

Revival and Repositioning of Handloom Sector of Himachal Pradesh

Sanjay Sharma¹, Prof. Binaya Bhusan Jena², and Dr. Rahul Chandra³

1. Research Scholar, NIFT, Delhi,
1. Professor, FMS, NIFT, Bhubaneswar,
2. Dr. Rahul Chandra, Joint Director, ICSI, New Delhi,

Abstract: The handloom sector of Himachal Pradesh holds a unique position in the world of handloom textiles in terms of its history, heritage, process, design and material use. With the advent of powerloom and machine made textiles and availability of ready to wear economical clothing in variety of style, colour, design, the handloom sector in India came under tremendous pressure. However, the cultural roots, affinity to the heritage and the efforts and initiatives by the Governments both at the Centre and at the state helped the handloom sector survive and grow in many parts of the country. The situation in Himachal is no exception. Incidentally the handloom of Himachal has got a very strong backward linkage due to its attractiveness as a crowded tourist destination and secondly due to the rising eco-consciousness of the customers around the world. This research study is an attempt to understand the socio economic factors of handloom weavers of Himachal Pradesh and find the factors that have worked as incentives for certain districts which had at least able to check the continuous erosion in number of handloom weavers as compared to other parts of Himachal , and made them continue with the economic activity producing handloom fabrics. This study is concentrated in various weaving clusters of Himachal Pradesh, and the key finding of the study has been that in spite of decrease in handloom weaver population in the state of Himachal Pradesh, Kullu has been able to retain and prosper its reputation as the handloom capital of Himachal Pradesh. Another major outcome of the present study that has come out that professionally well managed cooperatives are the best safeguard for handloom sector.

Key Words: Handloom, Tourism, Socio economic condition of weavers, cooperatives, revival.

Introduction

Handloom sector of Himachal Pradesh is unique in many aspects. The community, their weaving patterns, methods, looms, value chain, their geographic spread and their socio-economic status make the handloom sector of Himachal Pradesh distinct and different from other parts of the country.

The socio-economic condition of the weaver's community and their backward and forward linkages with the market are the key determinants of their prosperity and growth.

Designing of intervention programmes for their welfare and integrating their supply chain, demands a thorough understanding of the socio-economic condition of the weavers.

Any effective level of intervention would require firsthand information about the weaver's socio-economic status across different clusters of Himachal Pradesh. In the absence of any solid ground level data, no scheme and intervention could yield meaningful and lasting results.

At this backdrop, the present study is an attempt to understand the ground realities of the socio-economic status of the weaver's community in Himachal Pradesh and reasons Kullu to develop as a prominent handloom cluster and conditions conducive for this growth.

Historical background

Number of handloom weavers with looms in urban and rural Himachal Pradesh as per handloom census of 1987-88 and 2009-10

Table 1.1

Sl. No	Census	No. of handloom weavers & allied workers	No. of handlooms
1	1987-88	1,36,977	27,971
2	2009-10	13,458	5,550

Source: Office of the Development Commissioner (Handlooms-2015)

As per 2nd Handloom census of Himachal Pradesh in 1995-96

DISTRICT WISE CLASSIFICATION OF HANDLOOMS OF HIMACHAL PRADESH (Total No of Clusters - 12)

Table 1.2

No. of Looms	Up to 1000	1000-5000	5K-10K	10k-25k	25K -50K
	1.Bilaspur, 2.Lahaul & Spiti 3. Solan 4. Sirmour 5. Hamirpur 6. Una	1.Shimla 2. Kangra 3. Chamba 4. Kinnaur	1. Mandi	1. Kullu	-----

Source: Office of the Development Commissioner (Handlooms-1995-96)

Number of handloom weavers and allied workers and no. of handlooms households as per 3rd handloom census of 2009-10:

Table 1.3

District	Number of Handloom Household	Total Workers (All Ages)	Total Looms
Kangra	929	4510	1025
Kinnaur	261	291	272
Kullu	3869	6357	2929
Mandi	1871	2220	1279

Shimla	76	80	45
Total	7006	13458	5550

Source: Office of the Development Commissioner (Handlooms-2009-10)

As evident above, the number of workers in the handloom sector of Himachal Pradesh dropped to 13,458 (Handloom Census of India, 2009-10) and had marginally improved to around 13,578 in the latest Handloom census of 2019-20.

