

A Study of the Socio-Economic Profile and Perceptions of Handloom Weavers in Himachal Pradesh

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Chapter

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ABSTRACT

In India, the handloom sector constitutes one of the major cottage industries. It is considered among the major persistent traditional industries contributing to rural livelihoods for the millions associated with the weaving community and artisans. This ranks as the second most significant source of employment generation after agriculture. The current study aims to examine the socio-economic profile of handloom weavers and their perception towards handloom products with a specific focus on Himachal Pradesh. The study used a quantitative descriptive research design. The data were collected using a structured questionnaire, and 249 weavers were chosen using a random sampling method. The study describes the socio-economic profile of weavers and examines their perception towards handloom products. The data were described using different statistical techniques, i.e., percentage, Means, Skewness, Standard Deviation and Kurtosis etc. The findings indicate that the handloom sector in Himachal Pradesh is mainly a rural area activity, and female workers dominate this sector. The findings further suggest that a majority of the weavers have low education and income levels. In spite of their limited earnings, rising raw material costs and middlemen's interference, they view weaving as a stable source of livelihood. Weavers are satisfied and optimistic about their occupation, but perceive that their work is not adequately rewarded. While government support is regarded as helpful, lack of awareness and limited financial access remain challenges.

Keywords: Handloom Sector, Socio-Economic Profile, Weaver Perception, Rural Livelihood, Market Challenges, Cultural Heritage.

INTRODUCTION

The handloom sector has long played a crucial role in India's rural economy, representing a blend of indigenous skill, cultural heritage, and sustainable

livelihood practices. Handloom weaving serves as both an economic activity and a cultural expression, deeply rooted in the socio-cultural fabric of communities across India. In Himachal Pradesh, the sector plays a particularly notable role due to its unique regional designs, traditional practices, and the socio-economic reliance of rural households on weaving activities. Despite its deep-rooted significance, the handloom industry faces critical challenges arising from industrial competition, technological limitations, fluctuating market demand, and inadequate policy support.

Understanding the socio-economic background of weavers is essential for developing effective interventions. Their perception towards handloom products not only describes their occupational commitment but also determines their willingness to innovate, adopt new technologies, and participate in formal markets. Positive perceptions can enhance productivity, quality improvement, and long-term engagement in weaving, while negative perceptions may lead to occupational withdrawal, reduced innovation, and migration to alternative livelihoods. In light of these factors, the present study focuses on describing the socio-economic profile of weavers such as age, education, income, experience, and household size, and examining their perceptions towards handloom products. The study aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the socio-economic profile and perceptions of handloom weavers and their implications for policy and sectoral development.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Economic Challenges

Shaw Tanusree (2015) identified factors such as competition from power looms, rising raw material costs, low wages, limited access to credit, and labour shortages as major reasons for the decline of the handloom sector. Similarly, **Ahmed and Sheereen (2022)** reported that most weavers belong to economically and socially disadvantaged groups, characterised by low income, limited education, dependence on loans, and restricted market opportunities. **Aparna and Attokkaran (2025)** further observed that increasing production costs, competition from machine-made products, weak market access, financial constraints, and dependence on middlemen continue to affect weavers' livelihoods and profitability. These studies collectively emphasise the need for stronger policy support, improved market access, financial inclusion, and capacity-building initiatives to ensure the sustainability of the handloom sector.

Socio-Economic Conditions

Sharma et.al. (2021) found that handloom weavers in Himachal Pradesh experience low income, poor living conditions, limited education and irregular employment opportunities. The study further reveals declining interest among youngsters and strong competition from machine-made products, emphasising the need for better policy support, easy market access, and institutional strengthening. **Sheeba and Sivakkolundu (2021)** reported that the majority of workers engage in extended working hours with low wages and depend on credit for raw materials, while facing significant health issues due to traditional working conditions. The sector is further affected by significant levels of high

production costs, inadequate resources, and lack of modern training, highlighting the need for improved remuneration, enhanced raw material supply and policy support to enhance weavers' livelihoods. **Akshay et.al. (2023)** highlighted issues such as low income, rural concentration, female dominance, and dependence on government support. However, the study lacks emphasis on marketing aspects, productivity differences, and regional differences.

