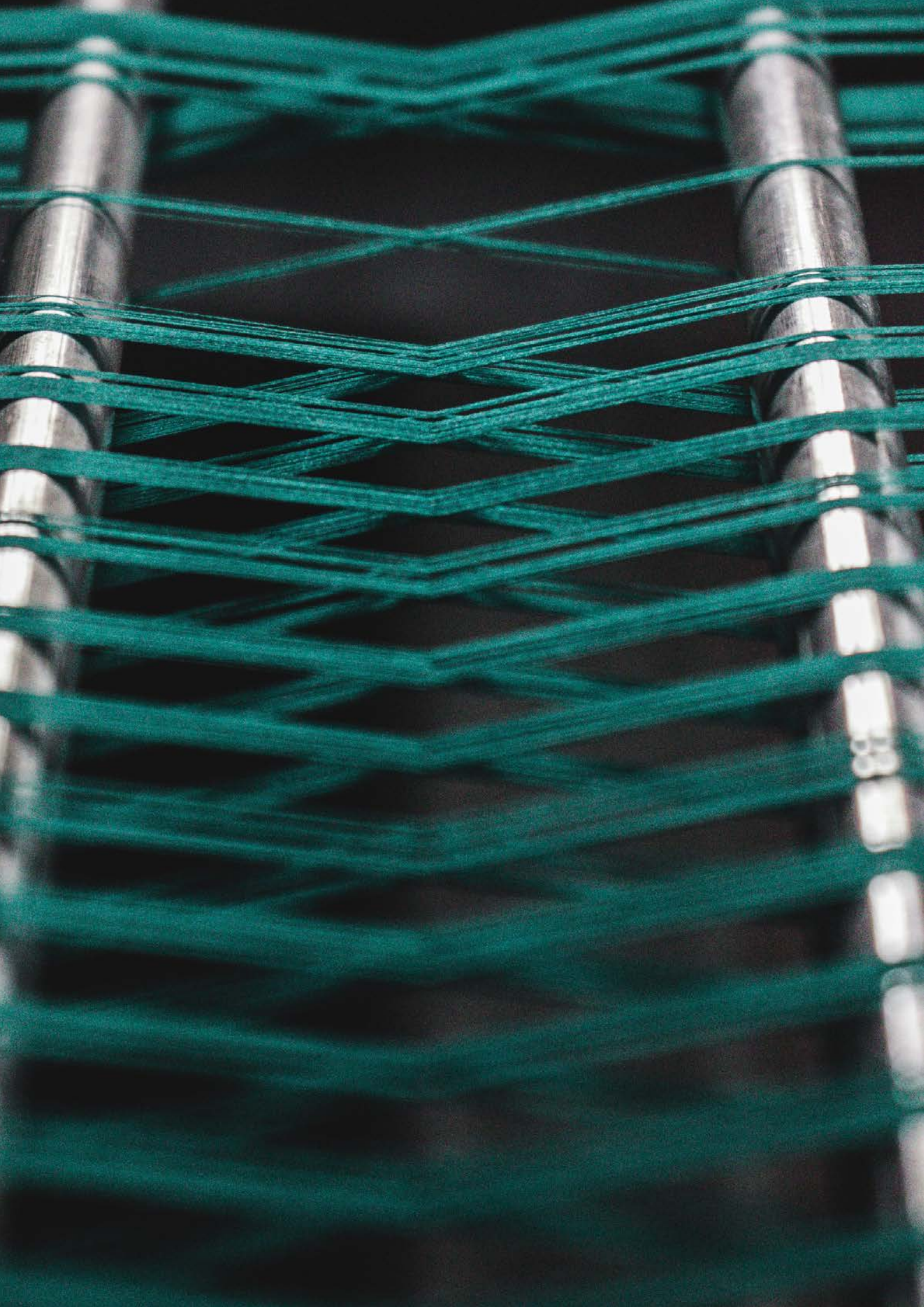
A woman wearing a bright yellow and green sari is standing in a traditional weaving workshop. She is positioned next to a large wooden handloom, with her hand resting on one of its horizontal beams. The room is dimly lit, with a single bright light bulb hanging from the ceiling. In the background, bundles of colorful threads are visible, and a small framed picture hangs on the wall. The overall atmosphere is one of quiet industry.

# Purvanchal: Silence of the Looms

A study examining the impact of  
the Covid-19 Lockdown on the  
traditional weaving industry







## PREFACE

This report, a sustained collective study lasting several months in 2020-2021, conducted by a dedicated team of well-trained on-ground researchers led by Dr Muniza Khan, a Varanasi-based scholar and qualified researcher in the social sciences, could not have come at a more opportune time.

The rigour and courage shown by the team marks it out for a unique effort. This is because though some similar studies inquiring into the effects of the pandemic have been conducted telephonically or online, there have been none, or very few, where physical interviews of participant subjects have been attempted in their homes and workplaces since the breakout of the Covid-19 pandemic. For that alone, this study is rare and special, capturing as it does unspeakable distress and emaciation of the key constituents of a once vibrant artisanal industry.

The fact-finding investigation team conducted as many as 204 detailed recorded interviews in Varanasi, Gorakhpur (Rasoolpur, Purana Gorakhnath), Azamgarh (Mubarakpur, Ibrahimpur, Shahpur) and Mau (Ghosi, Madhuban). We spoke to people engaged in different aspects and stages of spinning together some of India's most exquisite textiles. These reflect the various stages of the artisanal industry of weaving, one that has been in a state of crisis for decades given the ambivalent, often hostile policies adopted by the government.

The data in this report, analysed and collated, reveals many layers of differential exploitation. Specific to 2020-2021, the severe economic and structural blow due to work stoppages during Covid Lockdown has led to acute distress, indebtedness, beggary and hunger that any society and State should be ashamed of. Neither the state government nor the Centre have shown any sensitivity or responded to the crisis.

In fact, just as India's 63 crore migrant labourers found themselves completely abandoned by the State from 2020, the hundreds of thou-

sands artisanal workers and weavers attached to eastern UP's traditional weaving industry find themselves abandoned. Apart from acute impoverishment and hunger leading to indebtedness, the health denials, the denial (absence of access) to government schemes, and the absence of access to education have created a cycle of mistrust and loss of faith in an electoral government that is hitherto unprecedented.

This study amplifies the trends that have become markers of the existence of India's most vulnerable and marginalised. The Covid-19 pandemic and ill-conceived Lockdown was the final blow to an already reeling artisanal community. Loosely calculated estimates reveal a loss of a staggering Rs 3,000 crores to eastern UP's handicraft, handloom and power loom business during and after the pandemic due to a complete drying up of orders from Europe, UK and the US.

Textile associations as also chambers of commerce and industry have officially made statements of vast orders being canceled. The loss to the exchequer, however, does not, in any way, give an estimate of the economic losses suffered by the vast artisanal community, the sharp increase in indebtedness, despair and hunger. Fair and dignified wage was absent within this sector even before the Lockdown, raising moral, political and ethical questions for Businesses and Trades who draw profits from this traditional yet exoticised sector. The fact that successive governments never concerned themselves with ensuring a fair and dignified wage forms the backdrop.







## INTRODUCTION

Varanasi, also known as Banaras, is one of the world's oldest continuously inhabited cities. People have lived here for more than 2,000 years and while it has tremendous cultural significance for Hindus, it also has a significant population of Muslims and also smaller minority groups. It has therefore developed a composite culture that is known in local parlance as “*Saajhi Sanskriti*” or “*Tana-Bana*”.

But this *Ganga-Jamuni Tehzeeb*, as it is also called, is most evident in the city's centuries old textile industry where artisans hailing from different faiths, virtually weave together cultures. The best-known example of this is the world famous *Banarasi* silk. Woven mostly by Muslims and sold predominantly by Hindus, *Banarasi* silk *Sarees* and fabric, reflect the close bond traditionally shared by the two communities. In fact, this couplet by poet Zam Zam Raamnagri captures the spirit of this composite culture best:

यही मिट्टी हमारे पूर्वजों का एक खज़ाना है, इसी मिट्टी से आए हैं इसी मिट्टी में जाना है।	This land is a treasure left to us by our ancestors, We were born of this soil and will go back to it in death,
कला का केंद्र है काशी यहीं बनती है वो साड़ी, मुसलमां जिसका ताना और हिन्दू जिसका बाना है।	Kashi is a cultural centre where that <i>Saree</i> is made, The warp of which is Muslim, and Hindu the weft.

But this brotherhood and this syncretism appears to be now at peril, especially in wake of Covid-19.

The ‘*Banarasi*’ weaving industry has seen the almost deliberate marginalisation of handloom workers with burgeoning powerlooms virtually taking over. Post 2014, these manipulations took a sharper turn bringing the home business to a virtual shut-down, especially in wake of the Covid-19 Lockdown.

Citizens for Justice and Peace (CJP) undertook a fact-finding mission in Varanasi and other parts of what is referred to as the Purvanchal region of Uttar Pradesh to get to the bottom of what actually ails this once thriving industry. Our partners and advisors include Dipak Malik, Vasanthi Raman, Abdullah Ansari, Lenin Raghu-vanshi, and many others. Dr Muniza Khan is the coordinator of the entire effort that began in September 2020.

As a part of this fact-finding mission, our teams have been conducting detailed interviews on the ground with artisans and weavers in four locations; Varanasi, Gorakhpur (Rasoolpur,

Poorana Gorakhnath), Azamgarh (Mubarakpur, Ibrahimpur, Shahpur) and Mau (Ghosi, Madhuban). We spoke to people engaged in different aspects and stages of spinning together some of India's most exquisite textiles. These include people who make the design (*Naksha*) and the card (*Patta*), that are used to create the first image of the motif, as well as those who are involved in reeling, dyeing, weaving, *Zardozi* and embroidery, adding diamante stones into the weave, polishing and finishing the product.

Saraiya, Nakki Ghat, Jalalipura, Lallapura, Baribazar, Bajardeeha, Madanpura, Shiwala, Koyla Bazar Chauhatta and the outlying areas of Lohta and Saraimohana, were the areas covered in Varanasi. We collected details of over 200 people for this survey.

We discovered that not only have weavers suffered huge economic losses and are being crushed under mounds of debt, the Muslim community and women in particular have borne an unfair brunt of the pandemic.

This report aims to showcase the despair and discrimination suffered by them and also proposes possible solutions.





## INDUSTRY OVERVIEW

The decades of the 1970-1990s saw a sharp demographic shift within this artisanal industry: classes of Muslim *Gaddidars* emerged who were successful in making their presence felt at the international and national levels. The later part of these 20 years also saw bouts of communal violence that have also been analysed as a reaction to the successful and emergent trader class among Momin Ansaris. This period of prosperity also saw the expansion of power looms and the decline or death of handlooms.