It is significant to note that since Indian economic development has to be viewed in the light of socio economic factors, preservation of traditional skills and the use of local available resources and significantly all the three are very important particularly for a hilly and difficult terrain of Himachal Pradesh.

There is a sharp decline in employment in the sector in the past two decades and the number of handloom is also declining very fast along with production. In many districts handloom is almost non-existent today except for few districts. The situation is grim over there too. Despite the fact that there lies a great demand for the handloom products particularly from Himachal both in the domestic and international market, the situation instead of improving is worsening. Again, Himachal being a very popular tourist destination, the backward and forward market linkage is also equally strong. Keeping the favorable conditions in mind, it is not yet known the reasons for the poor state of the affairs of the handloom sector. The policy measures, schemes and programmes appear to be ineffective in arresting the situation.

Review of Literature

Srinivasa Rao (2017)¹ has explained about the problems of the Handloom weavers in Krishna district and concluded that the main reason for the existence of handloom in India is the socio-economic condition of our country and the high employment potential in this sector.

Chouhan, & Roy (2017)², studied about the socio-economic profile of Handloom weavers. and concluded that industry is dominated by the male workers with very low level of educational level and ultimately are facing a number of challenges like financial constraint, drop off in wages, increased price of yarn, the absence of government support, lack of domestic market and demand and so on.

Muneendra and Prakash (2016)³, has researched about the status of handloom in AP and finally concluded that, the status of handloom sector in the state is decreasing as many of the weavers are shifting to other professions due to poor earnings, unemployment and poor demand for their products.

Bari et al, (2015)⁴, explained about the status of the handloom industries in India. Their study summarized that India is lacking in education and weavers don't have any other source of income for their livelihood. The price rise of yarn and low price of their final products has discouraged them.

Naga Raju G. et al (2014)⁵ have studied about the socio-economic conditions of the Handloom weavers finally summarized that, handloom sector has always been a weak competitor against powerloom and mill sectors.

Research Questions

- Why the weavers population is on decline despite ample and lucrative market opportunities?
- What are the motivating and de-motivating factors for the weavers to continue with the trade?
- Why the young generation is no more interested to continue with their parental occupation?

Research Objectives

The primary objective of the present research work is to understand the socio economic conditions of the handloom weavers.

The detailed objectives of the study are

1. To study the social-economic conditions of the handloom weavers of Himachal Pradesh and their place in the society.
2. To find the factors responsible for arresting the sharp fall in decreasing population of handloom weavers at Kullu.

Research Methodology

The present research study has chosen both the quantitative research for its data collection, interpretation and analysis and qualitative research by Focused group discussions.

Data Collection Methods and Strategy

- The present research work makes use of both sources of data, i.e., primary as well as secondary data.
- The Secondary data was collected from research journals, government publications, state department publications, other unpublished sources of NGOs and cooperatives etc.

Collection of Primary Data

Target Population	Handloom Weavers of Himachal Pradesh
Sampling Unit	Weavers from Selected Clusters of HP
Sampling Method	Quota Sampling
Data Collection Method	Structured Questionnaire Schedules and Focused Group Discussions.

Sampling Methods

A questionnaire survey was conducted among 200 artisans across five districts of Himachal Pradesh.

A Quota sampling was administered based on the population of handloom weavers in each of the districts and also due to convenience.

Since Kullu District is having the largest number of handloom population, and keeping in view the physical connectivity and accessibility of conducting data from weavers 50% quota was allocated to Kullu District.

For the rest of the districts like Chamba, Mandi, Kangra and Kinnaur 25 samples (12.5%) were collected from each.

DATA COLLECTIONS

The present study included SIX Focused Group Discussions (FGDs) to identify the current state of affairs in the Handlooms Textiles and to understand the socio economic status of handloom weavers across two most populous districts of Himachal Pradesh ie Kullu and Mandi (housing around 60% of total handlooms of Himachal Pradesh) and one each at Chamba and Kangra.