Market Access and Institutional Support

Venugopal et al. (2023) and **Todi and Deb (2025)** highlighted the poor socio-economic conditions of handloom weavers in Himachal Pradesh, characterised by low income, limited education, poor living standards, irregular employment, and weak market access. Both studies identified declining youth participation, competition from machine-made products, and inadequate institutional support as major challenges affecting the sector's sustainability. The findings emphasise the need for policy intervention, market expansion, and institutional strengthening to promote the long-term development of the handloom industry. Though, previous studies analyses socio-economic conditions and challenges, limited research has explored weaver's perceptions towards handloom products in Himachal Pradesh using primary data. The present study attempts to fill this gap.

Socio-Economic Profile of Handloom Weavers

Considering the above literature review it reveals that most of the handloom weavers belong to economically poor section and socially marginalized communities of society. Their socio economic profile describe that they generally possess a low level and unstable incomes and seems insufficient to meet their basic household needs. Majority of the weavers depends on loan for their production activities as well as they are dependents on middlemen for selling the products in the market. And due to this their overall earnings reduced. Weaver's life style and livelihood is also adversely affected by severe competition from power loom products and high cost of raw material. Previous research findings also reveals that the education level of majority of the weavers are very poor. Poor education level limits the awareness level of the handloom workers and also their capability to adopt new technology and efficient marketing strategies. Handloom weaving activity is majorly a traditional and hereditary occupation and weavers generally face irregular employment, long working hours and poor wages. The interest among young generation to continue this traditional work is continuously declining interest. Standard of living of the workers are generally poor with limited access to quality housing, assets and basic services especially within rural region. Weavers experience health-related issues due to longer manual working hours and inappropriate working environment. Further, weavers have limited access to institutional support, market information, and formal financial services. In general, the socio-economic condition of handloom weavers reflects multiple challenges, including poverty, low education, and along with a deficiency of opportunities, highlighting the necessity for improved policy interventions and development measures.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The objective of the present study is to describe the socio-economic profile of handloom weavers and their perception towards the handloom products in Himachal Pradesh.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methodology provides the structure for collecting and analyzing data for the fulfillment of the stated objectives of the study. The study is descriptive in nature. The current research aims to describe the socio-economic profile of handloom weavers and their perception towards the handloom products in Himachal Pradesh. As the study is quantitative in nature, primary data were collected from handloom weavers through an interview schedule. Special emphasis was placed on Kullu and Kinnaur districts due to the high concentration of handloom weavers in these regions.

Research Design

The study used a quantitative descriptive research design to examine the socio-economic profile of weavers and their perception towards handloom products.

Scope of the study and Sampling design

A random sampling method was adopted to select 249 weavers from major handloom clusters in distt. Kullu and Kinnaur in Himachal Pradesh due to the high density of the weavers.

Data Collection Instrument

The primary data were gathered by the interview method. Since the majority of the respondents were not in a situation to fill the questionnaire accurately. Therefore, the primary source of data collection was an interview schedule. The secondary data were obtained from various published and unpublished reports by the government and societies of the handloom industry. Also, various types of books, journals and websites related to the current study were preferred for data collection.

Statistical Tools

In the present study, descriptive statistics tools such as mean, percentages, frequency distribution, skewness, kurtosis and standard deviation have been employed to summarise the data.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

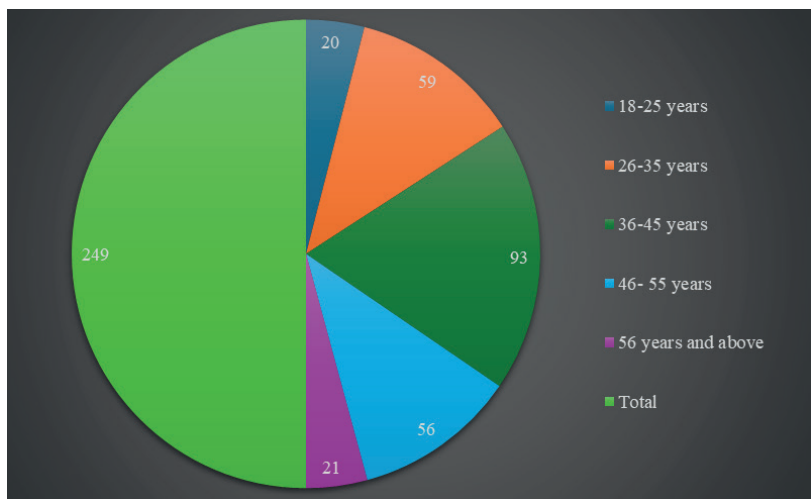


Figure 1: Classification of respondents based on the Age

From the above pie diagram, the majority of respondents are in between 36 to 45 years age group, i.e 93 percent in the total respondents 249. 59 percent respondents are in between 26 to 35 years age group. It is observed that very few respondents are above the age 56 years i.e. 21%.