In this ground-level investigation, we have taken stock of the steady though relentless decline of the artisanal weaving cottage industry over the few decades since the mid-1990s with the Joint Census of the Handlooms and power looms providing a signpost. (That was the one and only Census that acknowledged the existence of the power looms). In essence, the very structure of this artisanal industry has seen a seminal shift and with it the world of the weaver. Steadily, the numbers of handlooms have reduced to mere thousands and correspondingly the number of handloom weavers has severely declined. (Raman, 2020, *The World of the Banaras Weaver*).

Ironically, as the handlooms have gradually though insidiously moved towards oblivion, their numbers have been recorded in the two Handloom Censuses, the third one of 2009-10 conducted by the National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER). An important finding of the Third All-India Handloom Census of 2009-10 was that the number of handloom weavers had reduced drastically between 1995 and 2010, by three lakhs. (Bhowmick, 2019. EPW article, Vol.54, issue no.49. 14 December, 2019).

The structure of the handloom industry has correspondingly altered. The picture that emerges from the Census of Handlooms and Power looms, 1995-1996 is that of a thin 'stratum of *Grihastas/Gaddidars*/traders at the top', a large bulge in the middle (self-employed weavers with one or two looms) and then a thin stratum

of loomless weavers or wage workers at the bottom.' (Raman, Ibid). Over the next decade, and as is recorded in the Third Census (2009-2010) there is a drastic structural shift in the industry with the picture now emerging of a pyramid with a 'vast pauperised base of weavers who in a sense are no more weavers but mere wage workers.'

Within this overall background, we have seen a shift with the *Banarasi* weaving industry being overtaken by power looms. Even in the power loom sector, women have outnumbered men in running power looms. (Sultana and Mehrunissa, 2016). The failure of State policy in furthering State-driven financial and structural incentives to this industry has been a crucial factor in its steady collapse.

Even the cottage power loom industry has been critically impacted by policy ignorance and change; it now faces competition from large factories of 100 and 200 power looms. (Raman, Ibid). The complicated structure of this industry has several levels: the *Grihasta-Gaddidar* at the top, the owner of two-four power looms in the middle and the ordinary weaver-worker at the bottom. Experts have understood the emerging structure of the power loom industry as a kind of replica of the earlier handloom industry when the latter was the predominant base of the weaving industry.

Demonetisation (2016) and then the Goods and Services Tax (GST), thereafter, have both dealt a further blow to the heart of this industry which ran on trust, credit and post-dated cheques. We see how, therefore, a deliberately negligent central government policy was already, prior to the 2020 Covid-19 Lockdown rendering all levels of this business vulnerable. The sharp economic crisis caused by the ill-thought out Lockdown was the last straw on the ailing camel's back as far as the vast base of weavers who had been reduced to wage workers over decades.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report was made possible due to the support and guidance given by Prof. Dipak Malik, (Late) Abdullah Ansari, Prof. Vasanthi Raman, Lenin Raghuvanshi and Chanchal Mukherji. We are grateful to them for their invaluable inputs.

Here are a few words of wisdom from two of our guiding lights:

### **Prof. Dipak Malik:**

The unemployment and dire poverty affecting weavers is a matter of concern as well a big political question which is related to the current regime. The pandemic has quickened the pace of impoverisation, and destruction of small and cottage industries on a scale unprecedented till now. But it is not merely the pandemic that is destroying these professions and population. The impoverisation and destruction of the 'small' industries that encompass 80 percent of the population was already on the agenda.

It was introduced as liberalisation, privatisation, and globalisation right in 1991. But the pace was tardy and weak as it did not have an aggressive agency to execute it. An aggressive agency was found out in 2014 with the accession of the current government and political platform with a heady mixture of majoritarian communalism and neoliberal economics. As a matter of fact, whatever was built to cater for national emergence as a legacy of our freedom struggle, and later building of a regime to take care of the population's need for better life, is being robbed off very aggressively and fast by the current regime. This regime is the first regime after independence, which is actively working against the poor, middle classes, minorities and marginalised, who constitute almost the whole of the nation. Thus this regime is in fact the most anti national regime in the history of India after 1947. Sometimes it functions even worse than colonial powers that subjugated the country.

The cases sighted in Varanasi are further examples of this general process of impoverisation as well as pointed majoritarian communal attack on livelihood of people or may be both. Actually both these processes are the mechanism of reversing the history towards capital in exclusion and communalism, and they are extremely handy in demolishing the legacy of a history of India earned through great pain and sacrifices.

The indications from these incidents as sighted are indeed ominous and show very difficult times for our people who have been facing hardships for centuries. It is also a sign, that unless properly reversed, it will rob people of the little that they had earned by means of rights and conducive atmosphere of an inclusive society and inclusive state. Though they too were inadequate, yet there were some signs of the work in progress.





**(Late) Abdullah Ansari:**

Weavers have been given certain exemptions when it comes to electricity charges. But this rebate is available only to the power loom operators whereas the handloom weavers are charged electricity at the full rate. Electricity is stolen by a mafia of sorts. They operate allegedly with the support of some corrupt employees of the electricity department.

Due to the rampant power theft, the state government decided that the rebate given to the power loom weavers will be reduced to a few units and full charge will be calculated if it is used over the free unit limit. The theft of electricity and the resulting losses to the power corporation, end up being covered in large part by the general public via higher tariffs. The power loom owners are a wealthier class of weavers and those who now have to compensate are from the poorer class. Is it fair that the general public is compensating for the power theft, while the electricity mafia remains unpunished?

Power loom produced *Sarees* are neither a part of the international identity of the *Banarasi* industry, nor is Varanasi identified by it. Varanasi is identified with *Banarasi Sarees* produced on handloom. The tag of heritage industry has been given to *Sarees* produced by handloom, while no such tag is given to power loom produced *Sarees*.

Apart from power loom weaving there are many small industries which need to be promoted, but they have not been given any kind of exemption. For example, in Varanasi, the business of making wooden toys, brass utensils and Thar Jaali business etc. are not given any kind of exemption, whereas this too is a small-scale industry.



(Late) Abdullah Ansari











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## GLOSSARY

<i>Aanganwadi</i>	Day-care centres
<i>Aari</i>	A type of <i>Zardozi</i> but not fine work
<i>Banarasi</i>	Can refer to both – people hailing from Varanasi and the special type of silk <i>Sarees</i> / fabric produced here
<i>Bana</i>	Weft
<i>Basti</i>	Settlement, residential colony
<i>Biradari</i>	Caste group
<i>Bunkar</i>	Weaver
<i>Burqa</i>	Traditional long robe worn by some Muslim women over their daily clothes that completely covers the face and head
<i>Chunri-Dupatta</i>	Traditional long scarf/stole worn by Indian women
<i>Dhaga</i>	Thread
<i>Dini Talim</i>	Religious education
<i>Gaddi</i>	Business enterprise
<i>Gaddidar</i>	Traders and businessmen
<i>Ganga-Jamuni Tehzeeb</i>	Syncretic culture of the area where both rivers (Ganga and Yamuna) flow
<i>Grihasta</i>	Master weaver
<i>Gota</i>	Gold braid
<i>Hijaab</i>	Traditional long scarf worn by some Muslim women to cover their face and head
<i>Jaalदार Jhalar</i>	Mesh frill
<i>Jahalat</i>	Ignorance
<i>Jan Dhan</i>	A special type of bank account
<i>Kabari</i>	Scrap dealer
<i>Kafan</i>	Shroud
<i>Karigar</i>	Workman, artisan
<i>Karchup</i>	Wooden frame for the use of <i>Zardozi</i> work
<i>Kargha</i>	Wooden Handloom
<i>Karkhana</i>	Factory
<i>Kurta</i>	Traditional upper-body garment
<i>Kurti</i>	Short <i>Kurta</i> usually worn by women
<i>Lehenga</i>	Traditional long skirt worn by Indian women usually for formal events
<i>Lungee</i>	Traditional waist cloth worn by men
<i>Madrassa</i>	Traditional schools where Muslim children get religious (and sometimes also contemporary) education
<i>Mala</i>	Garland

<i>Mandi</i>	Slowdown, stagnation
<i>Mazdoor</i>	Worker
<i>Mazdoori</i>	Wages
<i>Mukut</i>	Crown
<i>Mohalla</i>	Neighbourhood
<i>Naksha</i>	Map of the design (prepared before weaving)
<i>Namak-Chawal</i>	Salt and rice
<i>Namak-Roti</i>	Salt and Indian flat bread
<i>Nari bharna</i>	Spooling yarn
<i>Nug</i>	Gems
<i>OBC</i>	Other Backward Classes
<i>Pakora</i>	Popular fried food in India
<i>Paan</i>	Indian dessert made using betel leaves and traditional herbal mouth freshners
<i>Patta</i>	Design plotted on a graph as per the map ( <i>Naksha</i> ) before weaving
<i>Ramzan</i>	Holy month of fasting for Muslims
<i>Resham</i>	Silk
<i>Salaam</i>	Traditional Urdu greeting
<i>Sanjhi Sanskriti</i>	Plural, intertwined culture
<i>Saree</i>	Traditional garment worn by Indian women
<i>Sarpanch</i>	Village head/chief
<i>Satti</i>	Trading centre
<i>SC</i>	Scheduled Castes
<i>Sewaiyyan</i>	Indian sweet dish made of vermicelli
<i>Sherwani</i>	Traditional upper-body garment worn by men for formal occasions
<i>ST</i>	Scheduled Tribes
<i>Tablighi Jamaat</i>	Followers of a particular sect in Islam who were falsely accused of spreading Covid-19 in India
<i>Tana</i>	Warp
<i>Tanchoe</i>	A type of silk <i>Saree</i> made using silver or gold embroidered
<i>Tehzeeb</i>	Urdu word for culture
<i>Tikli</i>	Small round glass
<i>Zardozi</i>	Embroidery using golden or silver threads
<i>Zari</i>	Golden threads used in embroidery
<i>Zari Booti</i>	Embroidery work with silver/golden thread design and pearls





## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This on-ground fact finding mission spread over 2020 and 2021, takes a deep and nuanced look at the plight of the traditional weaving industry in Purvanchal (Eastern Uttar Pradesh), especially in wake of the Covid-19 induced Lockdown.

Our 17-member survey team led by Dr. Muniza Khan, Varanasi-based social science researcher, conducted detailed interviews of 204 respondents, 37 video interviews and 19 audio-interviews in neighbourhoods with a high concentration of people engaged in weaving the famous *Banarasi* fabric and allied activities.