FGD conducted:

Three in Kullu District (15 male members, 12 women members, 15 mixed)

One Each in Mandi, Chamba and Kangra Districts (15 male, 14 women, 15 mixed)

The FGD's were based to around following Points

- To understand weaving as a traditional income generating activity in HP.
- Competitions with power looms,
- Availability of raw materials
- Marketing of handloom products
- Decrease in demand of handloom products,
- Awareness of Govt. welfare schemes for H/L Weavers
- Ways to increase volumes and employment potentials
- Lack of interest in weaving by the new generation & finally
- Availability of alternate sources of income and employment for weavers in HP.
- Influence of Tourism in maintaining demand of H/L products.
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The recorded responses indicated that

1. Competitions with power looms is the biggest threat to handlooms.
2. Lack of finance to hold for stocks as prices of woollen yarn has increased from Rs 650/Kg to Rs 1700-1800 /Kg and
3. Lack of awareness of implementation of government incentives and welfare schemes.
4. Modern generation lacks interest
5. Due to increase in transportation and industrialization and increase of infrastructure facility other sources of income are not season bound these days, as compared to woollen handloom weaving, which finds demand in winter only.
6. The participants were in favor of a stronger and robust, system from government awareness camps.
7. They were collective in a view that handloom has a potential, where less education is not a barrier in earning livelihood
8. Less tedious in terms of hard labor required in outdoor activities of construction of roads and civil work,

9. Group consensus led to conclusion that women weavers which provide dual opportunity for flexible timing of work at home without compromising the care of family members provided the produce is saleable at a margin.
10. Also, cooperative sector working has a potential in meeting the challenges posed due to management of working capital / inventory of raw materials and finished goods and utilizing various government schemes for the welfare.

Summary of Questionnaire Schedules

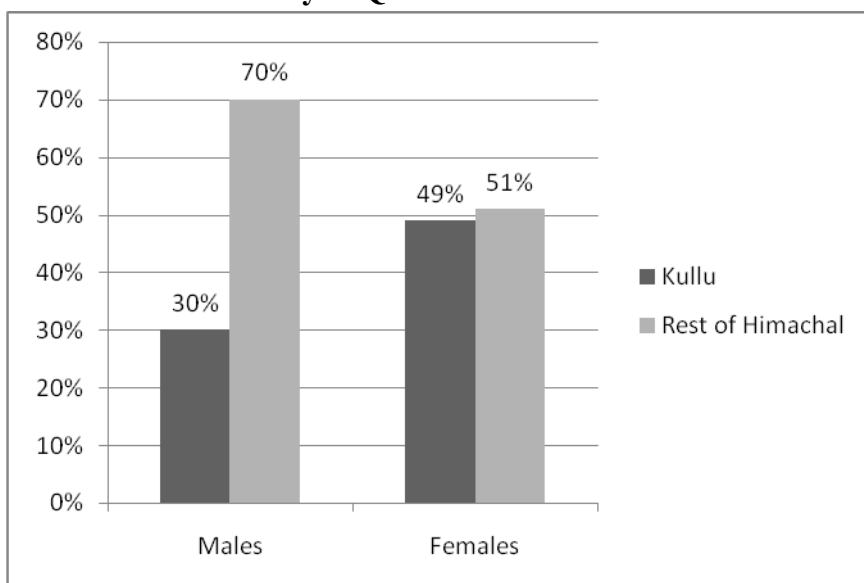


Table 1.1 Comparative study of Number of Handloom Weavers in Kullu Vs Rest of Himachal

The above table clearly indicates that women weavers are more inclined to weaving profession in District Kullu, as compared to male weavers, as more and more job opportunities are opening in other sectors for them, like tourism and infrastructure.

