslim weaving community especially Ansaris in the city. Majority of the small-traders (grihasthas) are Ansaris. But being the beneficiaries of the cooperatives by appropriating the gains, the traders registered decades ago and became chairmen themselves. Now majority of the small-traders have become exporters themselves and are into the business parallel to the earlier Hindu traders.

The weavers, cut off from the market, are not able to actively participate in the price negotiation of their produce and are at the trader's mercy. The traders extract twin advantages as they have market information and mercantile capital. With the growing labour force joining the industry, skilled weavers add up while there is little growth in the demand. Increasing supply of labour saw decreasing price/wages to the weavers. At the same time, the fluctuating prices of silk and artificial shortages created by the suppliers caught the weavers in a precarious situation. Increasing price of silk makes it out of the reach of majority of the poor weavers, who switched over to cheap artificial fibres. This led them to start using relatively poor quality of raw material, where the piece rate earning is much less than those out of the weaving done by using the better quality of the raw material.

There is a slight difference in the earnings of an independent loom owner and those attached to a trader. Normally, an independent loom owner

gets better price but lack of holding capacity and fluctuating raw material prices force them to compromise with the payment and delaying tactics of the traders. Apart from this, the traders often find excuses on grounds of flaws in the quality of weaving to make deductions from even the agreed price. Due to such machinations of the trading community, the earnings of the weavers ultimately come down to piece rate, irrespective of the status of a weaver- be it independent or attached.

However, in majority of cases the payments to the weavers are made on a piece-rate basis. The normal piece rate varies from Rs.300 to Rs.1000 for a silk saree on handloom, depending upon the complexity of the design. The number of days it takes to complete a piece of saree depends upon the design and normally varies from three to 15 days. Some designs may even take a month.

The saree industry is not seeing much growth in demand, whereas the growing influx is adding more to the woes of skilled weavers. The weaving skill is passed down from one generation to the next. Weavers, who are often illiterate have relatively less 'security' of survival of their kin lacking in awareness and poor healthcare infrastructure and moreover, afflicted with myriad social problems characteristic to poor. Many mouths to feed and living constantly under the illusion that there is assured employment in the weaving trade. As the children of the weavers grow up, they set up their own looms or work as hired labour on others' loom and alternative employment opportunities force them to continue in their own traditional trade. Then, migration of weavers from city to rural areas exposed the rural labour to this trade. The rural labour found this trade offering better returns compared to working as marginal agricultural labour and they too adopted weaving.

The genesis to all sorts of social malaise in the silk

The weaving skill is passed down from one generation to the next. Weavers, who are often illiterate have relatively less 'security' of survival of their kin lacking in awareness and poor healthcare infrastructure and moreover, afflicted with myriad social problems characteristic to poor.

industry emanates from the gulf between a large army of weavers and squeezing of the job opportunities. As a fall out to the bigger gap, the profits have taken a downward trend for the loom owners and moreover, there are no alternative opportunities in other sectors for the weavers. Weavers attached with Master Weavers, for a little amount of loan, either in cash or in the form of raw material, taken by them. Even their labour or their children are pushed to the condition of servitude working under loom owners. Even the industry has both, bonded adult and child labour as well as bonded loom owners, also.

CHILDREN AND WOMEN IN BANARASI SILK INDUSTRY:

In the silk industry, children are the worst sufferers. Pushed to penurious conditions, weavers have to make their children sit on the looms and add to the earning of the family. Children help in creating design pattern (*Buti*) and also operate the shuttle (*Dharki phakna*), which speeds up production process. If the weavers have looms more than what his family member could operate, then they even hire adult and children. Children can be hired either on a little amount or in lieu of the loan disbursed to their parents. Bonded labour, however, can move from one owner to another provided the new looms owner pays off the outstanding debt to the first loom owner.

The role of women in Banarasi saree weaving process is quite critical but neither is they given that recognition nor good remuneration given to them. Work done by women is most strenuous, repetitive and quite un-stimulating. The work of saree *katran* is done by women by continuously sitting for 6 to 7 hours.

Women, who do the cutting, earn a pittance of Rs. 5 to Rs. 15/- a day by putting up a hard toil. Usually, the cutting work they carry out at their home.

However, women working in the saree industry are quite less and



A woman working doing *Anta & Nari* filling work

moreover, they work either to augment family incomes or to run the household, in absence of their spouses. Given the low piece rate wages in *nari bhara*i and the financial constraints faced in setting up even a handloom pushes women to move out of their homes and work as labour, despite social constraints.

The *Gaddidar* engage women for the katran work, *Anta*, *Nari* filling and even for cutting work. Though in the weaving of sarees, women are not involved, this has become the norm. They are involved in the menial tasks, such as '*nari bharna*', '*taana kheechna*', '*anta bharna*', making holes in cardboards for jacquards, cutting of threads and finishing of the woven saree.

Whatever women do either they are not paid or given pittance. They have been conveniently kept away from the entire saree weaving process. Even they are not allowed to sit on the handlooms, as they are seen to be weak, who cannot sit on the looms. Even there is no attempt to adapt the looms in accordance with the needs of women. In addition, there is a feeling that if the women were to come on the looms, men will lose their jobs, and the cost of the saree will drop drastically.