The locations of the respondents were: Varanasi (13 locations), Gorakhpur (Rasoolpur, Purana Gorakhnath), Azamgarh (Mubarakpur, Ibrahimpur, Shahpur) and Mau (Ghosi, Madhuban).

The team took all necessary precautions, including wearing masks, using sanitisers and maintaining social distancing, while conducting the physical survey amidst the Covid-19 pandemic.

The detailed analysis and data contained in this report reveal how the artisanal weaving industry as well as the *Zardozi* industry, that has been in a state of crisis for decades given the ambivalent, if not hostile policies adopted by the government, slid into further despair due to the sudden and unplanned Lockdown.

It caused severe economic and structural blow due to the work stoppages, and led to acute distress, indebtedness, beggary and hunger that any society and state should be ashamed of.

Neither the state government of Uttar Pradesh nor the Centre have shown any sensitivity to the plight of hundreds of thousands of weavers and their families so far, and have failed to respond to the crisis.

The estimated loss stands at a staggering Rs 3,000 crores to eastern UP's handicraft, handloom and power loom business during and after the Lockdown.

## Following are some of our most crucial, and frankly shocking, findings:

A staggering 89 percent of those interviewed stated that due to a trust deficit, they simply could not or did not approach the local and state government for a variety of relief measures: food rations, monetary assistance, inflated electricity bills, sewage related and other civic problems. Of the 11 percent who did, they were dissatisfied with the response.

Absence of access of Central Government schemes:

- The central government's much publicised Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY) (launched on May 1, 2016) has simply not reached persons on the ground. Only 10 percent of the women among our respondents were even registered to get Ujjwala Gas under this scheme; the rest remain excluded, despite multiple attempts to apply for the same.
- The respondents also found the Prime Minister *Jan Dhan* Yojana (PMJDY) difficult to access. A staggering 52 percent of the respondents simply did not have the account. Of the 48 percent who did, only 58 percent received cash transfers more than once.

The weavers who are wage workers or those who have just a few looms belong to communities like Muslim Ansari, Dalit, OBC and some are Muslims who hail from more privileged castes. Today a vast section of this artisanal industry is completely impoverished and invisibilised. Informed and reasoned public dialogue is needed to influence not just political but economic policy and decision making.

We also reached out to women as they form the backbone of this industry, with their work ranging from actual weaving to allied activities like spool feeding, *Saree* decoration and finishing work. 24 percent of our respondents were women and girls.

We discovered that most often, their work remains unpaid, even in this day and age, as it is considered part of their household chores.

The testimonies of these women and girls were sorry tales of malnutrition and attendant health issues, apart from impoverishment, hunger and domestic abuse. Many girls were forced to drop out of school.

The overall impact of a brute form of targeted communal violence and politics over the past three decades has also had its specific impact on women, specifically Muslim women. This splintering of the gender identity along communal lines has deeply affected traditional gender-driven solidarities that often breached denials and divides of the kind that swept India during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The role of the commercial media, most especially television, in furthering a divisive discourse that, apart from being not based on any fact, was tailored to suit an anti-constitutional agenda, and made the sufferings of all sections of the minority, even the artisanal weaving community in eastern UP, more humiliating and acute.

A significant number of our respondents spoke of economic boycotts at work in neighbourhoods days and weeks after the spread of the virus was deliberately mis-construed and associated with one community (with terms like Coronona-Jihad, Superspreaders of the Virus., being used).



## Recommendations to Government and Business, Corporations

- The report makes detailed recommendations for the government, central and state, urging that all stakeholders in the industry are consulted before policies are framed and budgetary allocations (dwindling over the past seven-eight years) are made. An emphasis on State-driven incentives for professional co-operatives at the village, taluka and state level have also been made.
- Authorities should ensure that benefits of all schemes and campaigns should reach every last weaver and artisan.
- The report, invoking the 2011, UN Principles on Business and Human Rights also urges Corporations, Export Houses and Brands that thrive on this rich and traditional art and craft, to respect standards of dignified wage and social security as it is the creator who is central to the products manufactured.
- Public awareness needs to be created around the fact that it is the creators of the *Banarasi Saree* and brocade who are the owners of this intellectual property, a fact little known to the weavers and artisans. (Registered in 2009, under Geographical Indication Handicrafts (<https://search.ipindia.gov.in/GIRPublic/Application/Details/237>))

## Call for a National and Regional Campaign

There is an urgent need for a sustainable and concerted national and regional campaign that highlights the following:

- Ensuring a sustained revival of this industry and craft so closely linked to rural-urban livelihoods and the cultural heritage of India
- Democratic engagement before policy, economic and business practices are conceived, emerge or are promoted by the government
- Social Security Schemes for different levels of the craftspersons, artisans and weavers with a special emphasis on women
- Reaching out to Corporations and Businesses to incorporate a component of social responsibility and human rights when dealing with the creators of products
- Ensuring that the elected representatives also respond to the campaign demands in this report
- All Indians, consumers of these products and others, should get involved to raise their voice and ensure that this crucial heritage industry is saved



## TARGET GROUP AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This is a fact-finding study, the questionnaire was designed after several consultations with experts<sup>1</sup>, and the same was used by trained volunteers who were on the field. In the present study, we used a structured interview schedule as a tool for the in-depth survey.

There were several steps involved in developing the questionnaire for the field work. A meeting was held online, where participants included:

- **Prof. Dipak Malik** – A retired Professor, Banaras Hindu University, and Director Emeritus, Gandhian Institute of Studies. He is a political thinker and writer, economist and historian.
- **(Late) Abdullah Ansari** – An activist and public intellectual of Banaras, educationist and multi-faceted personality who was an ardent champion of weavers' interest.
- **Prof. Vasanthi Raman** – A retired Professor of Social Sciences of Centre for Women's and Development Studies, New Delhi
- **Teesta Setalvad** – A Human Rights Defender, senior Journalist, academic, historian and educationist. She is also the Secretary of Citizens for Justice and Peace (CJP)
- **Lenin Raghuvanshi** – A Dalit rights activist, political activist and social entrepreneur. He is one of the founding members of People's Vigilance Committee on Human Rights, Varanasi.
- **Dr Muniza Khan** – A Human Rights activist, academic and researcher in Gandhian Institute of Studies and Field coordinator of CJP Field Office, Varanasi
- **Chanchal Mukherjee** – A social activist and member of Samajvadi Jan Parishad

Together, they held an intense discussion on the contours of the fact-finding and parameters.

A background note for the Fact-Finding Committee for Investigation of the conditions of Weavers and the Weaving Industry in UP after Covid-19 was prepared by several of the team members in consultation with Vasanthi Raman. Using this background note, the small committee of discussants deliberated on the issues/questions to be addressed by the fact-finding mission. The questions which needed to be elaborated upon in the formal survey in the form of the questionnaire for the purposes of the study, were also discussed, especially in the context of the impact of Covid-19 Lockdown on the weavers and weaving industry. Consciously, the issues, and therefore the questions, related to *all* sections of the weaving community i.e., handloom weavers, power loom weavers, dyers, *Zardozi* workers etc. Questions related to women's work in weaving and their conditions were a significant section. The decision was to elicit detailed and substantive responses not merely 'yes' or 'no' responses. With such open-ended questions respondents leave a wider flexibility to the respondent to answer with detailed inputs and information, and for the surveyors to elicit substantive insights from this information. After the questionnaire was drafted, it was pre-tested in the field, some final changes were made before the field work started.

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<sup>1</sup> Dr Vasanthi Raman, Shri Abdullah Ansari among others. A copy of the Draft Questionnaire in Hindi and English is annexed to the report.





## Survey conductors

A 17-member team comprising of trained volunteers, researchers and field workers, were involved in direct field work; 11 were females and 6 males. 10 members of the field team belonged to the Muslim community and 7 to the Hindu community. Community organisers from the CJP Field office at Varanasi also conducted the field work. Almost all the team members are post graduates, except two male field workers. These two male field workers are under-graduates and hail from the weaving community themselves. They have experience to add value to such a fact-finding mission, especially sectoral knowledge about Weavers / Zari artisans in Purvanchal in general, hence were made part of the team.

## Location selection

The present study was undertaken as an intensive exercise in primary research to understand the impact of the Covid-19 Lockdown on weavers and Zari artisans of Eastern Uttar Pradesh. For the purpose of the study, we selected four districts: namely Varanasi, Mau, Azamgarh and Gorakhpur from the Eastern part of Uttar Pradesh, where the concentration of weavers is more. The study is concerned with only the weavers/artisans (men and women) who are involved in handlooms, power looms, Zardozi or home-based work related to the weaving industry. The major weaving activities are: Design making (*Naksha banana*), Card making (*Patta banana*), reeling raw material *riyaan* (*Warp ka kaam*), dyeing, spooling yarn (*Nari bharna* that women do in their households), weaving, finishing (cutting by women), Zari work, and binding. Other work in the industry includes: embroidery, diamond stud (*Nug*) embossing, Saree printing, Saree dyeing, Saree-polishing, *deca* +wax polishing.

## Nature of sampling

The nature of sampling is purposive as well as random. It was based on the design of the study.

## How were respondents chosen?

In the lead up to the fact-finding mission, that was preceded by a Webinar on Conditions in Uttar Pradesh during the Lockdown, persistent news emanated of the particular impact and plight of the Weaving Industry, so connected to Banaras. Hunger, deprivation, distress sale of looms and even suicides had become common. Choice of the respondents was made after discussions with expert consultants, Vasanthi Raman and Teesta Setalvad.

Raman's *World of the Banarasi Weaver*, Routledge, 2021, *Entangled Yarns-Banaras Weavers and Social Crisis*, 2013 and *The Warp and the Weft, Community and Gender Identity among the Weavers of Banaras*, 2009 make her an expert on the subject.

Setalvad's experience with work on national and international law on political, economic and social rights of the marginalised brings that vast experience to the table. After widespread discussions, we decided that through long standing and well-established contacts in all the areas identified, we would go to elicit our sample from the target areas. There, we would meet senior/responsible people with experience of the industry/trade; make an exhaustive list of those weavers from the area, then of those who were affected by the Lockdown. From this data-base, we selected respondents and filled the interview schedule following principles of purposive and random sampling.