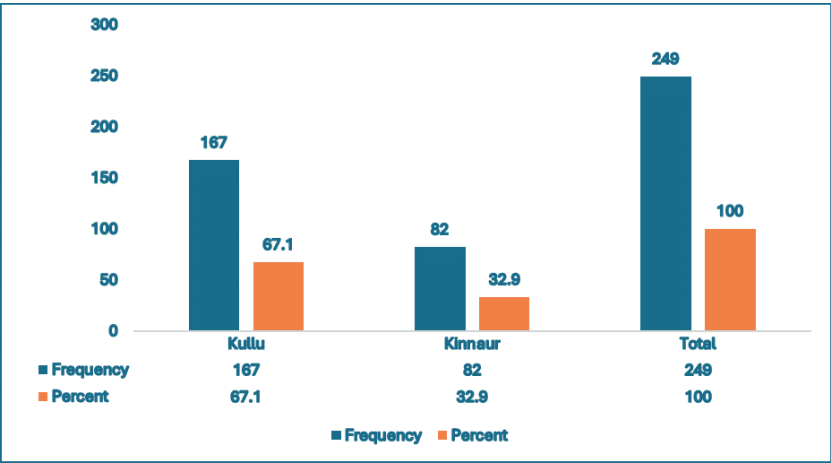


Figure 2: Classification of respondents based on the District

It can be inferred from the above chart that that a large proportion of respondents are from district Kullu i.e. 67.1 percent out of total 249 respondents and only 32.9% respondents are from district Kinnaur.

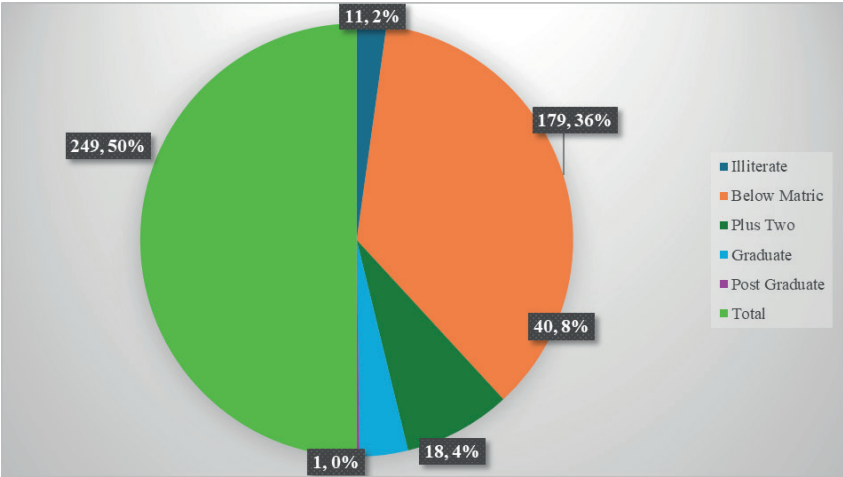


Figure 3: Classification of respondents based on the Qualification

According to the above pie chart, 71.9 percent of respondents are below matric and 4.4 percent respondents are illiterate and only 7.6 percent of respondents have attained their higher education. Therefore, the results indicate that the level of education among the weavers are very poor.