In the Banarasi Saree Sector, the various players transfer costs to women, who bear the brunt of subsidising the production. In fact if the women did not do the menial jobs without getting any remuneration, the cost of the finished product would be much higher than what it is at present. By not providing adequate healthcare and welfare infrastructure for the women workers the Government is culpable of transferring this cost on to women, who often suffer silently or live considerably reduced life spans.

In absence of crèche or day care facilities for their children, women putting up long hours, results in its adverse implication on their children. It denies the children, their congenial growth, without education, poor parenting and it's the consequences they suffer, when they are adults. Many children are drawn towards drugs, criminal or other nefarious activities.

The *Gaddidars* and master weavers in tandem with the male weavers or members of a family transfer significant amount of production costs, such as *Nari bhara*i on the women members of the household. However, this cost goes un-accounted while deciding the market price of the finished product. Measuring the financial implications on the transfer of the above costs on to women of the sector needs further attention.

WAGES:

Weavers in Banarasi Silk sector work under most appalling condition, where neither negotiations nor contract exists. It pushes weavers' deeply exploitative conditions, where *Gaddidars* violate all labour legislations and pinning down the weavers in never-ending cycle of privation.

Weavers toil hard in a condition where there no alternative opportunities left to them. Majority of them, have been working in the silk industry since their childhood. As regards wages, they are able to weave a saree in almost 10 days and they get something around Rs. 350-400, however, the actual sum depending upon the quality of the weaving.

Weavers, whom we met during our visit to Bajardiha, Lallahpura and Bhaghwa Nala work on the looms for nearly 12 hours a day. During the marriage season when the demand for Banarasi sarees increases, then the weavers have to work for long hours. Even prior to Id festivals when weavers need money, then most of the weavers toil for almost 16 hours a day.

In the Banarasi saree sector, dismal scenario abounds pertaining to the wages of the weavers. There is no system of written contract, the weavers go and buy raw silk from the market or from the *Gaddidars*. If it is the latter, then it is an advance by the *Gaddidars* to the weavers and when the weavers have finally woven the saree, the *Gaddidars* generally take it. Till the time the saree is not sold in the market, the weavers do not get anything. The other arrangement is that a weaver gets the design and silk from the *Gaddidars* and then weaves a saree. However, weaving normally spans 7 to 10 days and the saree is then given back to the *Gaddidars*. The weaver gets a wage payment, only when the saree is sold.

In the meanwhile during the intervening to manage his financial requirements, weavers have to take advance from the *Gaddidars*, thus entering into a form of bondage with the creditor. Such practices are also common in the saree industry. The possibility of additional wage earnings, coupled with no assistance from the weaver's co-operatives forces the weavers to take their children out of school and ask them to work at homes in saree weaving.

It came as a surprise that in saree weaving areas though a large number of weavers' families have been into this occupation for the last two to three generations, majority of them do not even own a loom. All looms are on contract and are owned by *Gaddidars*, who provide the weavers with the necessary raw materials.

"We are capable of earning about Rs. 400 to Rs. 500 for a saree, which in turn requires about 8 to 10 days for completion. However, there has been virtually no increase in the wages for the past five years. Most of the women folk of our family are involved in *nari bharai* and children work for nearly 16-20 hours over a period of a week," said Muhammad Sabban of Lallupura.

"The weavers have taken as a *fait accompli* to work under such low wages so they refrain from making any effort to set up our own looms. This is because the weavers feel that, if they set up their own looms, then their own funds would get blocked. This is because their 'staying capacity' is too low to sustain during the lead-time when the saree is given to the *Gaddidar* and payment is received," said Siddique Hassan. "When the weavers face financial crisis, most of them tend to take advance from the *Gaddidars*. Weavers are not willing to take any loan from the local moneylenders. The repayment of the loan is done in equal instalments at the time when completed saree is given to the *Gaddidar*," added Hassan.

As Ram Prasad Rajbhar of Baghwa Nala said, "We know that by taking advance or loan from the *Gaddidars* we actually get into some sort of bondage, till the entire loan is repaid. But we have no option left but to depend on the *Gaddidars*."

However, for majority of the weavers, though the element of indebtedness is not there because no interest is paid on the amount taken from the *Gaddidar*. At times, when weavers feel harassed at the hands of these *Gaddidars*, they look for a new master/*Gaddidar*, paying the loan taken by the weaver. In this way, the weavers keep on working for one master/*Gaddidar* or another but bondage remains the same, only hands change.

IMPACT OF GLOBALISATION ON THE *BANARASI SAREE* SECTOR

Demand of Banarasi sarees has shown a downward trend over the years. Since the 1990s, when the economic boom has been sweeping the nation, the wages of the weavers are declining day-by-day. Though the quality of the saree has gone up but it does not commensurate with the wages of the weavers. Presently, weavers who toil for 12 to 16 hours get half of the wages, which they got earlier. Moreover, the power looms have wreaked havoc in the lives of the weavers by snatching their work and pushing them to starvation. The middlemen and *Gaddidars* are taking full advantage of their helplessness.

Weavers' woes never ends, shopkeepers add one more to it by burdening them with complicated and tougher designs and further harass them by

claiming that there are no buyers for the finished products. Such manoeuvring tactics are used as ploy to push the weavers to the brink of disaster and further tighten the noose on their necks of the weavers. These designs are used to cutback in the number of orders, which has a crippling effect on the weavers existing precarious economic status. Thus weavers assume a greater onus of getting the work. Also they have additional tasks these days, such as cutting of jacquard cardboard designs, which was earlier, not their responsibility.