Once we met a local person who said, "*Har ghar ki bunkari khatm ho gayee hai, loom bik gaye hai, zevar bik gaye. Logo ne ek waqt khana kha kar guzara hai.*" (Translation: Weaving work has stopped in all households, there has been a distress sale of looms and jewellery. People have been forced to survive on one meal a day.) He further added, "*Lockdown se zyada kharab halaat ab hai, Lockdown mai log madad kartey the, per ab koyee madad nahi kar raha hai. Kitney logo se aap baat kareygee, kiska kiska naam batain?*" (Translation: The period after the Lockdown was lifted has been worse than the Lockdown itself. At least during the Lockdown

there were many people offering relief supplies, now there is no one! How many people do you want to talk to? There are so many names.)

The vast impact of the crisis made it difficult for us to choose, who to interview and how many interviews we should limit ourselves to. Besides the fact-finding mission had to happen practicing/following Covid-19 protocol. After detailed discussions in this regard, we decided to fill 15 interview schedules from each of the 11 areas, in Banaras i.e 165; 10 each from Mau, Azamgarh and Gorakhpur i.e 30. This was done keeping in mind gender, class, and different sections among the weaving communities. We decided to fill a total of 195 questionnaires. The areas were selected where poor and middle-class weavers lived.

Total: 169 interview scheduled forms were filled from 11 areas in Varanasi, 10 were filled from 4 areas in Mau, 14 were filled from 5 areas in Azamgarh and 11 interview schedules were filled from 4 areas in Gorakhpur. Thereafter, 9 more interview schedules were filled as some areas were large. Thus, the total sample has finally come to 204 instead of 195. The details of these additional forms are: Banaras 4, Azamgarh 4 and from Gorakhpur 1.

Apart from the written questionnaires (schedule forms) we had in-depth interviews, group meetings, using videos and voice recorders. In the present fact-finding study in Banaras, we have 23 videos and 2 voice recordings, in Mau 6 videos and 5 voice recordings, in Azamgarh 3 videos and 9 voice recordings, and in Gorakhpur 5 videos and 3 voice recordings, as per the requirement of the study.

Respondents were chosen proportionately from the different categories of working people from all sections of the weaving / *Zardozi* community for data collection.

One respondent represents one family (kitchen) but in some cases, respondents have one kitchen but live in a large joint family. We have interviewed 204 families means one respondent represents one family.

The study is based on primary as well as secondary data. Primary data collected through field survey and interviews on videos and audios recording.

The material for the study / primary data was collected through interviewing weavers through discussion and self-observation. As observation and discussion with weavers played an important role in identifying the real situation. The secondary data collected through books, research papers, web sites, newspaper articles and reports, online portal articles/analyses and government records.

## Project area

This fact-finding study was conducted in Uttar Pradesh. The state has over 2,50,000 handloom weavers operating about 1,10,000 handlooms with natural clusters developed over hundreds of years. Varanasi and Mubarakpur are world renowned for silk *Sarees* of the highest quality. Source: ([https://niveshmitra.up.nic.in/txtile\\_Policy.aspx](https://niveshmitra.up.nic.in/txtile_Policy.aspx))

Districts of Eastern Uttar Pradesh (Purvanchal) produce silk and textile products that have a huge demand all over the world. It has a mix of highly-skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled weavers in the weaving industry and many of these are from Scheduled Castes (SC), Other Backward Classes (OBC) from the Hindu community, and Ansaris from the Muslim community. In *Zardozi* work artisans mainly are from the Sheikh, Pathan and Syed sub-communities from within the Muslim community. At one time, Eastern Uttar Pradesh was famous, both nationally and internationally, for its traditional weaving industries like textiles, including handlooms and power looms. However, today the weaving industry of Eastern Uttar Pradesh is struggling for its survival.

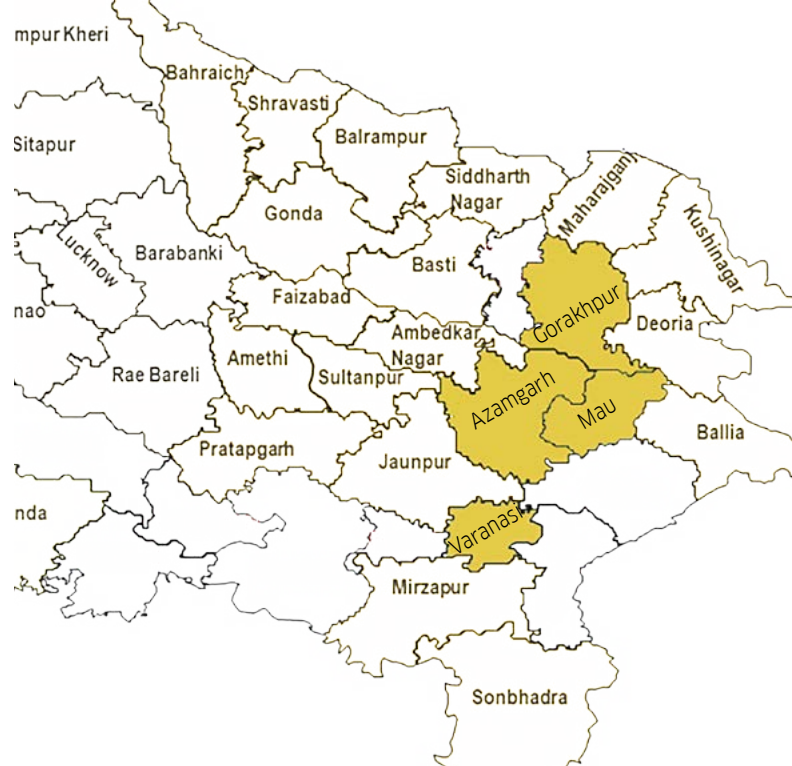
The present fact-finding study was conducted in Eastern Uttar Pradesh. There were several news reports of weavers and selling of their looms, jewellery and blood during the Covid-19 Lockdown to prevent starvation. Four districts namely: Varanasi, Mau, Azamgarh and Gorakhpur of Eastern Uttar Pradesh were selected for



the primary survey. The reason for selection of these four districts and locations, was due to high concentration of weavers here.

One of the reasons for the selection of these areas, is that poor and middle-class weavers hailing from Muslim (Ansari), SC, OBC from Hindus live in these areas. The village Saraimohana was purposely selected as SC and OBC weavers from the Hindu community were concentrated here. Two areas: Shiwala and Koyla Bazar/Chauhatta were selected as these areas have a high concentration of *Zardozi/Aari* works.

## Sampling



District	Location (Mohalla)	Number of respondent/ sample fill interview schedule	Video interviews	Audio interviews	Total
<b>Varanasi</b>	Jalalipura, Saraiya, Nakki Ghat , Lallapura, Baribazar, Barardeeha, Revri Talab, Shiwala, ( <i>Zardozi/ Aari</i> work), Koyla Bazar/ Chauhatta ( <i>Zardozi/ Aari</i> work), Lohta (Outskirts rural area), Saraimohana (Kotwa, Konia-Outskirts rural area)	169	23	2	194
<b>Mau</b>	Ghosi, Malikpura, Karimuddinpura, Bada gaw	10	6	5	21
<b>Azamgarh</b>	Mubarkpur, Ibrahimpur, Shahpur, Akbarpur, Nayapura	14	3	9	26
<b>Gorakhpur</b>	Rasoolpur, Gorakhdham, Purana Gorakhpur	11	5	3	19
	<b>Total</b>	<b>204</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>260</b>

Detailed data was collected of 204 respondents from the above four districts, while using a structured interview schedule. In the district of Varanasi 19 mohallas, in Mau 4 mohallas, in Azamgarh 5 mohallas and in Gorakhpur 4 mohallas were selected for the primary data collection.

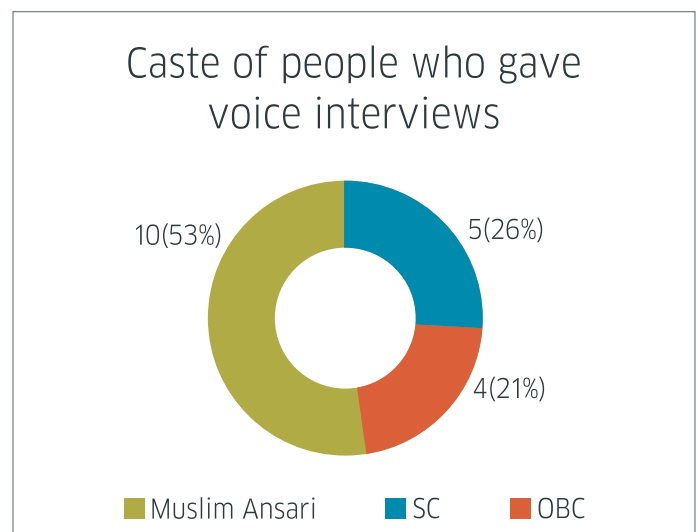
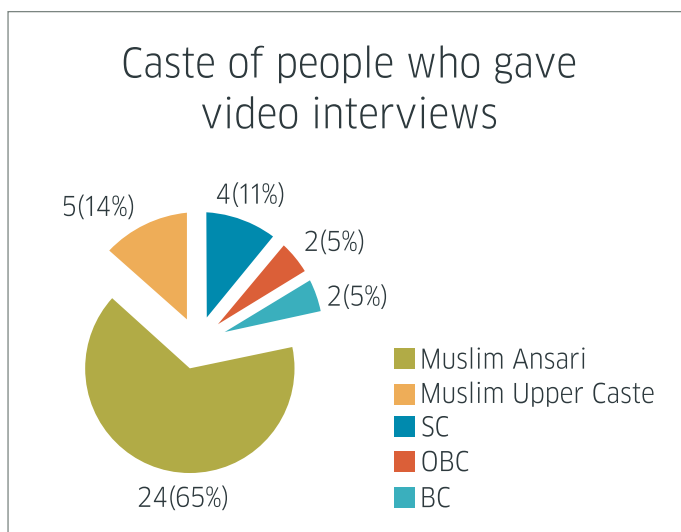
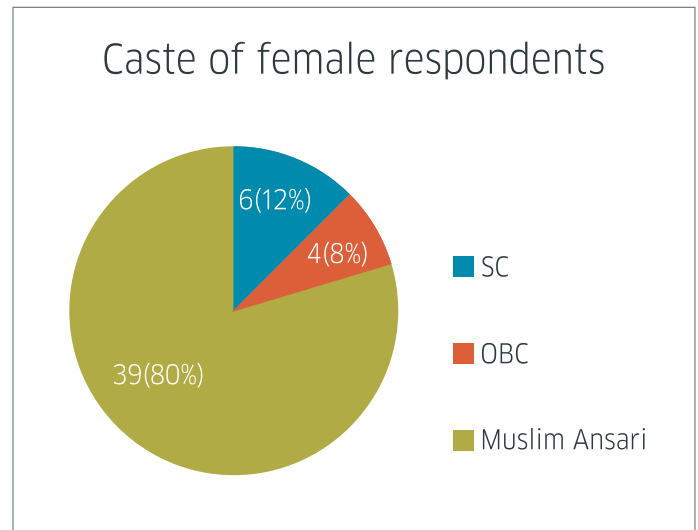
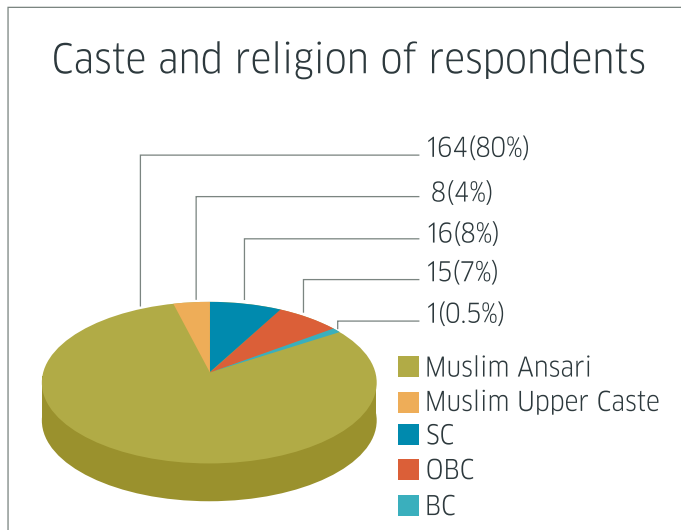
The respondents were taken through purposive and random sampling. This purposely participatory survey has been conducted in sample districts in the period between October and