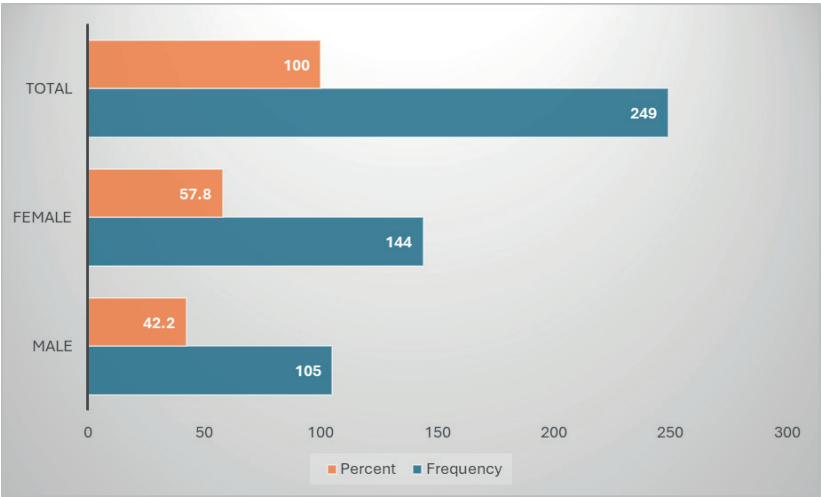


Figure 4: Classification of respondents based on the Gender

As reflected in the above bar diagram that a predominant share of respondents are female i.e. 57.8 percent of the total sample i.e. 249 and only 42.2 percent of participants are male. The results shows that handloom weaving activities in Himachal Pradesh are predominantly carried out by females. It also presents the significant role of women in the handloom sector, particularly in rural and traditional are overwhelming.

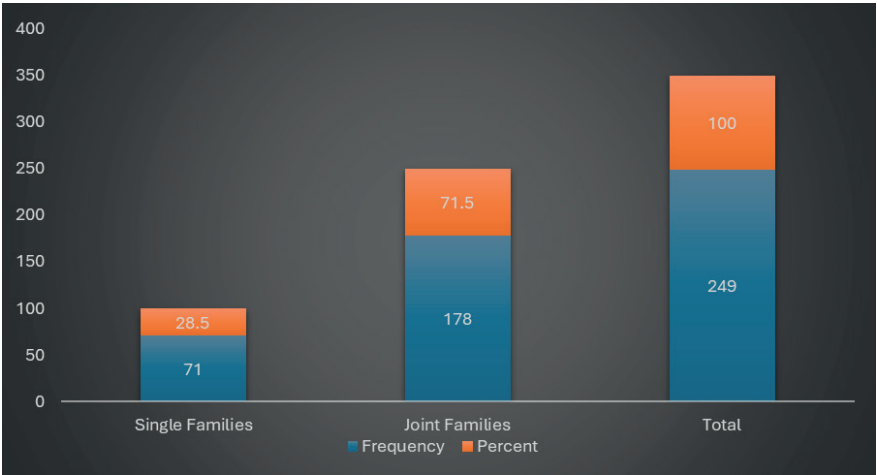


Figure 5: Classification of respondents based on the Family Type

Figure 5 presents that a considerable proportion of respondents belong to from joint families i.e. 71.5 percent out of total 249 and 28.5 percent respondents are from nuclear families. The findings indicates that joint families system among weaver are most prevalent within the handloom industry in Himachal Pradesh.

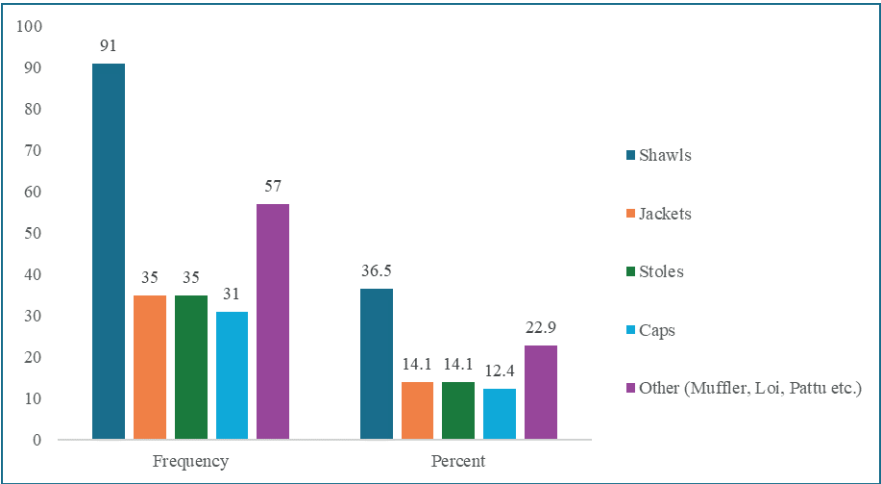


Figure 6: Classification of respondents based on the Type of products

As presented in the Figure 6, it is revealed the various types of handloom products. Shawl contributes higher than other products i.e. 36.5 percent out of 249. The study further indicates that other products such as Muffler, Loi and Pattu contributes 22.9 percent showing some diversity in the weaving activities. Overall, the finding suggests that Shawl weaving dominates the handloom sector.

