

## Socioeconomic status and problem of Tangail Saree handloom weavers in Bangladesh

Nazmunnahar Nipa, Md. Rais Uddin Mian\* and Md. Aynul Haque

Department of Agricultural Finance, Bangladesh Agricultural University, Mymensingh-2202, Bangladesh

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#### \*Corresponding Author

Md. Rais Uddin Mian  
E-mail: [raisagfin@yahoo.com](mailto:raisagfin@yahoo.com)

### ABSTRACT

The present study was undertaken to observe the socioeconomic status of Tangail Saree (women cloth) handloom weavers and their problems. Keeping in view the objective, 50 respondents were selected from 5 villages of Tangail sadar upazila of whom 28 were small, 13 were medium and those of 9 were large according to loan size taken from various sources. Socio-economic characteristics of the weavers revealed that majority of the respondents were in 20-40 years. The overall family size stood at 5.42. All the weavers were literate, however only 22 % were qualified above secondary level. Almost 82 % respondents were engaged in weaving as their main occupation and some of them had other occupations as subsidiary. The average annual incomes of the respondents were Tk 164050 for small, Tk 294615.38 for medium and Tk 730311.11 for large category. The respective average annual expenditures were Tk 157850, 285384.62 and 16533.33. That's why the annual average savings of the weavers were Tk 6529, 9230.78 and 13777.78 respectively. The study identified some problems like lack of adequate credit facilities, high price of raw materials, low price of product, political viability, lack of proper technology, etc. The respondents also suggested some solutions from their own point of view. Provision of institutional credit, increased marketing facilities, govt. patronage, etc. might help the respondents to get rid of the identified problems.

### Introduction

Bangladesh is one of the lower middle income developing countries in the world and agriculture is the most important sector of economy. Unemployment remains a serious problem, and a growing concern for Bangladesh's agricultural sector will be its ability to absorb additional manpower. Finding alternative sources of employment will continue to be a daunting problem for future governments, particularly with the increasing numbers of landless peasants who already account for about half the rural labor force. Handloom products are not agricultural but obviously increase agro based demandable products in and outside of the country which are made mostly on family based labor through small or medium manufacturing units.

Historically handloom has got its predominance and heritage in Bangladesh. It is the oldest and biggest cottage industry giving employment to rural as well as urban people by using local available resources. It is spreads out all over the country with long tradition of excellence. Once handloom product like 'muslin' made in this part of sub-continent was globally famous and people took it from here while visited this area. But with the emergence of industrial revolution started in European countries during 18<sup>th</sup> century, the British rulers destroyed this handloom only for their own interest.

The tradition of weaving cloth by hand constitutes one of the richest aspects of Bangladeshi culture and heritage. The level of artistry and intricacy achieved in handloom fabrics are unparalleled and unique. The handloom can meet every need from exquisite fabrics of daily use. The industry has displayed innate resilience to withstand and adopt

itself to the changing demand of modern times. The handloom sector is the largest traditional cottage industry in Bangladesh providing employment for more than 1027407 people and is the second largest employment provider after agriculture (BBS, 2013). Handloom products have shown decisive upward trend in the export market since 1972 and with distinctive design and superior quality have created a niche for themselves in overseas markets. We can now proudly claim to be equipped to meet the demand for the latest fashion. An international expert's study reveals that the technical skill of weavers of Bangladesh is second to none in the handloom producing world. The sector has a prospect for labor intensive and capital saving growth. Handloom weaving can reduce unemployment and underemployment among rural households.

Tangail district has a long and prestigious heritage in producing handloom products in the country. It is one of the 10 largest cloth producing districts of Bangladesh (Nipa, 2015). It alone accounts for more than 11% of total handloom production of the country (BBS 2013). Tangail handloom weavers produce silk saree namely Tagail Muslin and famous Jamdani. Generally, socioeconomic conditions and other features like occupational distribution, communication facilities, etc, have a strong influence on the skill of manpower and industrial development in an area. It is especially applicable for heritage-based industries like handloom. But studies addressing this issue are almost absent in Bangladesh. So, this study was undertaken to investigate the socioeconomic condition and problems of Tangail saree handloom weavers in Tangail district of Bangladesh.