December 2020. The interview schedule comprises of open ended as well close-ended questions. The questionnaires were filled by Citizens for Justice and Peace (CJP) staff and volunteers who worked under the close supervision of the CJP's field coordinator, Dr Muniza Khan.

## Religion, caste and gender

In the weaving industry a majority of weavers and *Zari* artisans come from the Muslim community. *Bunkar* and *Grihasta* are largely from the Muslim (Ansari) community, while traders are largely from the Hindu community.

Village Saraimohana has a large number of SC and OBC weavers from the Hindu community. We consciously selected this village to know the condition of weavers of this community. Apart from this, we had audio and video interviews of weavers from varied (other) communities, dyers in Mau, Azamgarh and Gorakhpur.



Out of a total of 204 respondents, 16 were from Scheduled Castes (SC), 15 from Other Backward Classes (OBC), 1 from Backward Classes (BC), 164 from the Muslim Ansari community and 8 from Muslim “upper” caste communities. Out of 204 respondents, 49 respondents were female. Among the 49 female respondents we have 6 from SC, 4 from OBC and 39 from the Muslim Ansari community. Out of 37 videos, 4 respondents came from SC, 2 from OBC, 2 from BC and 24 from the Muslim Ansari community and 5 from Muslim “upper” caste communities. Nineteen interviews were voice recorded. Out

of 19 we have 5 SC, 4 OBC and 10 from Muslim Ansari community. 24% of the respondents were female.

Apart from the interviews transcribed on the 204 written schedules (forms) 56 interviews were taken by videos or voice recording from the sample areas. Only those respondents were interviewed who are involved in weaving different kinds of products like; *Saree*, dress material, *dupatta*, scarf, bed covers, cushion covers, bedsheet, pillow cover, lungi, suiting-shirting material, *Kafan* (shroud) and in *Zardosi/ Aari*





work like; mukuts (crown and other items for deities), badges, dress material, army emblems, dot badges etc.

Therefore, the total sample of the survey is 260. However, the specifics of the parameters are available for 204 and percentiles have been drawn from 204 as a sample of the main core sample. Adjunct sample 56 is divided area/district wise. Graphs and analysis are from the CORE SAMPLE (204) not from the adjunct.

All the primary data schedules, videos, voice recordings, photographs and observation reports from the team are preserved and available at the CJP Field Office in Varanasi.

### Challenges in approaching respondents

*It was not easy to take interviews. In most of the cases, respondents in the first instance, declined to be interviewed. It was only after some persuasion and establishing a rapport with the respondents, that they were ready to answer. Only one respondent from Saraiya declined to be interviewed and said, "Yahan kya hum bunkaron ki bhookhmari dekhiyega, logon ne khoon tak becha hai. Hum form nahin bharwayenge."* (Translation: Are you here to show how we are starving? People have sold blood to survive. We will not fill forms.)

In Baribazar, a Muslim dominated area, as soon our community organiser approached the house for an interview, men at the doorstep said, "NRC wale hain ye log, humlog kuchh nahin batayenge, aap log yahan se jayen." (Translation: These are NRC people. Go away, we will not tell you anything.)

It was not easy to talk with Muslim women. In Jalaipura, a woman said, "Ghar ke maalik mard hain, unse baat kariye. Hum padhey likhye nahin hain. Hamey nahin pata kya sahi hai aur kya galat. Kaun hamarey liye aaya hai aur kaun NRC ke liye. Aap hamarey shauhar se baat karen." (Translation: The men own the household. We are not educated and can't tell if you are here to collect information for the NRC. Please speak to my husband.)

General scepticism about the exercise was put across by respondents. They often said, "Sab log form bhar kar le jaatey hain, hamen kya mileyga? Hum log pehle se hee bhookhe mar rahe hain, kya hoga bata ke? Sab log mazak banatey hain." (Translation: Everyone just comes and fills forms for surveys. What do we get? We are dying of starvation. We have become a joke.)

### Objectives

- To ascertain the impact of Covid-19 Lockdown on the weaving industry in the eastern part of Uttar Pradesh.
- To ascertain the impact of Covid-19 Lockdown on weavers/ Zari artisans during and after Lockdown in sample areas.
- To ascertain the impact of the Lockdown on women who are involved in the weaving industry.
- To understand the socio-economic and gender profile of loom weavers and artisans in the sample areas of Varanasi, Mau, Azamgarh and Gorakhpur district.
- To assess the impact of the Lockdown on the livelihood of the weaver/ artisan community (men and women) belonging to selected districts in the Eastern part of Uttar Pradesh.
- To evaluate the government schemes for weavers and their implementation in the sample areas.
- To evaluate relief efforts of the central and state government during the Lockdown and its impact on weavers.
- To assess the future of weavers and the weaving industry in Eastern Uttar Pradesh.

## PROFILES

### Social Profile of Respondents

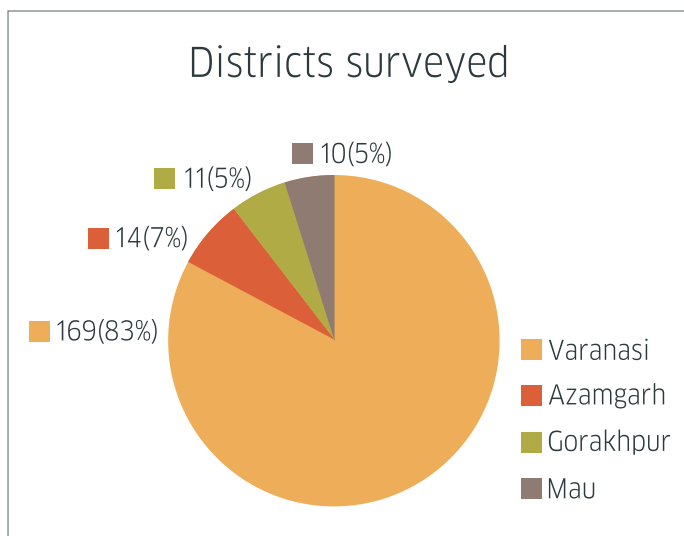


Figure 1: Districts surveyed

The survey was conducted in four districts of Eastern Uttar Pradesh from where detailed data of 204 people were collected, while using a structured interview schedule.

Out of the total 204 respondents interviewed, 169 (83%) were from Varanasi. The areas covered in Varanasi were Lallapura, Madanpura, Nakki Ghat, Badi Bazaar, Bajardiha, Jalalipura, Revri Talab, Sarraiya, Purana Pul, Chauhatta, Koyla Bazaar, Shiwala, Sarai Mohana and Lohta.

14 (7%) respondents were interviewed from Azamgarh (Mubarakpur, Ibrahimpur, Shahpur, Akbarpur, Nayapura). 11 (5%) respondents were from Gorakhpur (Rasoolpur, Gorakhdham, Purana Gorakhpur) and 10 (5%) respondents were interviewed from Mau (Ghosi, Karimuddinpur, Malikpura, Badagaw).

### Profile of the locations surveyed in Varanasi

#### Jalalipura



Location : North Constituency of Varanasi district

Total population : 20,000 to 22,000

Muslim weavers : 8,000 to 10,000

Hindu weavers : 7,000 to 9,000

Rest engaged in other work



#### Schools:

One Primary school (Government) and five private schools up to class 8<sup>th</sup> in both Hindi and English medium

Six *Madrasas*; two are registered and four are private



#### Hospitals:

One Primary Healthcare Centre, also operates Anganwadi

Government hospital named Shri Shiv Prasad Gupta Hospital (Kabir Chaura Hospital) is at a distance of four km from the locality

#### Major concerns:

Inefficient sewage disposal

Government school considered inadequate, but people are impoverished and cannot afford private school for their children

The main road in Jalalipura gets inundated during the rainy season





## Badi Bazaar



Location : Mostly North Constituency of Varanasi district. Some part of this locality fall under South Constituency

Total population : 2.5 lakh

Muslim Weavers : 2 lakh

Remaining 50 thousand are others



### Schools:

Two Primary schools (Government) and four private schools upto 8<sup>th</sup> class in both Hindi and English medium.

There are four recognised *Madrasas* and six private *Madrasas*

Madarsa Darul-Uloom upto intermediate and Madarsa Mazarul-Uloom upto Junior High school are located in this area

### Hospitals:

Two charitable hospitals named Azaad *Bunkar* Hospital and Jamia Hospital

The government hospital named Shri Shiv Prasad Gupt Hospital is at a distance of three km from the locality

### Major concerns:

Inefficient sewage disposal

Poorly maintained roads

## Saraiya



Location : North Constituency of Varanasi district

Total population : Approximately 25,000

Muslim weavers : 20,000 to 22,000

Non-Muslim weavers : 1,000 to 2,000



### Schools:

This locality has no government school

Three private primary schools

Two recognised *Madrasas* and two private *Madrasas*.