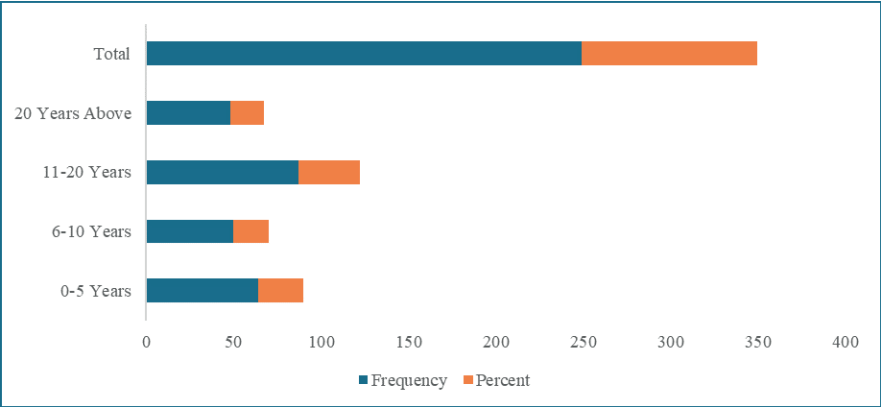


Figure 7: Classification of respondents based on the Experience

From above Figure 7, it is shown that largest proportion i.e. 34.9 percent among respondents have 11 to 20 years’ experience, indicating very experienced workers/weavers in the handloom sector. 64 respondents have 0 to 5 years’ experience suggesting the presence of new people in the sector. Overall, the data reveals a balanced combination of both experienced weavers and new entrants.

Figure 8: Classification of respondents based on the Monthly Income

Source: Data is collected from questionnaire

From the above pie chart, the findings show that majority of the respondents i.e. 39 percent falls below 10, 000 income category and 34.1 percent of respondents belong to between 10 thousands to 15 thousands income category. An only 4 percent people are receiving above 25 thousands monthly income. In conclusion, only a small proportion of individuals are receiving higher wages from the handloom weaving activities. And majority respondents earn relatively low incomes.

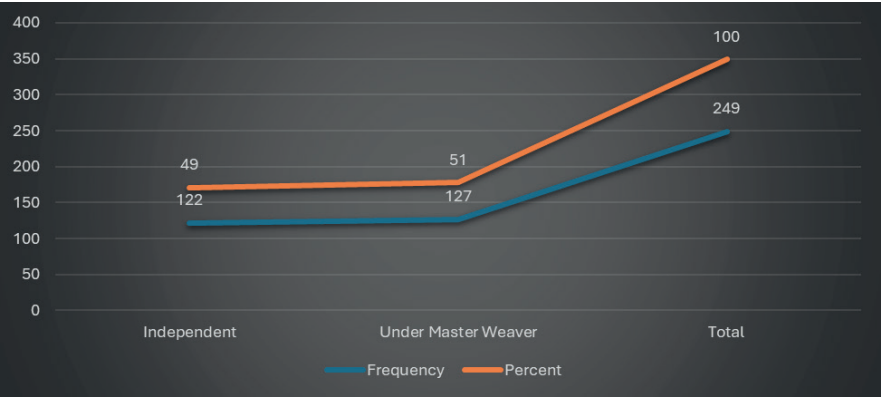


Figure 9: Classification of respondents based on the Type of Weaver

Figure 9 depicts that most of the weavers respondents i.e. 51 percent are engaged under Master Weavers while 49 percent of the overall sample 249 are working independently. The higher proportion under master weavers indicates

the significance of systematic production and proper guidance in the handloom sector. Simultaneously, the significant share of independent weavers presents a certain level of self-employment and autonomy among artisans.

Table 1: Classification of respondents based on the Location.

Sr. No.	Location	Frequency	Percent
1	Rural	215	86.3
2	Urban	34	13.7
	Total	249	100.00

Source: Data is collected from questionnaire

The table 1 exhibited that that a large proportion of weavers belong to rural areas i.e. 86.3 percent, while 13.7 percent artisans are from urban region. It indicates that handloom weaving is predominantly a rural based activity.