### METHODOLOGY

### **Selection of study area**

To achieve the objectives of the present study, a preliminary survey was conducted in Tangail sadar upazila and it was seen to be a suitable place for the study. On the basis of previous information, some sub-urban areas namely Porabari, Baghil, Gharinda, Silimpur and Gala in Tangail sadar upazila were selected as the study area. Many of the households of this area are involved with handloom industry long since and adopted handloom as the main source of livelihood. The study area is also under the microcredit program of Grameen Bank, BRAC and BURO Bangladesh.

### **Sampling technique**

Purposive random sampling technique was followed to select the respondents for the study. At first, lists of the handloom weavers were collected from the lending organizations (Grameen Bank, BRAC and BURO Bangladesh) because the borrowing weavers were the well-functioning among the weavers in the study area. Then the weavers were classified into three categories according to the loan size as small (Tk 7000-20000), medium (Tk 21000-40000), large (above Tk 40000). Subsequently 28, 13 and 9 respondents from small, medium and large lists were randomly selected and thus the total sample size stood at 50 which covered at least 20 percent of the population of each of the categories.

### **Collection and analysis of data**

The present study is based on primary data collected through field survey of randomly selected 50 Tangail saree weavers using pre-tested questionnaire. Collected data were analyzed with appropriate tabular and descriptive statistical techniques to arrive at the meaningful findings of the study.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Socioeconomic characteristics of beneficiaries and basic features of the study area**

#### **Population and households**

Total population of the study area is 521104 having 260170 male and 260934 female. Total number of households is 116922 with a density of 1559 persons per sq km (BBS, 2013). So, the study area is comparatively a populous rural area in the country.

#### **Occupation**

The main occupation of the study area is weaving and most of the people are somehow related with weaving and. Besides this, people earn their income from other sources as farming, teaching, servicing and petty business. Once upon a time this area was most famous for weaving sarees. But at present, besides weaving, people are converted to different other occupations. Agriculture is the main occupation of the study area after weaving.

### **Economic condition**

The economic condition of the area is almost the same as other parts of the country. The labor class stands at the lowest economic status and lives almost from hand-to-mouth. The respondents are almost poorly educated or poorer section of the district. As being born weavers and illiterate, they live in a lower status. Very few of them have their own trading business. Most of the respondents are worked as a laborer under some mohajons. They are always deprived of getting their proper wage.

### **Literacy and educational facilities**

The educational facility prevails in the study area is relatively good. Most of the people are being very conscious about their children's education and hopefully it's very progressive now. The average literacy rate is 53.1% of which male 57.3% and female 48.8% (BBS, 2014).

### **Industry**

There are some small mills and factories in the study area. Among them, cottage and handloom industries are prominent also. These industries make different handloom products such as Tangail Muslins, Silks, Jamdani Saree, Cotton share, Half Silk, Soft Silk, Cotton Jamdani, Dangoo sharee/Baluchurri, Gas-mercerised twisted cotton sharee, etc. (ASB, 2014).

### **Religion, culture and tradition**

Almost all the peoples in this study area are Muslims. The non-Muslims are Hindus, Buddhists, Christians and some others. The villagers are very much cooperative to each other for any type of occasion or help. Male members are usually works in out and female members are work at home. They celebrate their festivals as religion basis. Though their festivals are different to each other as religion purpose, they have some common occasions like Pohela Boishakh, Nobanno, Independence Day, Mother Language Day, wedding day, etc. The weavers always try to exhibit their innovations and excellency in these occasions.

### **Communication, transportation and marketing facilities**

This area is well developed with pucca road. It is also connected with Dhaka-Tangail high way. Palanquin, horse carriage, bullock cart, Panshi nauka (luxuries boat) and Gaina boat were the traditional transports found in the rural areas of Tangail district. These transports are either extinct or nearly extinct. Now-a-days, all the upazilas are connected to the district headquarters by metalled roads. Bus, minibus and three wheelers move all over the district. Moreover, the district is also connected to the capital by railway. So, marketing of handloom and other products are easy in the study area.