### Hospitals:

There is no hospital

### Major concerns:

Lack of clean water

Inefficient sewage disposal (work had started, but has now stopped)

Boys are sent to a government school which is 3-4 km away. But girls are not sent due to safety reasons

People want to send their children to school but private school education is unaffordable

## Nakki Ghat



Location : North Constituency of Varanasi district

Total population : Approximately 25,000 to 28,000

Muslim weavers : 7,000 (approximately)

Non-Muslim weavers : 1,000 (approximately)

### Schools:



There is one government run primary school and one primary private school

There is one recognised *Madrasa* (recognised by All India Minority Board) and one private *Madrasa*

### Hospital:



There is one Primary Healthcare Centre which operates an Anganwadi

Generally, people go to *Bunkar Hospital* and *Jamia Hospital* which are 3 kms away

Shiv Prasad Gupt hospital (Government Hospital) is 4km away

### Major concerns:

Inefficient sewage disposal

Open drain not covered despite repeated pleas of locals (a major health hazard)

No place for garbage disposal, leading people to dump garbage in the open (a major health hazard)

Government school in a decrepit condition, but families are impoverished and cannot afford private school education

There are six private schools

There are two semi government and three private *Madrasas*

### Hospital:



There is no government hospital

But half a kilometer away, near to Madanpura, there is a hospital named Janta Hospital run by Muslim trust, where poor people go for treatment at a nominal amount

Others go to private doctors and hospitals

### Major concerns:

Inefficient municipality

Weavers need electricity at subsidised rates

They should be notified about new government schemes for weavers

### Lallapura



Location : South and Cantt Constituency of Varanasi district. Lallapura comprises three wards: Lallapura Khurd, Kaazipura Khurd and Lallapura Kala

Total population : 60,000 to 70,000

Muslims : 40,000 to 42,000

Hindus : 28,000 to 30,000

In the Muslim population, 38 to 40 thousand are weavers.

### Revri Talab



Location : Cantt. Constituency

Total population : 20,000 to 30,000

Muslim weavers : 70-75%

Hindu weavers : 25-30%

### School:



There is one government primary school and one college (Bengali Tola Inter College)

### School:



There is no government school in Lallapura

There are two private schools, one up to Intermediate and second up to 8<sup>th</sup> standard.

There is one recognised *Madrasa*





### Hospital:



There is no government hospital in Lallapura  
 Nearest government hospital is 6-7 kms away  
 There are few private hospitals on road side,  
 which are expensive  
 25 Aaganwadi workers working in this locality

#### Major concerns:

No street lights  
 No government hospitals or schools  
 Private schools and hospitals unaffordable for  
 impoverished families  
 Subsidised electricity demanded by weavers  
 Inefficient sewage disposal

### Lohta



Location : Shivpur constituency  
 It is divided into 4 parts that is Lohta Gram  
 Sabha, Dhannipura, Mahmoodpur and  
 Kannisarai

Lohta is a rural area and located in the fringe  
 part of the city

It is 18-20 km away from Varanasi

Total population : 2 to 2.5 lakh

Muslim weavers : 75 to 80%

Hindu weavers : 20 to 25%

### Schools:



There are 5 to 6 government run primary  
 schools and one government run Junior High  
 school

There is no college in this area

There are 6-8 Private schools and one *Madrasa*

### Hospitals:



There are two Primary Healthcare Centres and  
 three private hospitals

One Jaccha Baccha centre is 3kms away

#### Major concerns:

Inefficient sewage disposal  
 No proper road  
 Inefficient garbage disposal

### Bajardiha



Location : Cantt. Constituency

Bajardiha is divided into four wards

Total population : 2 lakhs

Muslim weavers : 75 to 80%

Hindus weavers : 0 to 25%

### Schools:



There is one government primary school and 16  
 to 18 private schools

There are 12 to 15 private *Madrasas*

### Hospitals:



There is no government hospital in Bajardiha

There are 15 to 16 Private hospitals, nursing  
 home and private clinics along the roadside,  
 runs by mostly non-Muslims

#### Major concerns:

Absence of government schools and hospitals  
 Lack of subsidised electricity  
 Main road required urgent repairs/  
 reconstruction

## Shiwala



Location : Cantt, constituency

Total population : 35,000 to 40,000

Hindus : 70 to 72% is Hindu population

Muslims : 28 to 30%

In the Muslim population 22 to 25% are weavers or doing *Zardozi/Aari* work.



### School:

There is one government primary school

6 to 7 private English and Hindi medium schools



### Hospitals:

There are two hospitals in near Shiwala namely Swami Vivekanand Hospital and Mata Anandamayee Hospital

### Major concerns:

When asked about the major problems of the locality, people have not reported any such issue in Shiwala.

They said Hindus and Muslims both live in harmony and brotherhood.

People are working hard and sending their children to cities for study.

The work of Nagar Nigam is also good



## Sarai Mohana

Location : Ajgara Constituency of Varanasi District

Sarai Mohana is surrounded by Kotwa, Konia, Khalispur villages

Total population : 12,000

There are few *Bunkar* families left in Sarai Mohana, everyone has doing some or the other work but mostly people are involved in daily wage work

In Sarai Mohana majority of the people are from 'Mallah' community whose occupation is selling fish



### School:

There is one government primary school and three private schools



### Hospitals:

There is only one small Sanjeevni hospital in Sarai Mohana run by Krishna Murti Foundation trust

Local people are free for treatment in this hospital



## Kotwa

Location : Ajgara Constituency of Varanasi District

Total population : 14,000

In Kotwa majority of the population is from the Yadav community

Currently in Kotwa there are only 5-6 Muslim weaver families, because of no work and handlooms have been shut down for few years.

Earlier there used to be 50 weavers



### School:

In Kotwa there is one government school



### Hospital:

Kotwa doesn't have any government hospital

People are mostly involved in farming and have small shops

## Koniya



Location : Koniya locality comes in two Constituencies namely North and Ajgara of Varanasi District

Total population : 18,000

Muslims : 5,000

Rest : Maurya and Yadav

Majority of the people are from OBC, BC and SC community

Main occupation is farming, selling vegetables

Women who were involved in weaving related works are now making bags

Earlier there were many Muslim weavers, but now very few are remaining

Due to lack of work they were shifted some other occupation



### Schools:

There are no government primary schools and colleges in Koniya

Five private schools are there which are till 8<sup>th</sup> standard



### Hospital:

There is one trust hospital situated at Palang Shahid which is 2-3 km from Koniya



## Khalispur

Location : Ajgara Constituency of Varanasi District

Total population : 12,000

Majority of the population is of Rajbhar and Maurya community

Weaving work is mostly done by people of Hindu religion and there is very less population of other religions

The women of the Rajbhar community do the work of preparing pickle



### Schools:

There is one primary government school and three private schools



### Hospital:

There is one government hospital in this area.





## Growing Communal Divide in the region and its Impact on Purvanchal Weaving Industry

During the particular circumstances of economic and social estrangement caused by the Covid-19 Lockdown, the overall informalising of the Indian workforce –that has been evidenced for a decade and half–further revealed the triple blow of Discrimination, Economic Marginalisation and Invisibilisation (being pushed out of the workforce) for all the artisans and workers involved at different stages, most acutely impacting women. The fact that this artisanal industry also engages/involves workers from the marginalised sections, Muslims, SCs and OBCs is not insignificant. The policy freeze, ambivalence or hostilities by the government in responding to the needs and crises of these sections is symptomatic of their relative voicelessness in the political, economic and social spectrum.

Districts of Eastern Uttar Pradesh have been renowned and recognised for these varied kinds of weaving. This part of one of India's largest and most populous states has also had its share of intra-community and intra-caste conflicts. Some of those that occurred in the British period were rooted or understood by a colonial lens that was instrumental in constructing an understanding that was not based on genuine historiography and have, in fact, been challenged from the 1970s onwards. (Gyandendra Pande, 1990, The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India, Paul Brass, 2004, The Production of Hindu-Muslim Violence in Contemporary India)

Since the 1980s, the emergence of a more confident trading, business and artisanal section among the Muslims also generated its share of conflict. (1970, Juyal BN, Rafiq Khan's Communal Riot & Communal Politics: Case Study of a Town)

A decade later, the 1980s into the early 1990s, witnessed the surge of a majoritarian brand of politics that has sought to alter seminally the character of the Indian state itself. Urban centres like Mau and Banaras, (1984, Rafiq Khan & S. Mittal, Hindu-Muslim Riot & Role of Police ) saw bouts of such communal violence not just more brutal but during which the police (and PAC, as uniformed representatives of the state) played the most aggressive and violent role. (Dr Muniza Khan, 1991, A Report on the Communal Riots in Varanasi)

Institutionalised discrimination and violence faced by the very sections who comprise the subjects of study in the report has been documented over time. This discrimination takes the form of denial of access to basic civic amenities, jobs both in government and the private sector and to education and health facilities. To top it all, it is the brute targeting through violence that renders ultimate vulnerability to sections that somehow navigate an existence under the shadow of systemic and institutional bias.





These areas and populations experience overall discrimination in access to education and health facilities (setting up of public schools and hospitals) perpetuating marginalisation and absence of access even normally. Sanitation in minority dominated areas of urban spaces or even in rural clusters is ignored as filth piles up. The state of primary health centres (PHCs) or district hospitals is abysmal. This denial of basic and fundamental aspects a citizen expects for a dignified and secure existence has eroded any sense of trust or belonging in these communities.

In 2020 and thereafter, the Lockdown-induced sharp decrease in work hours of the subject community has meant that there is just not enough to live on any more. This has led to the stark case studies of abandonment of this work, shifting to casual labour like selling tea, and worst of all, for many looking at ending their own lives. While grappling with this further twist in the tale of institutionalised discrimination, evidence of clear targeting by the police in Uttar Pradesh was evident: if shops belonging to the 'Hindu' majority were allowed to stay open, those owned or run by Muslims in particular were forcibly shut down.

Our investigation reveals disturbing levels of manipulation of data related to much publicised government schemes. For instance, the deliberate downgrading of the Mahatma Gandhi *Bunkar* Bima Yojana (GBBY) in 2017 dealt a body blow in terms of social security to this community.

Many of the analyses and figures that this report reveals are deeply concerning. The Trust Deficit between the community under study and the state government and administration is so low as to be non-existent. A staggering 89 percent of those interviewed stated that they simply did not or could not approach the local and state government for a variety of relief measures such as rations, monetary help under *Jan Dhan* Scheme, wrong or inflated electricity bill, and for sewage related problems. Of the 11 percent of those interviewed who did, were dis-satisfied with their response.