Table 2: Classification of respondents based on Marketing Channel

Sr. No.	Marketing Channel	Frequency	Percent
1	Local markets	117	47.0
2	Retail stores	29	11.6
3	Online platforms	44	17.7
4	Exhibitions/Fairs	31	12.4
5	Wholesalers	28	11.2
	Total	249	100.00

Source: Data is collected from questionnaire

The table above illustrates that the majority of weavers i.e. 47 percent are commonly using Local market channels of marketing their products followed by online marketing channel i.e. 17.7 percent. It indicates a growing shift towards the digital marketing. Exhibitions/Fairs, Retail stores, and wholesalers channels are used in a smaller proportion by the weavers to sale the products. Overall, the results indicate that although traditional marketing channels dominate, there exists a gradual adoption of modern and diversified marketing avenues among weavers.

Table 3. Classification of respondents based on Handloom Products

Variables	Mean	S.D.	Skewness	Kurtosis
Regular & reliable income	4.87	.340	-2.181	2.778
Sufficient income for household needs	3.86	1.236	-1.143	.203
Good profit margins	4.73	.455	-1.153	-.315
Raw material cost reduces income	1.55	.507	-.093	-1.767
Income stability throughout the year	4.67	.486	-.961	-.556

Source: Data is collected from questionnaire

The table 3, shows that respondents have a high degree of agreement towards the economic perception of handloom weaving as most of the mean values are very high. Certain variations have been observed in the responses. However, the low mean score for the statement raw material cost reduces income suggests that respondents generally disagreed with this statement. In general, the low standard deviation in most items reflects consistency in responses, while skewness values show a tendency towards agreement among respondents.

Table 4. Market Perception of Weavers towards Handloom Products

Variables	Mean	S.D.	Skewness	Kurtosis
Seasonal demand	4.79	.407	-1.441	.078
Fair market prices	4.08	.974	-1.121	.384
Middlemen reduce earnings	4.33	.479	.841	-1.007
Online platforms increase sales	4.51	.509	-.133	-1.762
Easy market access	4.78	.416	-1.354	-.169

Source: Data is collected from questionnaire

The table 4, shows that weavers have a generally positive perception of market conditions as the mean values of all the variable are high. The study suggests that weavers are very confident about the market demand and accessibility of handloom products. They are open for digital platforms for increasing sale. The study observed some variations among weavers regarding the pricing of handloom products. The research also reveal that respondents perceive middleman as reducing their earnings.

Table 5. Occupational Perception of Weavers towards Handloom Products

Variables	Mean	S.D.	Skewness	Kurtosis
Satisfaction with occupation	4.44	.506	.142	-1.753
Secure livelihood	4.69	.463	-.831	-1.321
Comfortable and safe working conditions	4.46	.515	-.008	-1.581
Fair reward for effort	2.17	1.163	-1.116	-.372
Pride in weaving occupation	4.43	.497	.269	-1.943

Source: Data is collected from questionnaire

The table 5 exhibited that weavers have positive perception towards their occupation as reflected by the high mean value of majority variables. It depicts that weavers are satisfied, feel proud and secure livelihood option. But, in the same side they thought their hard work is not fairly rewarded financially.

Table 6. Institutional Support Perception of Weavers towards Handloom Products

Variables	Mean	S.D.	Skewness	Kurtosis
Effectiveness of government schemes	4.70	.467	-1.012	-.655
Access to skill development and training	4.51	.501	-.024	-2.016
Accessibility of financial assistance	4.05	1.409	-1.087	-.503
Support from cooperative societies	4.41	.524	-.125	-.059
Adequate information about government schemes	3.32	1.725	-.335	-1.679

Source: Data is collected from questionnaire

The table 6 indicates that handloom weavers mostly hold a favourable perception of institutional support. A substantial proportion of the respondents agree that public welfare schemes, skill enhancement programs along with cooperative societies worked effectively as reflected by the high mean value. However, some variations observed in regarding financial assistance suggesting that all weavers have not received equal financial assistance. The results further indicate that there is the presence of gap in receiving adequate information regarding the Govt. Schemes related to the handloom sector. This suggests a need of awareness campaign and programs

Table 7. Social & Cultural Perception of Weavers towards Handloom Products

Variables	Mean	S.D.	Skewness	Kurtosis
Cultural importance of handloom weaving	4.53	.500	-.105	-2.005
Social respect for weavers	4.79	.420	-1.575	.976
Family encouragement	4.39	.497	.356	-1.627
Social value of handloom products	4.69	.521	-2.113	8.867

Source: Data is collected from questionnaire

The table 7 indicates a strongly positive social and cultural perception related to handloom weaving among respondents. The findings indicates that artisans strongly believe that handloom work is the significant part of their culture. The research further demonstrates that society respect and value their work. Majority of the weaver’s family wants to continue this occupation. The study further identifies that handloom products are more valuable and respected as compared to power loom products.