There are many big hats situated near about sadar, the notable ones are Babur hat , Bazidpur hat, Bolla hat, Sohagpurhat, etc. Respondents sell their products here as pikary price. Then the products are spreaded out all over the country and abroad by pikars.

**Age composition of the respondent weavers**

In the study area, all the respondents were found to be in age bracket of 20 and above years (Table 1).

It is apparent from Table 1 that most of the loanee members (56%) were in the age group of 20-40 years while minimum (16%) were found to be in above 55 years during the study period. Irrespective of age group it is found that more than 80% of the respondents fell within the age group of 20-55 years which is considered to be very active life time of human being all over the world to conduct any income generating activity effectively.

**Table 1.** Age composition of the respondents

Age group	Weaver respondents (Percent)			
	Small (no.)	Medium (no.)	Large (no.)	All (no.)
20-40 years	16 (57.14)	6 (46.15)	6 (66.67)	28 (56.00)
41-55 years	8 (28.57)	4 (30.77)	2 (22.22)	14 (28.00)
Above 55 years	4 (14.29)	3 (23.08)	1 (11.11)	8 (16.00)
All	28 (100)	13 (100)	9 (100)	50 (100)

Figures within parentheses indicate percentage of total

**Table 2.** Family composition and size of handloom weavers

Category	Age/Sex								Average family size (no.)
	Up to 15 years		16-55 years		Above 55 years		All		
	Male (no.)	Female (no.)	Male (no.)	Female (no.)	Male (no.)	Female (no.)	Male (no.)	Female (no.)	
Small	18 (26.87)	27 (29.03)	40 (59.70)	55 (59.14)	9 (13.43)	11 (11.83)	67 (41.88)	93 (58.12)	5.71
Medium	13 (37.14)	8 (22.86)	15 (42.86)	21 (60.00)	7 (20.00)	6 (17.14)	35 (50.00)	35 (50.00)	5.38
Large	3 (12.50)	4 (23.53)	17 (70.83)	10 (58.82)	4 (16.67)	3 (17.65)	24 (58.54)	17 (41.46)	4.55
All	34 (26.98)	39 (26.90)	72 (57.14)	86 (59.31)	20 (15.86)	20 (13.79)	126 (46.50)	145 (53.50)	5.42

Figures within parentheses indicate percentage of total

**Family size and composition**

A family in the present study has been defined as a group of individuals living together, taking meals united and living under the control of one head. It includes husband, wife, son, unmarried daughter, brother, unmarried sister, parents, etc. If any person of a family is employed outside but takes meals from the same kitchen while at home and shares the income and expenditure of the family, he or she has been considered to be a member of that family.

Table 2 shows that the average size of the family was found to be 5.71, 5.38 and 4.55 persons in the case of small, medium and large respondents respectively. Thus, small respondent's family size was bigger than that of the medium and large ones in the study area. Sex distribution in the table shows that male and female percentages constituted about

42 and 58 %, 50 and 50 % and 59 and 41 % respectively. Average family size stood at 5.42.

**Literacy level of handloom weavers**

The literacy level was classified into five categories, which is shown in Table 3. The table shows that 11% of total small respondents knew to sign only, 71 % of them were up to primary level and 18 % were educated up to secondary level. On the other hand, in the case of medium respondents, the respective percentages were found to be 15, 62, and 23 % during the study period. Large category respondents were found to be 33, 22 and 45 % of primary, secondary and above secondary level respectively. None of them were found to be illiterate which indicates positive sign of educational development in the study area.