Weavers toil hard, starting their work at 8.00 a.m. till 6.00 p.m. at a stretch spanning 10 to 12 days but earns a miniscule Rs. 350/- on a saree. During 10 to 12 days, the women and children in the family do *Nari*, *Dharki* and *Anta* filling needed during the weaving but they are not paid for it. *Banarasi saree* industry has reduced women to the status of unpaid workers. Though these are important tasks but neither its given recognition nor the value that they deserve and even its not included while fixing the pricing of the saree.

In the words of Muniza Khan of the Gandhian Institute of Studies, Varanasi, "The plight of women is such that even if they earn Rs.10/- they do not have the right to spend it. They work, trapped in dark hovels like chicken. Their contribution does not have the kind of recognition that it deserves. Their contribution is not accounted for while the product pricing is done. There has been no work done with women, and for any change to happen in the sector, their education, organisation and struggle for their rights will need utmost priority."

As regards the availability of raw silk, it appears that the industry is passing through a phase of crisis. There is often an artificial scarcity of raw material created by traders. If a small weaver was to go to the market to buy silk, then it would be difficult for him/her to buy in larger quantities, by way of buying a *gathia* (bundle), which normally has 5-6 kilograms of raw silk. Weavers, who at the lowest rung of the industry neither have purchasing capacity to buy raw silk in huge quantities nor they have enough business in which the raw silk, if purchased could be used. However, interventions either by government co-operatives or community cooperatives in helping the weavers to gain easy access to raw silk, has been not of much positive consequence so the small and marginal weavers are left out in the bargain. They also do not have enough money at their disposal to block it by way of purchase of raw silk at the so-called subsidised rates offered by the cooperative. It is apparent that, the whole structure of the co-operatives is to allow the bigger weavers to take the advantage of the subsidy offered.

Bangalore silk is good but too expensive for majority of the weavers to purchase. Earlier it was an important component in the production of the sarees, as it was available in abundance and that too at cheaper prices. Prior to 1990, the cost of this silk used to be Rs. 100/- per kilogram but now its price is over Rs 1500/- per kilogram. 'Economic reforms' of the Central Government has harmed the sector with the unhindered entry of the Multinational Corporations (MNCs). Imported Chinese silk, which are cheaper, have flooded the market, which is brought via Nepal and available at Rs. 1100/- per kilogram so it has become the first choice for the artisans. While MNCs are being given a free hand to operate but so-called weaver friendly cooperatives are allowed to decay, at the cost of the marginalised weaver.

Surat produces artificial silk thread, which is available at a much lower price. Also, the *Banarasi saree* designs are being copied and to produce duplicate Banarasi sarees using artificial material. However the deluge of artificial silk has pushed the *Banarasi* silk sector, reducing its business. It has resulted in further reducing the cost of the exquisite Banarasi saree produced in handlooms. As *Gaddidars*, middlemen and shopkeepers who cannot their profits so the weaver, the weakest link has to bear the brunt, in terms of reduced wages.

As in nutshell, Siddique Hassan observed, "When the product is substandard or the product loses its demand in the market, the weaver has to sell it at a price that may not even cover his labour cost. In the weaving industry, imitation is not valued. The product with a unique design, pattern and texture commands a high price. As soon as the design is copied, the product gets devalued. The weaver has to bear this loss. Change of product invariably involves substantial investment that affects the weavers adversely. Power operated looms also compound the problem, as an electricity connection is not easy to come by. Moreover, continued declared and undeclared power cuts add to the agony."

WEAVERS' MIGRATION TO OTHER CITIES OR TRADES:

The policies of liberalisation have in fact had a deteriorating effect on the weavers' wages and employment. The exploitation has reached its zenith, throwing skilled artisans from the sector and pushing them to obscure work profiles, such as pulling rickshaws, peeling and selling green chanas, making incense sticks, cleaning garbage heaps. Women have started working as domestic maids in middle class houses in their neighbourhood.

" Earlier, when I worked on the handloom I used to earn Rs. 75 a day. But as the condition took a turn from bad to worse, then I had no other option left but to pull rickshaw and now I earn Rs. 75 a day. In Varanasi you can see thousands of the skilled weavers have turned into rickshaw pullers for eking out a living," said Mohammad Naseem.

Since 1990s, the scenario has become so bleaker that weavers are force to migrate to Surat, leaving Varanasi. Surat provides better opportunities to Varanasi weavers', which has a demand for their products providing them better wages. These weavers are in fact, in Surat are pushed to such a paradoxical situation, that they are joining the 'duplicate' *Banarasi* saree manufacturing process, which has proved to be economically viable to them. Coupled with the abandoning of the *Banarasi* silk sector by rare skilled artisans with the influx of thousands of 'unskilled' hands into weaving from the rural hinterland due to problems in their areas, if left unchecked can sound the death knell of the sector itself, thus depriving humankind of one of its finest traditions.