The central government's "Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana" (PMUY) on May 1, 2016 is not just a flagship scheme but one that has snatched crores of rupees of public funds in terms of widespread publicity. The detailed sampling done under this investigation found however that despite the prominent publicity, only 21, that is 10 percent of the women among our respondents were even registered to get Ujjwala Gas under this scheme; the balance 90% don't. Of those so denied, it is not for lack of effort, for the last 1-2 years, and have even filled the form 4-5 times but to no avail. A similar bleak tale surrounds the Prime Minister *Jan Dhan* Yojana (PMJDY) which has also been highly publicised: bank accounts opened for the needy and direct transfers (other benefits like accident cover, overdrafts and debit cards) being made available by the central government. All our respondents stated that much hardship—standing in queues for opening accounts and getting benefits was attempted with no success. A staggering 52 percent of the respondents simply did not have the account. Of the 48 percent who have accounts, 58 percent received cash transfers more than once.

Behind the glitz and glamour of the *Banarasi Saree* and the exotic understanding of the handloom and power loom industry is a community—consisting of Muslim Ansaris, Dalits, OBCs and some Muslim more privileged castes—that is today completely impoverished and invisibilised. (2019,2020, *World of the Banaras Weaver*, Raman). Audible, informed and reasoned public dialogue is needed to influence not just political but economic policy and decision making.

The role of the commercial media, most especially television, in furthering a divisive discourse that, apart from being not based on any fact, was tailored to suit an anti-constitutional agenda made the sufferings of all sections of the minority, even the artisanal weaving community in eastern UP, more humiliating and acute. A significant number of our respondents spoke of economic boycotts at work in neighbourhoods days and weeks after the spread of the virus was deliberately mis-construed and

associated with one community (with terms like Coronona-Jihad, Superspreaders of the Virus., being used).

## 2014-2022

CJP's fact-finding report among the artisanal weavers' community in four districts of Eastern Uttar Pradesh popularly known as Purvanchal took place in 2020, six and a half years after a seminal shift in the political mapping of this region. Though the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) swept to power in the state for the first time in 1991, after a successful campaign of social engineering and on the back of particularly brutal bouts of communal violence in 1991, and post the Babri Masjid demolition on December 6, 1992. Entrenched forms of discriminatory governance were legitimised by both an invisibilisation of the Muslim vote and a barefaced majoritarianism. It was more specifically evident post the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, that among other aspects blew the cultural bugle of the transformation of the Indian republic into a Hindu rashtra. Narendra Modi's entrance to Indian Parliament was from Varanasi (though he did contest from Vadodara in Gujarat also) and the victory spectacle – religio-cultural in character that he indulged in post winning – at the Vishwanath temple signaled this tectonic shift. Now this cultural hegemony has extended to State funding and celebration of not just the Ram Temple at Faizabad-Ayodhya (also in Uttar Pradesh) but clearcut attempts to make the Vishwanath temple at Kashi (Varanasi) the next symbolic celebration of this assertion. Varanasi has seen much of its traditional home-businesses, lanes and temples destroyed in the past two years as a re-constructed new narrative is attempted and underway.

Two years on, in November 2016, demonetisation was the first blow dealt to India's vast informal economy and the *Banarasi* weaving industry in particular. [1] Policy moves have also been afoot to shift so called exotic aspects of the weaving industry to other locales in the country. All these factors need to be addressed and analysed together to understand the impact that they have had on a section of the population that has faced economic and social exclusion over time.

The detailed and dispassionate accounts in this report, backed by meticulous data collection tell a bleak tale for 21<sup>st</sup> century India. In early 2022, as the state of Uttar Pradesh enters into its round of provincial (state) elections, it is unlikely that the demands or recommendations of the artisanal weaving community will be centre stage. Much needs to be done by all of us collectively to ensure that one day soon, they do.



[1]

<https://www.sabrangindia.in/article/banaras-unique-rolling-credit-system-paralysed-de-monetization;>

<https://thewire.in/economy/varanasi-silk-industry-demonetisation;>

<https://www.livemint.com/Politics/BHUXH59k2Z1YANffG64AQO/The-rise-and-fall-of-the-Banarasi-handloom-Saree.html>



## Analysing the demographic further

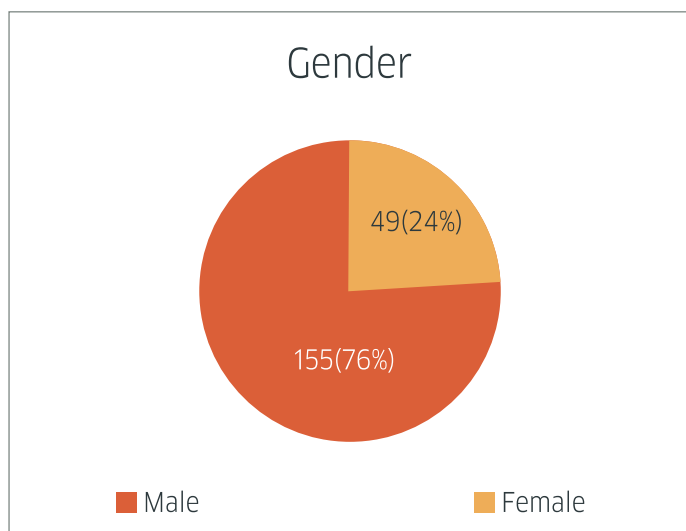


Figure 2: Gender

As per Figure 2, 24% of the respondents from all the four districts of Eastern Uttar Pradesh, were Female, while 76% were male. Women have an important role in the weaving industry. Women helped their husbands in the weaving process by undertaking tasks such as spool feeding, cutting threads, and decorating the *Saree* for finishing.

We also discovered that women are involved in weaving work in Mau and Azamgarh. Women in Ghosi (Mau) and Mubarakpur (Azamgarh) have for years woven using handlooms and power looms in their homes. As a matter of fact, women run the homes and men undertake other tasks like repairing looms, buying weaving materials and other items required for weaving.

In Varanasi, women are not involved in weaving, but they do other weaving related work. Women are mostly involved in preparatory and post weaving related work like spool feeding, application of decorative items like '*Tikli*', '*Gota*' and precious and semi-precious stones, finishing, sewing and working on chunaris. Unfortunately, in preparatory work like spool feeding, women do not get any money, as this counts as household work. Women play a major role in the loom industry, as it is their traditional work. This is a traditional division of labour and women end up providing unpaid services.

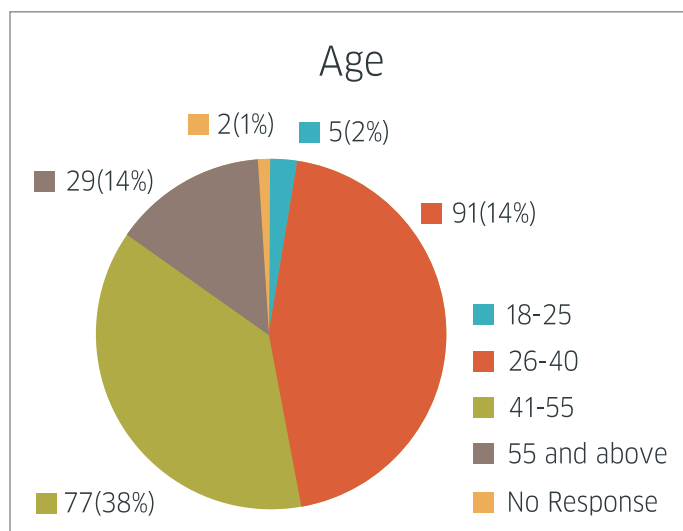


Figure 3: Age

Figure 3 indicates the age of the respondents interviewed. 5 (2%) respondents were in the age group of 18 to 25 years. Almost half of the respondents i.e 91 (45%) were in the age group of 26 to 40 years. In the age group of 41 to 55 years there were 77 (38%) respondents. So, in total it shows that 83% respondents come in the age group between 26-55 years.

29 (14%) of the respondents were in the age group of 55 and above, the oldest person interviewed was 85 years of age. 2 (1%) of the respondents didn't have any answer to this question.

Therefore, it would be reasonable to say that the core survey has covered the most productive age profile among the weaving industry in Eastern Uttar Pradesh.



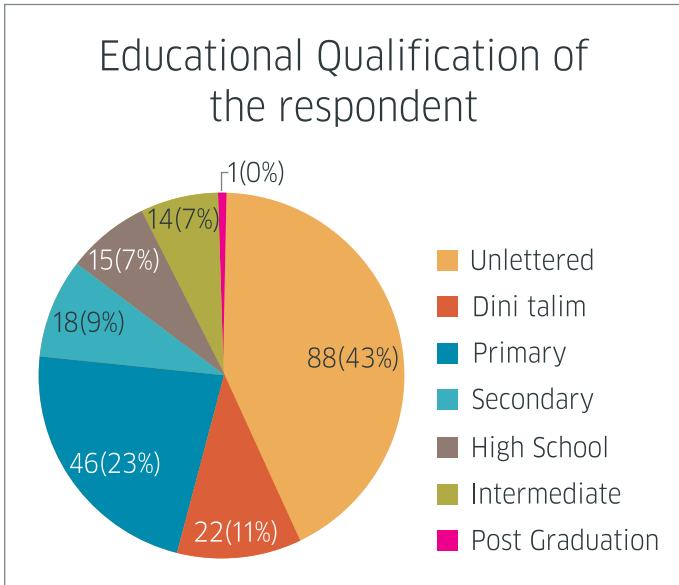


Figure 4: Educational Qualifications of the respondents

Figure 4 shows the educational qualification of the respondents. It turns out that 88 (43%) of the respondents are unlettered, however, they are highly skilled and have knowledge of the traditional work which they have been doing for decades.

22 (11%) respondents had received *Dini Talim* (religious education among Muslims). This refers to just going to a *Madrasa*.

46 (23%) respondents have been educated up to primary level (5<sup>th</sup> Grade). 18 (9%) of the respondents had received secondary education (8<sup>th</sup> grade). 15 (7%) of the respondents have completed their high school education (10<sup>th</sup> grade), and 14 (7%) of the respondents have studied up to intermediate (12<sup>th</sup> grade) level.

1 person had completed his post-graduation (M.A. Urdu).