**Table 3.** Distribution of the respondents according to level of education

Literacy level	Number of respondents			
	Small (no.)	Medium (no.)	Large (no.)	All (no.)
Illiterate	–	–	–	–
Signature only	3 (11.00)	2 (15.00)	–	5 (10.00)
Up to primary level	20 (71.00)	8 (62.00)	3 (33.00)	31 (62.00)
Up to secondary	5 (18.00)	3 (23.00)	4 (45.00)	10 (20.00)
Above secondary	–	–	2 (22.00)	4 (8.00)
All	28 (100)	13 (100)	9 (100)	50 (100)

Figures within parentheses indicate percentages of total

**Table 4.** Occupational distribution of the respondents

Occupation	Occupations of the respondents			
	Small (no.)	Medium (no.)	Large (no.)	All (no.)
Weaver	28 (100)	13 (100)	9 (100)	50 (100)
Subsidiary	4 (14.00)	2 (15.00)	3 (33.00)	9 (18.00)

Figures within parentheses indicate percentages of total

**Table 5.** Average Total land holdings of the respondents

Pattern of land	Respondent's landholders		
	Small (acres)	Medium (acres)	Large (acres)
Cultivated own land	0.20	0.96	1.6
Land rented in	0.90	–	–
Homestead area	1.06	0.54	0.43
Fallow land	–	0.04	0.02
Total cultivated land	1.1	0.96	1.6
Total	2.26	1.54	2.05

**Occupational distribution of the respondents**

The occupation which generates the major family income was categorized as main occupation in present study. In the study area, main occupation of the respondents was weaving. Besides, they were dealing with different other occupations as subsidiary. These were farming, service, business, day labor, shopkeeper etc. Above all, small cottage business was found somewhere. The occupational distribution of handloom weavers is presented in Table.4. It is evident from the table that handloom was appeared to be the major source of livelihood almost all the respondents in the study area.

**Size of land holding of the handloom weavers**

It is evident from Table 5 that all categories of weavers did not possess all the categories of land. Average total land of all categories belonged to small, medium and large groups were found to be 2.26, 2.51 and 2.98 acres respectively. The large

weavers have more land than small and medium ones in the study area.

**Average annual income of the handloom weavers**

Income is the most important indicator of socio-economic status of people in both rural and urban environments. Annual income of a family has been estimated on the basis of yearly earning from all sorts of income generating activity accrued by all active members of the family during the period of study. Table 4.6 shows that the average annual income of the weavers was estimated at Tk 164050, 294615.38 and 730311.11 respectively for the small, medium and large respondents. It is clear from the table that major income of the respondent's household was sale of handloom products which alone accounts for 80, 81 and 78 % of total income respectively.

**Table 6.** Average annual income of the respondents

Category	Average annual income of the respondents							Total (Tk)
	Handloom products (Tk)	Poultry (Tk)	Crop (Tk)	Grocery shop (Tk)	Service (Tk)	Tailoring (Tk)	Day labor (Tk)	
Small	131240.00 (80.00)	–	8202.50 (5.00)	9843.00 (6.00)	8202.50 (5.00)	–	6562.00 (4.00)	164050.00 (100)

Medium	238638.46 (81.00)	14730.78 (5.00)	11784.62 (6.00)	–	–	23569.23 (8.00)	–	294615.38 (100)
Large	569642.67 (78.00)	–	87637.33 (12.00)	–	43818.67 (6.00)	–	29212.44 (4.00)	730311.11 (100)
All	313173.71 (79.41)	4910.26 (1.25)	35874.82 (9.10)	3281.00 (0.83)	17340.39 (4.39)	7856.41 (2.00)	11924.81 (3.02)	394361.40 (100)

Figures within parentheses indicate percentages of total

**Table 7.** Average annual expenditure of the respondents

Source	Annual Average Expenditure			
	Small (Tk)	Medium (Tk)	Large (Tk)	All (Tk)
Household	39462.50 (25.00)	63926.02 (22.40)	171968.00 (24.00)	91785.51 (23.42)
Crops	4735.50 (3.00)	19120.77 (6.70)	42992.00 (6.00)	22282.76 (5.69)
Handloom products	113652.00 (72.00)	196915.40 (69.00)	487242.66 (68.00)	265936.69 (67.82)
Others	15785.00 (1.00)	5422.31 (1.90)	14330.67 (2.00)	11845.67 (3.02)
Total	157850.00 (100)	285384.62 (100)	716533.33 (100)	391850.94 (100)

Figures within parentheses indicate percentages of total

**Table 8.** Average annual savings of the participants

Type of participants	Average annual income (Tk)	Average annual expenditure (Tk)	Average annual savings (Tk)
Small	164050.00	157850.00	6529.00
Medium	294615.38	285384.62	9230.78
Large	730311.11	716533.33	13777.78
All	396325.50	386589.32	9845.85

**Average annual expenditure of the respondents**

Expenditure in respondent's family was incurred by different purposes, i.e., household expenditure, expenditure made for handloom products, crops and other purposes (gift and presentation, social ceremonies, etc.). Table 7 shows the average annual expenditure per household was again maximum in the case of handloom products being Tk 113652.00, 196915.40 and 487242.66 respectively for small, medium and large which stands 72, 69 and 68 %.