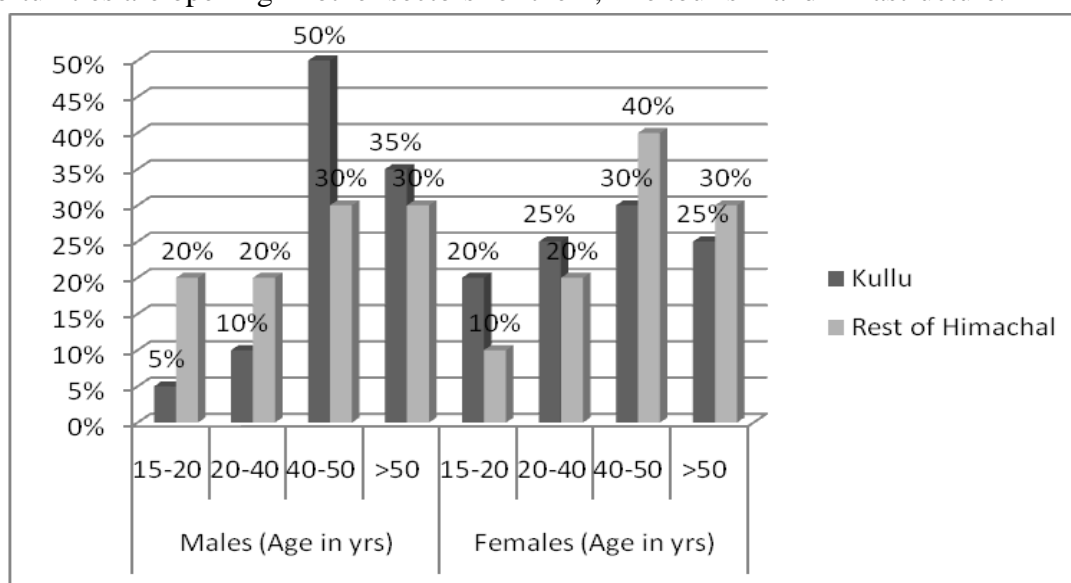


Table 1.2 Comparative Distribution of Age group in Males / Females in Kullu / Rest of Himachal

The above study depicts that there is clear lack of interest in younger males in Kullu district for want of more lucrative opportunities as available to them in other parts of Himachal. While 50 % of male weavers in Kullu, are comfortable in weaving job, as compared to hard jobs in infrastructure industry, while they are comparatively stronger in field work in other parts of Himachal.

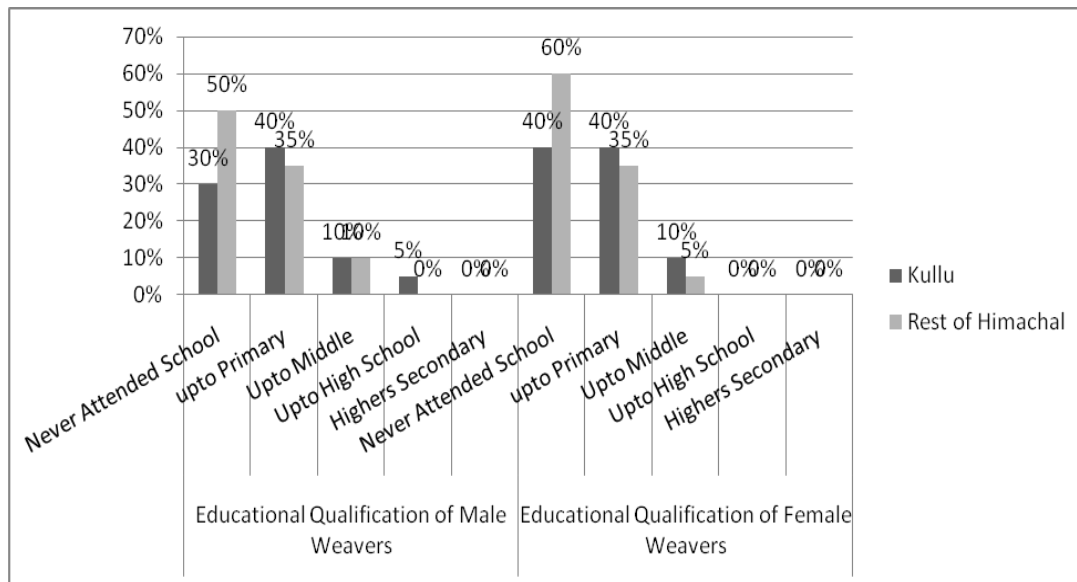


Table 1.3 Educational Qualification Break up of handloom Weavers of Himachal Pradesh

The study above indicates mostly weavers in handloom community belong to a class where they have never attended schools, and have very little opportunity to earn their livelihood by other means other than their ancestral income.