**Table 8. Competition & Future Perception of Weavers
towards Handloom Products**

Variables	Mean	S.D.	Skewness	Kurtosis
Negative role of machine-made products	4.24	.435	1.392	.364
Promising future of the handloom sector	4.38	.494	.407	-1.582
Role of innovation in demand growth	4.65	.493	-.857	-.773
Optimism about occupational future	4.49	.509	-.036	-1.778

Source: Data is collected from questionnaire

Table 8 analyzed that respondents believe that machine made products pose a challenge to the growth of handloom industry. The study further indicates that the future of this sector is promising and innovation and new designs can increase the demand associated with handloom products.

KEY FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

- The findings indicate that the handloom sector in Himachal Pradesh is primarily a rural-based weaving activity.
- The study further shows that a majority of the weavers/artisans are women. It highlights the female dominance and the crucial contribution of women in the handloom sector.
- A large proportion of respondents belong to joint family systems, highlighting the traditional social structures. The educational level of weavers is relatively low, with the majority of respondents below matric level.
- It was observed that the majority of the weavers come under low-income categories, i.e. below Rs. 15000 per month, indicating inadequate financial earnings among the weavers.
- A substantial number of weavers, despite the low earnings, exhibit a favourable economic perception towards handloom weaving. They consider it a reliable and stable source of income.
- The research further emphasises that with the expansion of digital marketing, the weavers are also very positive about the acceptance of digital/online tools as a means to increase sales.
- A large number of weavers perceived that middlemen significantly decrease the earnings of weavers.
- Most of the weavers are fully satisfied with their occupation and consider this sector as a secure livelihood option and also feel proud and emotionally connected to their occupation.
- Despite this, there exists a strong perception among the weavers those engaged under master weavers that their efforts are not remain fairly rewarded financially.
- The study describes that weavers' perceived institutional support is favourable, especially regarding government schemes and training programs. However, there is a lack of awareness and unequal access to financial assistance among weavers.
- The majority of the weavers perceived that social and cultural perceptions are highly favourable, with weaving seen as an important cultural heritage.

SUGGESTIONS

- Government should enhance awareness initiatives about schemes and benefits for weavers.
- Simplify procedures for availing financial assistance and subsidies to ensure wider accessibility.
- Promote direct marketing channels to reduce dependency on middlemen.
- Encourage digital literacy and e-commerce training for weavers.
- Introduce design innovation and skill development programs to enhance competitiveness, product quality and innovation.
- Provide fair wage mechanisms or minimum support pricing for handloom products.
- Strengthen cooperative societies to provide better support and market linkages.
- Focus on improving education and training opportunities for weavers.
- Provide accessible credit and financial incentives.
- Encourage youth participation through modern training and design exposure.

CONCLUSION

This study provides an in-depth examination of the socio-economic circumstances and perceptions of handloom weavers. The findings indicate that although handloom weaving remains a significant source of livelihood, the economic stability of weavers is precarious due to the role of intermediaries. A substantial number of respondents reported happiness and pride in their profession; nonetheless, apprehensions about insufficient income and restricted market access remain. The report emphasises that institutional support mechanisms, such as government initiatives, financial aid, and training programs, have not efficiently reached all weavers. Insufficient awareness, intricate procedures, and restricted accessibility impede the effective utilisation of these initiatives. Notwithstanding these limitations, weavers typically demonstrate an affirmative attitude of their profession and acknowledge the cultural importance of handloom weaving. The report underscores the necessity for focused policy interventions, streamlined administrative processes, greater market access, and increased knowledge of government programs. Enhancing these domains can markedly elevate the socio-economic welfare of handloom weavers and guarantee the continuation of this historic industry.

In nutshell, the study concludes that handloom weaving continues to play a significant role in supporting rural livelihoods and preserving the cultural heritage of Himachal Pradesh. Despite several socio-economic and marketing challenges, weavers maintain a positive perception of their occupation and the future of the sector. Strengthening institutional support, improving market access, promoting innovation, and enhancing awareness of government schemes can contribute significantly to the sustainable development of the handloom industry.

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