Mohammad Naseem, a skilled artisan now a rickshaw puller

MARKET CHAIN OF BANARASI SAREE WORK

In the market chain of *Banarasi Saree* work there are multiple and complicated stages that the raw material undergoes, before it comes out as a *Banarasi Saree*. The process is long, and the end product reaches the *Gaddidar / Grahastha*, who has the overall control on the process. The weavers are usually at the mercy of the *Gaddidar / Grahastha*, as they decide the returns that the weavers and other artisans get at the end of their work, and are firmly under the grip of the *Gaddidar / Grahastha*.

After the arrival of the raw material from Surat, China or Bangalore, it reaches the handloom owner, individual weaver or power loom owner through the silk cooperatives / silk wholesaler. Subsequent to that the raw material undergoes various value addition stages, after which the weaver weaves the saree.

Each value addition stage from the taaniwala to the dyeing process is handled by artisans, who are experts in their trade. Finally the woven saree goes back to the handloom owner / power loom owner, in case the raw material was taken from them. The finished saree reaches the market via the *Gaddidar / grahastha / kothedar*. The finishing of the *saree* is done at the level of the *Gaddidar / grahastha / kothedar*.

ECONOMIC DOOM FOR BAJARDIHA WEAVERS

Wading through the slushy road as the August rain sweeps across the congested lane in Bajardiha, home to over 1 lakh silk weavers in Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh, despondency and desolation has descended over the colony.

Crossing over the labyrinth of by lanes, Muhammad Suleiman takes us to his dark, cave like warehouse, switches on a light bulb, shows his rickety looms on which 12 weavers worked to weave the prize possession of every Indian bride: the hand-woven silk sari. He gazes reminiscently at the idle wooden, hand-driven weaving machine that helped him and the weavers to earn their living not so long back, now he and the weavers have to suffer.

"Hundreds of thousands of looms have been rendered idle as cheap Chinese yarn and silk fabrics have flooded Indian markets, throwing 1 million weavers of India's 5 million, who used to make the iconic Banarasi silk sari, out of work. With each passing day, the skilled hands of weavers living in Bajardiha are being engaged in other jobs such as pilling rickshaw, selling vegetables, laying roads and even begging. Weaver's aren't alone to bear the brunt, the condition of their family is worse. 50 percent of children in weaver families are malnourished, in blatant violation of Supreme Court orders, a number of children can be seen to survive on a mere bowl or two of plain rice and some bread. Some times they get nothing at all. About 70 percent of weavers' children are malnourished. The weavers also cannot afford basic medical care for their children, much less themselves," said Siddique Hassan, Convenor, *Bunkar Dastkar Adhikar Manch* (Forum for Rights of Weavers & Artisans) (FRWA).

Bajardiha, which has a population of 2, 75,000, predominantly Muslim weavers live in most appalling condition. In such large concentration of weavers' community, there is solitary Government Primary school, but neither hospital, nor road, even there are no paved roads in the locality. It's without sewerage system so stagnant and dirty water of sewer can be seen overflowing. The dump of rubbish is spread around the area. Due to acute poverty, filth and squalor, children, young and old are afflicted by Tuberculosis and Asthma. Indifferent and apathetic attitude of Varanasi Municipal Corporation has compounded the problem

Siddique Hassan takes us trip down the Bajardiha, which reveals that every household has more non-functional looms than functional ones, majority of the weavers have been compelled to migrate to Surat, Mumbai,

Delhi, Kolkata or other cities or have resorted to such menial labour as pulling rickshaws and construction work for survival.

The weavers' troubles began way back in 1995-1998 when the Deve Gowda led Central Government imposed a ban on Chinese silk yarns. The idea was that Varanasi saris would only be woven from silk yarns from Bangalore. Out of habit or because of its superior quality, some weavers started smuggling Chinese yarn in Varanasi. Realising that their need for Chinese yarn would only grow, the weavers demanded an Open General License (OGL).

"The decision of the Government to allow the free import of Chinese plain crepe fabrics brought the entire business to a standstill. Now most customers prefer crepe silk to the traditional Banarasi silk because of its smooth appearance and cheaper price," explains Kauser Ali. Adds, "The flaws of Banarasi silk relating to its colour, texture and durability are not found in Chinese crepe since they are woven in



Hazi Jamaluddin weaving on his loom in Bajardiha

automated looms. The Chinese can afford to sell the finished product at a lower price, giving the traditional Varanasi silk saree tough competition. Chinese silk traders brought cheap yarn to the local market and decided to replicate Banarasi silk by hiring some weavers from here." However, the middle and lower middle class prefer synthetic saris from Surat at one-tenth the price of a Banarasi silk saree.

Mohammad Jallaluddin, who works on the loom, owned by Suleiman, said, "The power looms are the biggest culprits. Every design, which *bunkars*

(weavers) innovate and prepare and weave on the handloom, is copied on the power loom and that leads to decline in the price of the new design."

"The production technology has more or less remained ancient-pit type handloom where the weaver sits with his legs in the pit," said Hazi Jamaluddin. "During the medieval period skilled Muslim weavers from the West Asian countries came to India along with Moghuls. These weavers found Varanasi complementing to their art of intricate pattern of weaving and settled there under the patronage of the then Muslim rulers," adds the elderly Hazi.

Weavers living in Bajardiha and other *bastis*, who were at the centre stage of the Banaras silk industry, now face hunger and desperation. Gone are the days when the uniqueness of the creation was appreciated and patronised at a great cost. The weaver was a producer as well as creator of designs. Now the industry in this changed scenario has shifted to producing at large volumes with low quality design at a low cost. With the change in time the buyer's preferences changed. The demand for high valued intricately patterned heavy silk sari, for which Varanasi was famous, declined. Today's fashion is marked by fast change in design, low cost of production and low inventory.