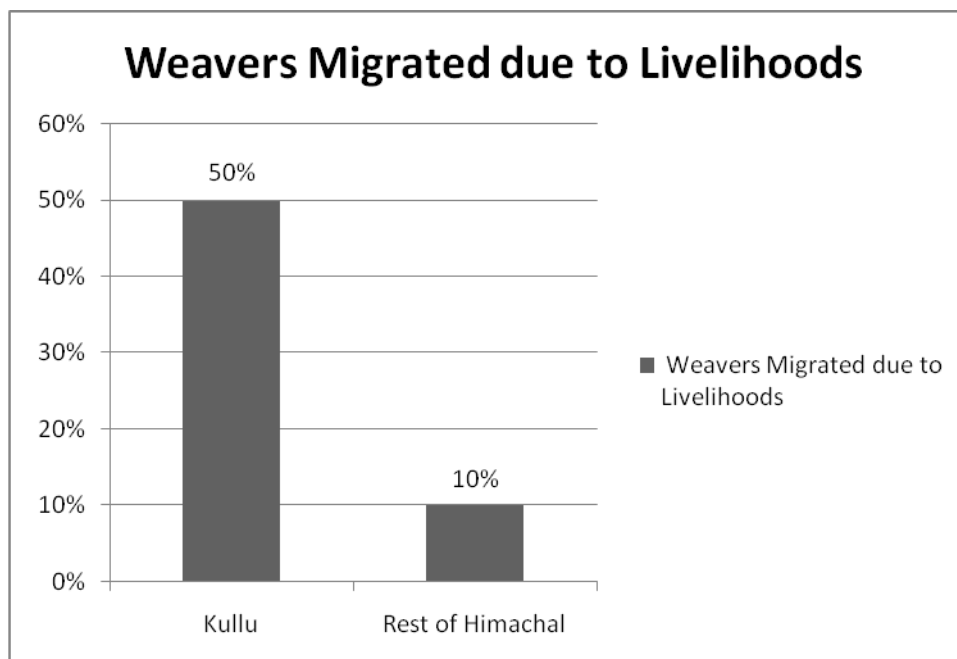


Table 1.4 Migration of Weavers due to livelihoods

The study on migration pattern indicated that most of the skilled population of handloom weavers have migrated from other parts of Himachal and could find their livelihoods in District Kullu.

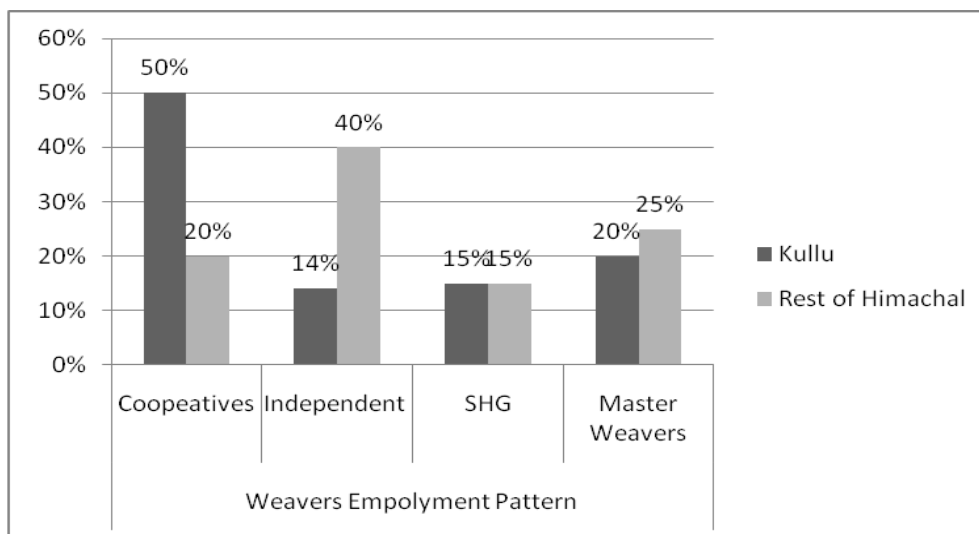


Table 1.5 Study on Employment pattern of handloom weavers of Himachal Pradesh

The study shows that handloom weavers in District Kullu are more affiliated to Coopeartive network, which has shown improved performance in their livelihood pattern.