**Average annual savings of the respondents**

Average annual savings of the household has been calculated by subtracting the corresponding total expenditure from total income of the weavers during the study year. Table 8 shows the average annual savings of small, medium and large loanee members was Tk 6529.00, 9230.78 and 13777.78 respectively. The table also reveals that annual savings of the respondents was positive and also positively related with loan size during the study period.

**Problems and Suggested Measures**

**Problems of Tangail saree weaving**

The handloom weavers were asked what problems they were encountering in weaving Tangail saree.

Their responses thus collected and painted in Table 9 and discussed subsequently.

**Lack of adequate institutional credit facilities**

Handloom weavers should have sufficient fund to buy necessary raw materials such as clothes, yarn, color, etc. As they did not have enough money to buy necessary inputs, they often failed to produce their products in expected quality and quantity. It was observed that they were not able to borrow money from institutional credit source according to their convenience. About 89.29 % of small, 69.23 % medium and 77.78 % large weavers were facing this sort of problem.

**Abnormal price hike of yarn**

Yarn is the most important raw material of handloom products. Its abnormal high price caused a threat to the weavers. Among respondents 85.71, 69.23 and 66.67 % small, medium and large respondents were very anxious of this problem respectively.

**Low price of product**

The weavers expressed that price of Tangail saree and other products were not sufficient enough to make reasonable profit for them. Price did not rise proportionately with rise in production cost. As a result, they were discouraged to continue their

works. About 96.43, 46.15 and 55.56 % of small, medium and large categories of respondent respectively expressed this problem.

**High interest on loan**

It is evident from Table 9 that in the study area about 82.14, 61.54 and 77.78 % of small, medium and large respondents respectively reported high interest rate of credit was a hindering factor for their operation.

**Lack of suitable marketing facilities**

About 89.29 % small, 76.92 % medium and 55.56 % large handloom weavers indicated that the facilities present in the market were not adequate to run their business. They had no retailed outlet. They had to sell their products to wholesalers at a lower price. Long distance of market from production point was also opined to be a great problem.

**Lack of proper storage facilities**

Lack of adequate and proper storage facilities affected 96.43, 69.23 and 55.56 % of small, medium and large respondents respectively. Because of low quality storage facility they could not sell their products relatively in higher price after holding them for sometimes.

**Political unrest**

Political unrest of our country is a very big and dangerous problem which harms the poor people seriously. This problem was mentioned by 92.86 % small, 84.62 % medium and 88.89 % large for respondents. Hartal, street block, burning etc. caused a great ruin to their business.

**Lack of skilled manpower**

Non availability of skilled manpower was considered to be a problem for handloom production as reported by 85.71 % small, 92.31 % medium and 44.44 % large respondents.

**Lack of proper improved technology**

Because of lack of proper education, the weavers were far away to adopt modern and improved technology in their operation. The study area also lacked of training facility of their nature. For this they did their work mostly on traditional measure. This problem was mentioned by 92.86, 53.85 and 44.44 % of small, medium and large weavers respectively.

**Problems of theft**

About 78.57 % small, 46.15 % medium and 55.56 % large weavers of handloom expressed their bitter experience regarding theft of their products.

**Problems of get ruined**

This was also reported as a big problem. After production, knots of the sarees have to cut to separate them. If saree is cut misleadingly during this time, the saree is completely rejected causing a complete ruin to the weaver. About 71.43, 69.23 and 77.78 % of the small, medium and large weavers mentioned this problem.