The continued use of the ancient production technology however proved to be a stumbling block in increasing the production. An improvement was made by incorporating a device in the handloom, which lifted the warp threads according to the design punched on paper cards so that the weft thread shuttle could weave through the design without any manual intervention. This device called Jacquard, made it possible to reproduce any given design.

The designs are now given to the weavers for production, thus reducing the weaver's contribution to mere supply of skilled labour in the production process. They have been cut off from the market. It is now the traders who keep pace with changing fashion trends and dictate the production. These developments had a major economic implication for the weavers. They were reduced to the status of an ordinary skilled labourer in the industry and with their supply surpassing the demand, saw declining wages. This decline in wages to weavers in turn had serious implications for their family. To survive, all able-bodied family members including children have been drawn into the labour market.

India's global integration is devastating the artisan class living in Bajardiha and other weavers colonies of Varanasi. The traditional silk industries are confronting problems and challenges thrown by liberalisation of trade.

Dumping of cheap silk and silk-woven garments from China has further aggravated this problem. Due to this, 70 to 80 % of handlooms have been virtually closed down and the weavers in Varanasi are committing suicide.

As Siddique Hassan emphatically puts forth, "Though India is riding the crest of the economic boom, whilst on the other, lakhs and thousands of craftsmen, manual labourers and rural workers are being left out of the economic boom. Helping those left behind is India's greatest challenge"

BHAGHWA NALA WEAVERS HAVE NO HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

Ram Prasad Rajbhar spends his entire day weaving golden and silver flowers across exquisite silk sarees on a rickety handloom in his ramshackle house and earns a paltry sum of Rs. 20 a day. His son, who used to work on the loom, now pulls on rickshaw to make the both ends meet. "Looms at Bhaghwa Nala are closing down slowly, one or two at a time," said Ram Prasad. Just standing nearby, his son Praveen said, "Many of the looms have been the looms' pedals now resemble shallow graves."

Siddique Hassan of *Bunkar Dastkar Adhikar Manch* points out, "The stratified caste structure of the temple town- Varanasi had forced the *dalits*, especially Rajbhars or Muslims to live in the fringe of the city. Almost all the weavers are from these marginalised communities and are illiterate. Rajbhars of Bhaghwa Nala, who are saree weavers, are almost facing ruin. Cheaper, machine-made sarees -- many of which are copied from famous patterns, even produced by the weavers living in Bhaghwa Nala are being pumped out of China from newer factories in Surat. Adding to the weavers' woes, changing fashions and global trade rules has opened the Indian market to foreign competitors, leaving many once-prosperous saree weavers and their families in desperate poverty."

"This is the ugly, painful side of globalisation. It's a real crisis. If India is booming, you don't see it among weavers or farmers or other rural

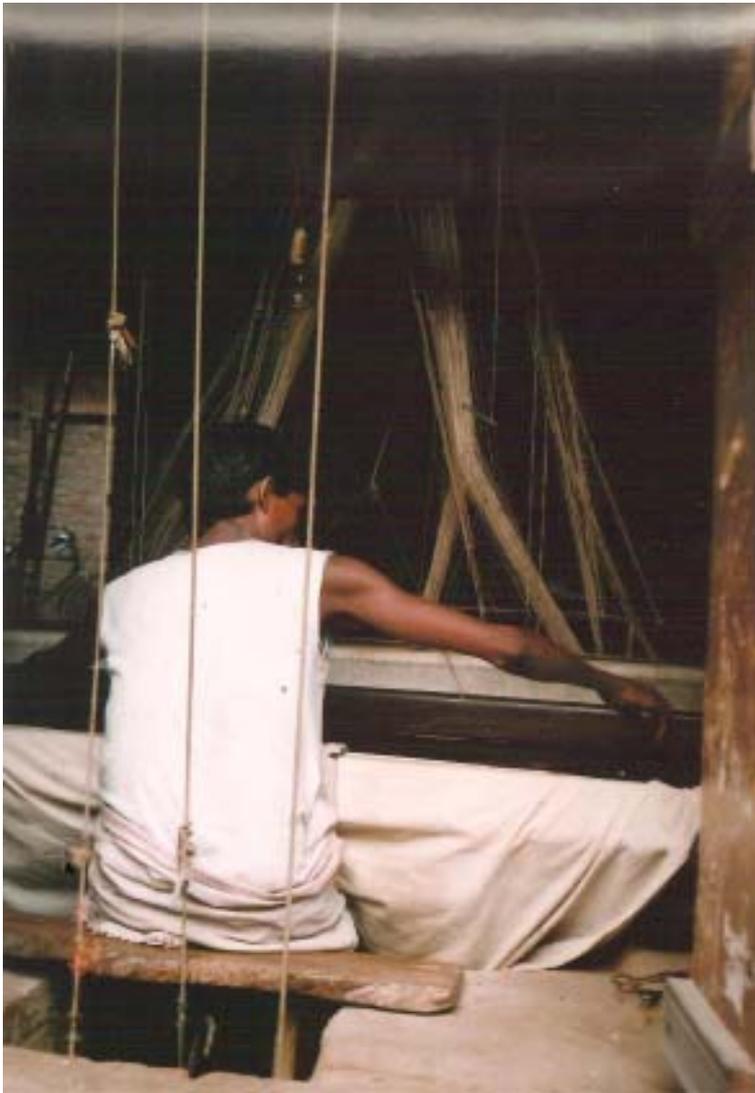


Ram Prasad Rajbhar working on his loom at Bhaghwa Nala

labourers, which is to say most of the country," said Lenin Raghuvanshi, Convenor, People's Vigilance Committee for Human Rights (PVCHR)