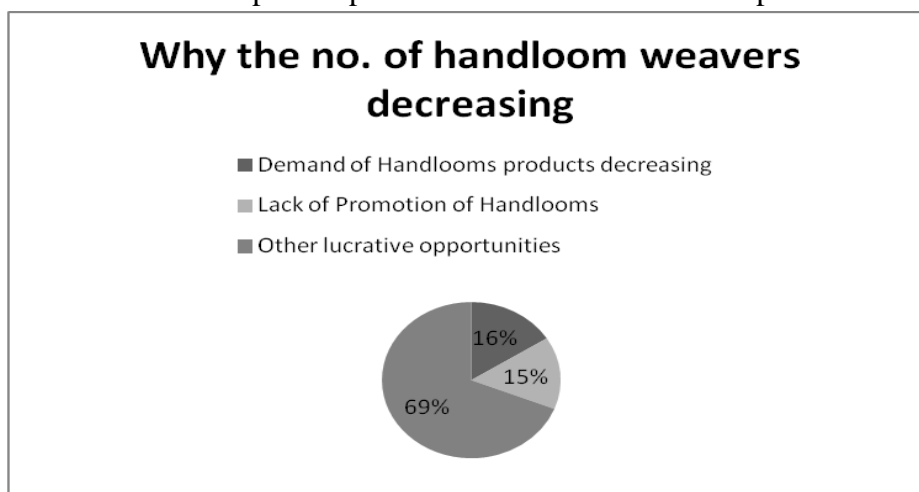


Table 1.6 Study on weavers attitude towards handloom weaving in Kullu, clearly indiactes that Handloom, is no longer a choice for educated youth of Kullu, because he finds other lucrative opportunities in terms of livelihood, provided he is educated and he explores other options due to increase in tourism and infrastructure in district of Kullu. As evident from Table 1.3, youth who is less educated finds handloom weaving as a viable option for livelihood earning , if he is not ready to work in open fields / infrastructure construction works, or else education lands him up in white collar tourism job with better returns, as Kullu Manali has already grown into a prominent tourist destination.

Case Study of Bhuttico Weavers Cooperavtive Performance

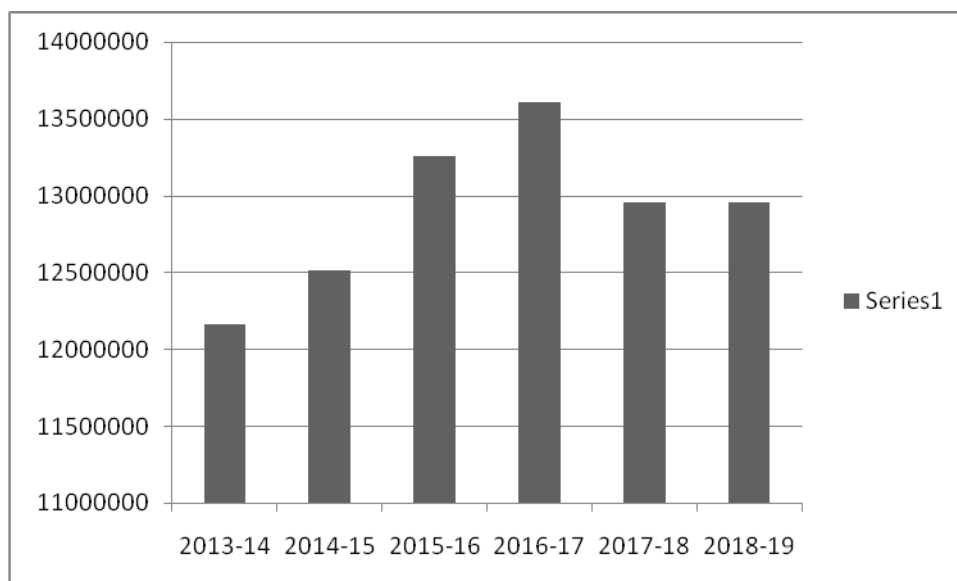


Table 1.6 Sales Turnover of Bhuttico (Rs) in last 6 years

The data is obtained from accounts office of successful cooperative weavers society running for the last 70 years and expanding sales year on yearly basis, clearly indicates that welfare of weavers is best in cooperative fold, provided the whole cooperative is managed by professionals and the result is evident from the above chart. Bhuttico weavers cooperative society, which was established, way back in 1956, is till date successful in providing the employment to around 800 weavers (400 handloom weavers in house and 400 with job work) and running its own retail outlets, and weaving all ranges of merino, pashmina, rabbit and angora wool, running its own spinning unit and testing laboratory for quality production for finished products and made ups. Presently, Bhuttico is expanding its horizon of sales to overseas and modern channels of online e market.