**Lack of govt. patronage**

Lack of govt. patronage is a serious threat for dealing with cottage industries in Bangladesh (Rahmatulla, 2010). Government concern is very important to any kind of industries. It was reported by 89.29 % small, 61.54 % medium and 77.78 % large respondents that they enjoyed no government patronage in doing their business.

**Table 9.** Problems faced by the handloom weavers

Nature of problem	Small	Medium	Large
Lack of adequate institutional credit facilities	25 (89.29)	9 (69.23)	7 (77.78)
Abnormal price hike of yarn	24 (85.71)	9 (69.23)	6 (66.67)
Low price of product	27 (96.43)	6 (46.15)	5 (55.56)
High interest on loan	23 (82.14)	8 (61.54)	7 (77.78)
Lack of suitable marketing facilities	25 (89.23)	10 (76.92)	5 (55.56)
Lack of proper storage facilities	27 (96.43)	9 (69.23)	5 (55.56)
Political unrest	26 (92.86)	11 (84.62)	8 (88.89)
Lack of skilled manpower	24 (85.71)	12 (92.31)	4 (44.44)
Lack of proper improved technology	26 (92.86)	7 (53.85)	4 (44.44)
Problems of theft	22 (78.57)	6 (46.15)	5 (55.56)
Problems of get ruined	20 (71.43)	9 (69.23)	7 (77.78)
Lack of govt. patronage	25 (89.29)	8 (61.54)	7 (77.78)

Figures within parentheses indicate percentages of total.

The summation of percentages will not equal to 100 because of multiple answers given by the respondent.

**Table 10.** Suggested solutions by the respondents to overcome the problems

Suggested measures	Number of reported respondents		
	Small	Medium	Large
Provision of institutional credit	23 (82.14)	11 (84.62)	5 (55.56)
Supply of adequate raw materials by government at reasonable price	20 (71.43)	9 (69.23)	6 (66.67)
Increased marketing facilities	20 (71.43)	9 (69.23)	4 (44.44)
Developed storage facilities	24 (85.71)	9 (69.23)	5 (55.56)
Prevention of theft	19 (67.86)	12 (92.31)	5 (55.56)
Increasing labor efficiency	26 (92.86)	10 (76.92)	7 (77.78)

The summation of percentages will not equal to 100 because of multiple answers given by the respondent.

### Suggested solutions by the respondents

Respondents were requested to give some solutions regarding the problems encountered by them. These solutions are summarized in Table 10 and discussed below.

#### **Provision of institutional credit**

Sufficient working capital is a predominant factor for moving the wheels of industry (Ghosh, 2005). Institutional credit facilities with easy terms and conditions should be made available to the handloom weavers to supplement their cash needs which might help them in expansion of handloom products as well as quality goods. About 82.14 % of small, 84.62 % of medium and 55.56 % of large weavers expressed this as a possible solution to mitigate fund shortage.

#### **Supply of adequate raw materials at reasonable price**

Table 10 reveals that about 71.43 % small, 69.23 % medium and 66.67 % large weavers suggested raw materials should be supplied by govt. agencies at subsidized reasonable price for the development of their profession.

#### **Increased marketing facilities**

Marketing facilities is an important support for a producer. Table 10 shows that 71.43 % of small, 69.23 % of medium and 44.44 % of large weavers suggested for adequate and improved marketing facilities for ensuring fair prices to their products.

#### **Developed storage facilities**

Considering the economic feasibility, store house may be established at important assembling centers. As being poor, weavers could not be able to arrange these facilities by them own. About 85.71, 69.23 and 55.56 % small, medium and large weavers expressed opinion in this regard.

#### **Prevention of theft**

Security measures to be undertaken against the theft and dacoit. About 68 % small, 92% medium and 56 % large respondents said that law and security agencies should be strict to prevent such kind of problem.

#### **Increasing labor efficiency**

Government and private entrepreneurs should come forward with proper training program in feasible manner to the labor engaged in handloom production. Most of the labor is illiterate and they do not know about proper processing and making methods so their productivity is low. About 92.86, 76.92 and 77.78 % small, medium and large weavers expressed this idea respectively to train the labor for future efficient handloom production.

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