The decline of the saree industry has had tragic consequences over the weavers of Bhaghwa Nala too. As Ram Rati, Ram Prasad's wife said, "Now it's become extremely difficult even to arrange for a square meal a day. I cannot even afford to feed my children only a bowl or two of plain rice and some rotis each day. Sometimes they get nothing."

"In Bhaghwa Nala you would see most of the children are malnourished. We cannot afford basic medical care for our children. Most of the weavers of Bhaghwa Nala cannot earn from their handlooms, now they resort to menial jobs, such as pulling rickshaws, selling vegetables, laying roads or begging," said Praveen Rajbhar.



A weaver in Bhaghwa Nala

In the 1990s power looms became increasingly common, spitting out several sarees in a day -- the same time it takes someone like Ram Prasad to weave only the first yard of a classic six-metre saree on his wooden handloom, thread by thread.

"Now we cannot compete with the sarees made from powerloom, so now you see thousands of looms, not only in Bhaghwa Nala but in other weavers' bastis of Varanasi have fallen silent," said Ram Prasad.

Most of Rajbhar weavers, be it men or women work as casual labourers in the

building sites, if they get hired in the morning. Men pull rickshaw, sell vegetables or clear garbage heaps. Women or the girls work as domestic maid in the nearby middle class colonies.

"Tell me, with earning of Rs. 60 a day what can be done? Is it sufficient to spend it on our food or on medicines or on educating our children?" asked Ram Rati. "I have no hope for the future," she added emphatically, her eyes bloodshot and hooded from fatigue.

LALLAHPURA's WEAVERS FACE DEATH AND DESPERATION

Afizulnissa's husband, Mohammad Sabban earlier used to earn between Rs. 150 to Rs. 200 a day but now it is Rs. 50. Her 4 sons do menial work just to eke out an existence. Mohammad Sabban has to work on the loom with cataract in both of his eyes. He cannot afford to get his eyes operated.

"Not only us but most of the weavers living in Lallahpura are facing difficulties. Most of the weavers are now carrying bricks at construction sites. Though my husband is not in a position to work on the loom for longer hours but there are alternative option left for him," Afizulnissa cries while narrating her woes.



Afizulnissa cries while narrating her woes

"Earlier we used to sell directly to the buyers but now it is sold through dalaals (middlemen). But the money we receive after many months. A saree, which costs Rs. 1000 but we get Rs. 300," said Mohammad Sabban

"Fifty percent of children in weaver families, even in Lallahpura are malnourished. In blatant violation of Supreme Court orders, a number of children can be seen to survive on a mere bowl or two of plain rice and some bread. Some times they get nothing at all," said Gufran Ahmed Mohammad Aslam. Added, "Under such circumstances, education is a distant dream. What do you expect a weaver to do with such a meagre earning of Rs 35-40 per day? Buy medicines, food or send his children to school," asked Gufran.

Lallahpura had seen many weavers committing suicides out of desperation. "60-year old Quasim, who was known for the finesse in zari borders on Banarasi sarees. He had been a weaver since the age of ten but went vir-

tually jobless since January 2007. For over five months he and his family survived by selling whatever belongings and utensils they had. In a night of May 2007, Quasim and his family could not stand hunger. Unable to bear the pain of his children, Quasim went out of his house never to return home again. His family filed an FIR. Quasim's body was found later in the nearby well," recalled Siddique Hassan with tears in his eyes.

A weaver from Lallahpura, 20- year old Neeraj Patel, who had the burden of two younger brothers, an ailing mother and father consumed poison failing to find a job. "For over two months he went out in search of a job. Once, he was humiliated by the *gaddidaar*. The boy was shattered and bought a toxic substance on his way back home. He quietly consumed the poison to relieve himself from the humiliation," said Hassan

"Majority of the weavers are illiterate, which forces them to be dependent to seek help from money lenders and credit-giving gaddidars. These Gaddidars take advantage of the weavers' woes and fleece from them, whenever they are in difficulties," said Gufran "With each passing day, the skilled hands of weavers are being engaged in other jobs such as pulling rickshaw, selling vegetables, carrying bricks in the construction sites and even begging. Weavers living in Lallahpura are not alone to bear the brunt, the condition of their family is worse. Tuberculosis and malnutrition is common in Lallahpura," added Gufran

STRUGGLES LAUNCHED BY THE WEAVERS

Varanasi weavers are caught up between the decadent production system and the increasingly free trade economic regime of the country. Crisis confronting these weavers emanates from factors such



Siddique Hassan, Convenor, *Bunkar Dastkar Adhikar Manch*

as competition from powerloom products, changes in protections offered to the handloom sector, increasing prices of raw silk and shifts in market demand. Slump of the Banarasi silk sector is also due to the competition from imported silk fabric. With abolition of quantitative restrictions, and declining tariff on textile import the Varanasi silk sari producers are facing serious competition from cheap imports, especially from China.