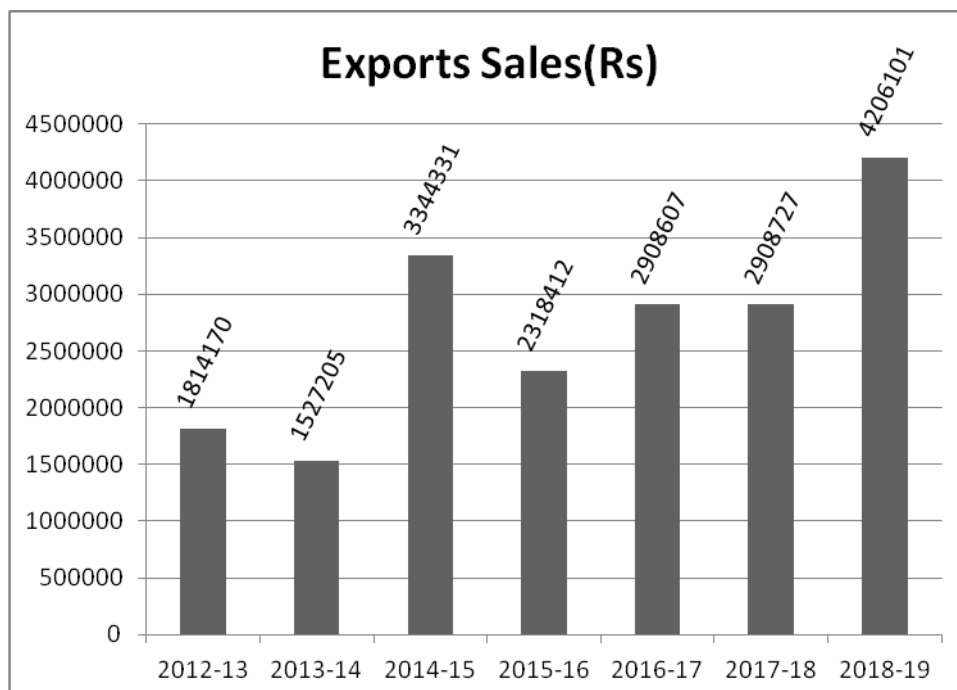


Table 1.7 Exports sales of Bhuttico Weavers Cooperative; Kullu (HP)

FINDINGS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

It is found from the above study most of the handloom weavers occupies a low status on society front, because less education gives them less opportunity to earning potential. Still less educated respondents from Himachal Pradesh have good earning capacity in district Kullu as compared to other parts of Himachal. Presently Kullu is inhabited with migrated skilled weavers, as they are ready to weave and able to sell, because of tourist inflow, and thus able to maintain the cultural heritage, along with preserving their ancestral art. Also, Natural inhabitants of Kullu have dual advantage, able to join weaving, as still has a demand because of tourism, but also look into other lucrative avenues, if they are better educated to pursue for other career options of tourism and working in infrastructure projects. Handloom weaving, though finding it difficult to survive when compared to cheaper options made available to power loom products, but niche designs and colour combinations and explicit work of art has been somehow able to survive in the competitive world at a price, which tourists and upper middle class is able to pay. Less educated youth of Himachal Pradesh finds weaving as an important cultural lineage to pursue as employment, but are protected only under the umbrella of professionally managed handloom cooperative, as evident in the case of Bhuttico Handloom Weavers coop society that Handloom Shawls of Himachal Pradesh have potential domestic demands because of niche designs and due to cultural lineage. It has great international demand as well.

As pointed out in FGD's that Government should give attention in up gradation and modernization of loom, equipments and infrastructural development for the betterment of the handloom industry. Raw materials should be made available through an established channel as the existing channel is not cost effective. Government policy for protection of handloom weavers by way of strict implementation of GI for Kullu and Kinnauri Shawls is very much need of hour, but very difficult to implement on the ground. Besides, using new technology through E Portals and tapping of exports markets for these products must also be evaluated, for long term survival of this industry which will not only provide employment to locals but also prevent migration to urban cities.

Conclusions

- Weavers should be given space in prominent tourist locations for direct selling of their produce.
- Wool being primary raw material for most of the weavers, small wool yarn processing centers need to be established.
- Promotional strategies: Publicity is one of the essential factors, which influence the sale of the products. Therefore government should provide special publicity drive to promote handloom products through promotion of societies.
- Handloom mark: The Government should organize more awareness towards Handloom mark, to create unique brand image for genuine Handloom Products. Branding of products and youth icons should be used to promote handloom fabrics into a modern fashion statement.
- Quality in handloom products: To bring superior quality in handloom products, the focus should be on pre and post loom process development. Innovative and faster

weaving processes to increase efficiency of weavers would make handloom more competitive and profitable.

- Finishing and Labeling of the product: Using modern finishing techniques and product packaging for innovative marketing.
- Efforts must be made for product diversifications by using cotton or some other substitute so that holding stock for a weaver becomes less costly affair.
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