Though the weavers are economically in a very desperate situation but struggles are being launched to face the onslaught. *Bunkar Dastkar Adhikar Manch* (Forum for Rights of Weavers and Artisans), has taken up the cudgels on behalf of the weavers and have putting its endeavour in bringing together both the weavers and artisans involved in embroidery. It had even mobilised senior weavers

and artisan leaders onto one platform. The FRWA also brought to fore the problems confronted by women weavers and their contribution in the Banarasi Saree industry, which goes largely unnoticed.

"For launching a protracted political struggle *Bunkar Dastkar Adhikar Manch* in association with People's Vigilance Committee for Human Rights (PVCHR), took up the issue of weavers and their dependent dying of hunger. In the pressure of our consistent campaign against hunger and starvation facing the weavers forced the Uttar Pradesh Government in its letter to Supreme Court appointed Commissioner accepted that weaving industry is passing through recession pushing weavers to joblessness. Even the State Government acknowledged it officially that there were cases of malnutrition and hunger among the weavers community in UP.

UP government formulated a norm by setting up an emergency fund for providing immediate relief to the hunger victims at the village level. A new committee was constituted under the chairmanship of *gram panchayat* to disburse emergency fund of Rs. 1000 to each hunger victims in the villages. Post to this, accountability mechanism from village to state level was established. As a result of strenuous and continuous campaigning of *Bunkar Dastkar Adhikar Manch* and PVCHR the cause of weavers has received not only nationwide but also international sympathy and momentum and it has made possible to draw the attention of Planning commission and Indian government as well." said Siddique Hassan, Convenor, BDAM.

Added Hassan, "Weaving stands as second biggest livelihood option in the villages, which remains vulnerable as most of those making a living out of it belong to most marginalised communities of the country, constantly pushed to corner. On the other hand farmers lobby has grown stronger. If there are farmers' suicides or deaths it reaches the parliament and immediate action is taken. But when weavers die in Varanasi, there is none to raise their voice in the Parliament. The plight of Banarasi saree weavers in Varanasi comes to the fore only during electioneering unfortunately seems to come to the fore only before elections. Once electioneering ends, the promises too fade and the poor weavers are left to fend for themselves. The consistent campaign by *Bunkar Dastkar Adhikar Manch* and PVCHR has kept the issue alive."

Actually, starvation deaths of 42 weavers in Varanasi district drew the attention of FIAN International, Germany based Human Rights organisation and Hong Kong based Asian Human Rights Commission joined hands with PVCHR to redress the problems of Varanasi weavers.

Taking a step ahead PVCHR with the help of renowned Sri Lankan economist Dr. Darin C Gunesequera proposed the concept of 'Varanasi weavers Trust' to bring about a radical change in the life of Varanasi weavers. Taking into account the efforts Bunkar Dastkar Adhikar Manch and PVCHR, the Planning Commission of India sent Dr. Syeda Hameed, its member to Varanasi to have a talk with *Bunkar Dastkar Adhikar Manch* and PVCHR and with the functionaries of different weavers' organisations. Weaving is the second biggest livelihood source for those living in the margins. Farmers lobby is so strong that if there are farmers' suicides or deaths it reaches the parliament and immediate action is taken. But when weavers are dying in Varanasi, nobody raises it in the Parliament. The plight of Banarasi saree weavers in Varanasi comes to the fore only during electioneering unfortunately seems to come to the fore only before elections. Once electioneering ends, the promises too fade and the poor weavers are left to fend for themselves. The consistent campaign by Bunkar Dastkar Adhikar Manch and PVCHR has kept the issue alive.

The WTO's Non- Agricultural Market Access (NAMA) will be the death knell of Banarasi saree weavers, craftsmen and rural artisans. With people struggling to find livelihoods, and hunger deaths growing, BDAM and PVCHR have launched campaigns demanding that the NAMA be outrightly rejected.

However, NAMA threatens the future path of industrialisation and development in many of the developing countries, including India. As an outcome to this, millions of poor workers of the traditional sector, such as leather and textiles in India and other developing countries face a future of increasing poverty, injustice and food insecurity.

The *Bunkar Dastkar Adhikar Manch* was invited in a brainstorming session on "Handloom Weavers- Assistance and upgradation, which was held under the Chairpersonship of Dr. Syeda Hameed, Member, Planning Commission of India. The functionaries of BDAM put forth the plight of the weavers and gave their views on how the weavers' condition could be improved. Providing marketing facility and purchasing the saree directly from the weavers by opening depots, timely payment of the wages and saree prices, same day encashment of postdated cheques, opening special units in the hospitals and labour department offices were the demands raised by the BDAM. The weavers are aware of the fact that the struggle has to be waged at both at local as well as national and international levels. The BDAM is raising its voice not just against local traders but is also concerned about

larger issues like trade liberalisation and WTO agreements.

Apart from organising the weavers and artisans, *Bunkar Dastkar Adhikar Manch* had been at the forefront to isolate the fascistic designs of the communal forces assiduously trying to divide the weavers, belonging to both the communities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations can be made to offer any solution towards the problems faced by the Banarasi saree weavers:

1. Banarasi silk sarees need to be presented as a brand, emphasising on its three features, which makes it unique and stands apart from other sarees. The features are:
 - a) The yarn used is high quality silk yarn from Karnataka. Though now the Chinese imported silk is also being used but it's not of the same quality.
 - b) Banarasi sarees woven on handlooms are of much better quality, not only in terms of design and motif but also in terms of weaving quality durability, than those that are copied on power looms.
 - c) The artistry of Varanasi weavers in designing the sarees is unique and of distinct quality.

The efforts to put labels like Silk Mark and Handloom Mark, if implemented properly, can help to establish the distinctive identity of the Banarasi sarees in the market.

2. For the promotion of Banarasi sarees as unique product, there should be efforts involving all the stakeholders in the cluster collectively. The *Banarasi* silk sector suffers from the bottleneck that none of the stakeholders having a sense of ownership. The *Gaddidars*, shopkeepers and middlemen are making profits by selling Banarasi sarees but they have kept away from investing in improving the production in their area of operation. *Gaddidars* and shopkeepers narrow interest in running the business simply for getting only orders. However, most of them deal in a range of textile products, such as power loom and handloom products, made-ups etc. of both silk and non-silk yarn but it does not generate interest in them to invest in improving handloom quality and production to regain lost market share. The weavers, who are the real stakeholders and take ownership of the weaving occupation, are into weaving more by compulsion than choice. Additionally, these poor weavers are cut-off from the market and are too unorganized to make any difference. They have no wherewithal nor access to market, credit and raw material and any form of organisation to have an effect on the market.

3. There is urgent need to create and promote structures that organise the weavers to collectively engage with the market; provide them with

quality raw materials and other facilities; and consequently, enhancing their bargaining power in the production process. Identifying existing structures that can be promoted and initiating new collectives of weavers should be given the greatest priority. Such collectives would also enhance the ability of weavers to access market information. Diversification into other products is taking place mostly into the power loom products. Diversification by the handloom weavers is very limited and is mostly by compulsion and not by choice or any sustained market strategy. There is a need to create structures that enable weavers to access market trends and respond to them accordingly. The value addition in form of embroidery work (*zaridozi*) seems to be providing opportunity for diversifying and generating employment.

4. At the policy level, the industry needs some form of protection from the cheap import of silk fabric and from the power loom sector. The Act banning power looms from producing *sarees* and other items needs to be implemented more seriously.

5. To strengthen the workers groups and improve the lot of unorganised sector workers, especially women, concentrated efforts are needed from multi-stakeholders, including civil society organisations, government, trade unions, media, corporate sector and others.

6. One dedicated hospital be set up in Lucknow and Varanasi, to cure the ailments afflicting the weavers. Occupational diseases such as byssinosis, numbness in the limbs, deterioration of eyesight etc. need special attention, which is not available in general hospitals. The *Sambhavana* Trust Hospital in Bhopal, established to give specialised medical care to gas victims in the aftermath of the Bhopal Gas Disaster. The Employees State Insurance Corporation hospitals have been set up in various parts of the country for the workers. Even the Chhattisgarh Miners *Shramik Sangh* (CMSS) Trade Union run hospital are some examples of specialised medical care which can be studied and their best practices replicated.

7. Crèches and educational / nutritional facilities for children of working mothers need to be established, to ensure participation of women and proper care of their children during their absence from home. Mobile Crèches, who have experience of working with the children of the unorganised sector could be contacted for trainings / running of the centres.

8. Establishment of professionally managed cooperatives will help in the establishments of middlemen free distribution facilities for the artisans to sell their products. Establishment of a cooperative bank / Thrift and Credit Society of weavers could help in making capital accessible to weavers at low interest rates, thus helping them to become free of moneylenders and middlemen. Establishment of 'haats' and exhibitions

in Varanasi and other cities are also recommended. In Varanasi, a permanent exposition on the lines of '*Dilli Haat*' would also be useful. Besides this, up-gradation / integration of weavers' expositions into the traditional melas of Varanasi would be immensely beneficial.

9. An online portal on weaving could go a long way in spreading awareness and to promote the sectors, with facilities for sales. The online portal could dramatically enhance direct market access to weavers, and for the purpose, a dynamic section, having frequent update facility of an online directory of weavers could be of immense use.

10. To further understanding the needs of women weavers and creation of special enabling mechanisms to help facilitate their role in the industry is needed. These could include designing special looms built with their needs in mind. Special fund for women weavers could help them becoming economically independent.

11. A special cell on the above sectors needs to be established in the office of the handicrafts commissioner, for any grievances and complaints. Information regarding this cell and its functions would need to be disseminated for its successful functioning.

12. A local museum needs to be established, to document the various practices in the concerned sectors. This museum could go a long way in helping the artisans understand practices in different sectors and regions. It could also help in making different sections of the population aware of the sector, and appreciate the nuances of production, which is taken for granted. This effort could go a long way in helping artisans know and appreciate their past heritage, instilling pride and ownership.

13. Weaving systems used in the North Eastern states and in other countries needs to be studied for undertaking improvement in loom design, especially with reference to women's needs.

14. Special shops selling the products 'directly from weavers' need to be established, to ensure better prices to weavers. Establishment of 'silk depots' for easy availability of raw material.

15. Standardisation mechanisms for some sarees need to be explored.