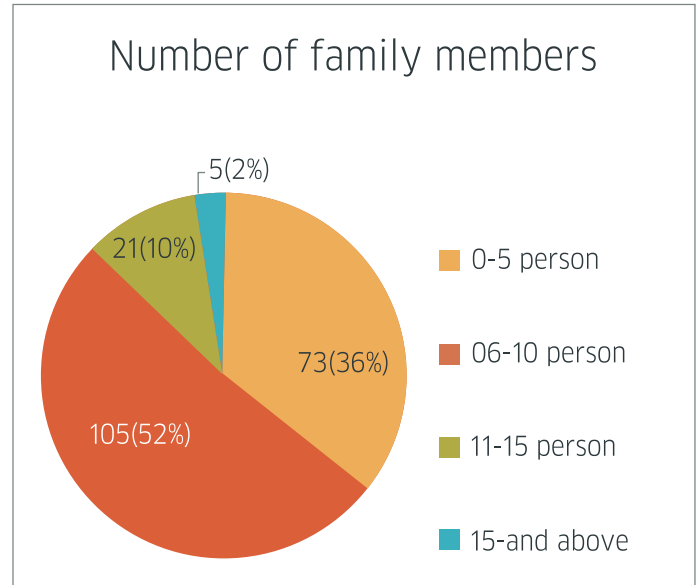


Figure 5: Number of family members

Out of the total respondents interviewed, 73 (36%) of the respondents have 5 or less people in their family.

105, (52%) of the respondents have 6 to 10 people in their family. We can see the unlettered among the respondents was 43%, therefore it shows how among people who are not educated, there is little or no awareness about family planning.

21 (10%) of the respondents have 11 to 15 people in the family. This could be due to two reasons; the aforementioned lack of awareness of family planning, or that they live in joint families.

5 (2%) of the respondents have more than 15 members in their joint family.

## Women in Weaving: Viewing their subjugation through an intersectional lens

As in all other states of societal and state driven conflict, the gendered aspect needs particular attention and emphasis. For the woman and girl belonging to the minority, Muslim and Scheduled Castes, there is a triple layer of discrimination and denial suffered: one of economic discrimination because of their positioning in a community that is so deprived, second because of the community to which they belong, and last but not the least, because of the fact that they are girls and women, often trampled upon by the patriarchy within the community and family.

Therefore, this report also aimed to investigate the plight of its subjects from a gender sensitive lens, equipped with the knowledge that women form the backbone of this work. Female artisans and workers are hardly visible and acknowledged, though their role has been pivotal in the world of the “master weaver” and other related exotica.

With this in mind, we worked towards ensuring that we get female respondents so that their concerns can get the representation they deserve. 24 percent of our respondent samples were girls and women; their testimonies were

sorry tales of malnutrition and attendant health issues, apart from impoverishment and hunger, as well as rampant domestic abuse.

Today, in Azamgarh, one of the four districts that was the subject matter of our study, and which is home to Rahul Sanskrityayan and Kaifi Azmi, 60 percent of its women and 52 percent of children are suffering from anaemia. The specific distress caused by the Lockdown has seen an increase of girls being compelled to drop out of learning and education. Additionally, women and girls suffer from domestic abuse.

Though crucial in undertaking tasks such as spool feeding, decorating the *Saree* with embroidery and sewing semi-precious stones, and cutting the *Saree* or garment for finishing – all tasks integral to the weaving and production process – the image of the weaver is rarely that of a woman. In fact, many women are actually involved in operating looms as well.

Through this exacting effort at investigation, our team found that women are involved in weaving work in Mau and Azamgarh. Women in Ghosi (Mau) and Mubarakpur (Azamgarh) have for years woven using handlooms and power





looms in their homes. From cloth used for the 'lungi' to the 'blankets' to the 'Kafan' (shroud), women are expert at this work as much as weaving the *Saree* and finishing and polishing it. In fact, women run the homes and men undertake other tasks like repairing looms, buying weaving materials and other items required for weaving. Where women are not involved in actual weaving like in Varanasi, they have crucial roles in other tasks: the preparatory and post weaving related work like spool feeding, application of decorative items like 'Tikli', 'Gota' and precious and semi-precious stones, finishing, sewing and working on chunaris. Much of this is not accounted for nor paid labour. For example, for spool feeding, women do not get any money, as this counts as household work! As in so many other areas of work, while women's work is crucial to this traditional artisanal industry, women (not surprisingly) end up providing unpaid services.

The overall impact of a brute form of targeted communal violence and politics over the past three decades has had its specific impact on women. Muslim women. Particular to their condition has been the disturbing spiral in hegemonic majoritarianism that has successfully mobilised, even aggressively since the 1990s, women from the majority community. (1993, Teesta Setalvad, *Women and the Hindu Right*).

It was in the early 1990s, that cases of women from the majority community aggressively attacking women and men from the minority community were documented. (1991, Setalvad, Ahmedabad, 1991, *Business India*, Sunday Observer, Bombay 1992-1993, Setalvad, Sunday Observer)

In Surat, on December 6-7, 1992, in the aftermath of the demolition of the Babri Masjid, women and girls from the Muslim community were made violent targets of debased gendered violence. Bombay 1992-1993 also recorded

three such cases where neighbourhoods voyeuristically participated. The 2002 Gujarat genocidal pogrom took this to a completely different level and dimension. The Concerned Citizens Tribunal, Crimes Against Humanity, Gujarat 2002, documented both the systematic hate writings and speeches and targeted attacks on Muslim women and girls.

This splintering of the gender identity along communal lines has deeply affected traditional gender-driven solidarities that often breached denials and divides of the kind that swept India during the Covid-19 pandemic. This is why responses too have been few and far between, and unfortunately may not have necessarily taken into account the depth and nuances of the deprivations unleashed.





## TYPES OF WORK AND APPROXIMATE WAGES

During our fact-finding study, we discovered that before Lockdown, respondents were involved in weaving on Handloom, Power loom and *Zardozi* work on *Karchup* (a traditional contraption). Women were also involved in work like *Nari bharna* (spooling yarn), setting shiny, semi-precious stones, cutting *Sarees*, applying '*Gota*', a traditional golden trimming, among other work.

Listed below are wages for different types of work as per the rate that was prevalent before the Lockdown. After the Lockdown, the situation worsened as work grew scarce. When they do get work, wages are often slashed by 50 percent by the loom owner and master weaver, owing to extremely low demand.

### Handloom Labour Charges

The rates of *Banarasi Sarees* are decided as per the work on the *Saree*. In Handloom work there is one skilled labourer, and with him his helper. Both work on it together. If it is your own Handloom then you get wages as per the different work. If it's a normal *Saree*, then people work for 10 to 12 hours and after 12-15 days they complete one *Saree*. For that they get up to Rs 1,800 to 2,000. Similarly, the 'heavy' *Saree* (with more elaborate work) also takes the same number of working hours and after 18 to 20 days, they complete one *Saree*. For that they get up to Rs 4,000 to 4,500.

### Power loom labour charges

The labour charges are decided for the people working on power loom. Rates depend on the type of work they get. On power looms, the work range is vast, but the labour charges are almost the same.

Rates differ. For example:

*Tanchoi*, *Zaribooti*, *Epeyan*, *Aadha*, Bright: for all these *Sarees*, the rates are Rs 75 to Rs 90, and require working for 10 to 12 hours.

Similarly, for the 'heavy' *Sarees* like *Georgette*, *Lakchha* border, *Tasar*, *Butter*, *Kataan*, people here also work for 10 to 12 hours, and for that they get up to Rs 110 to Rs 150.

### Zardozi work wages

*Zardozi* work has become like labour work now. People only look at the final material which has been produced, but no one looks at the efforts which have been put into it. Previously, work was for 12 hours a day, but now it has been reduced to only 8 hours. A large number of *karkhanas* (factories) are getting shut down. People are working on labour no matter what kind of work it is.

For eg- *Saree*, *Suit*, *Kurti*, *Kurta*, *Sherwani*, *Batch*, *Mukut* or purse whatever it is the money is decided on design basis, and they are paid Rs 200 for 12 hours.

### Azamgarh, Gorakhpur, Mau wages

In Gorakhpur weavers weave chadar and suiting-shirting material. While working 8-10 hours on a power loom, they earn Rs 150 to Rs 200 a day. Their payment is Rs 3 per meter.

In Mau weavers (usually women) weave *Kafan* (shroud) cloth on the power loom. They get Rs 25 per meter and weave approximately 4-5 meter per day. For this they have to work 8-10 hours a day. Master Weaver gets commission on a per *Saree* basis in Gorakhpur. They give material to weavers and get Rs 50 per *Saree*. It depends and changes from *Saree* to *Saree*.

In Shahpur, Azamgarh weavers weave *lungees*. Shahpur is a rural area located in the district of Mubarakpur. Weavers get Rs 10 per meter, and they weave 25-30 meter per day while working for 8-10 hours. Loom owners get Rs 30 per *Lungee* before the Lockdown. But after Lockdown, they hardly get Rs 10 in a day.



## Role of Women in Weaving and Zardozi work and its wages

**Stone work on Saree:** In stone work also, there is 'heavy' and 'light' work. Both rates depend on the type of Saree. For one 'light' Saree, the stone work is completed in 4 hours and they get Rs 10, and for one 'heavy' Saree is completed in 10 to 12 hours for which they get Rs 25 to 30. The material like Saree, stone, gum etc. which is required, is provided by the owner.

**Finishing work:** Banarasi Sarees need to go through the final process of cutting. This work is done by women in their households. This involves manually cutting the tiny threads left on the reverse of the fabric. The Saree, after that, is folded and packed. Finishing of one Saree (Saree cutting) takes up to 20 to 25 minutes, and for that payment is Rs 5. Only Handloom Saree needs this finishing work. But, as the number of Handlooms has declined, this work has almost no demand.

**Chunri-Dupatta:** In Chunri-Dupatta, the work of applying 'Gota' is done by women, and in a day, a woman completes 4 to 5 chunri-dupattas. For one chunri dupatta they get a measly amount of up to Rs 3. One chunri-dupatta takes 20 to 25 minutes to complete. The materials like Gota, Dhaga (thread), Dupatta, needle, are all provided by the owner.

**Jaalदार Jhalar Stitching work on Dupatta and Saree:** To apply Jaalदार Jhal to one Saree, it takes between one to one and a half hours, which pays Rs 10 to 12. Similarly, one dupatta takes one and half to two hours to complete, and for that a woman gets Rs 15 to 18. But this work is not regular, they get this work during festivals and weddings.

**Spool feeding (Nari bharna):** Women generally do Nari bharna work at home. Now machines are used to do this work. Young generation of Women in Gorakhpur left the work 'Nari bharna' as the wages are as low as Rs 60-70 per day, while working more than 10 hours a day. These women have now started sewing bags. They get Re 1 per bag, and in a day they get Rs 100 for sewing 100 bags.





## STATUS OF LOOMS / KARCHUP AND EMPLOYMENT

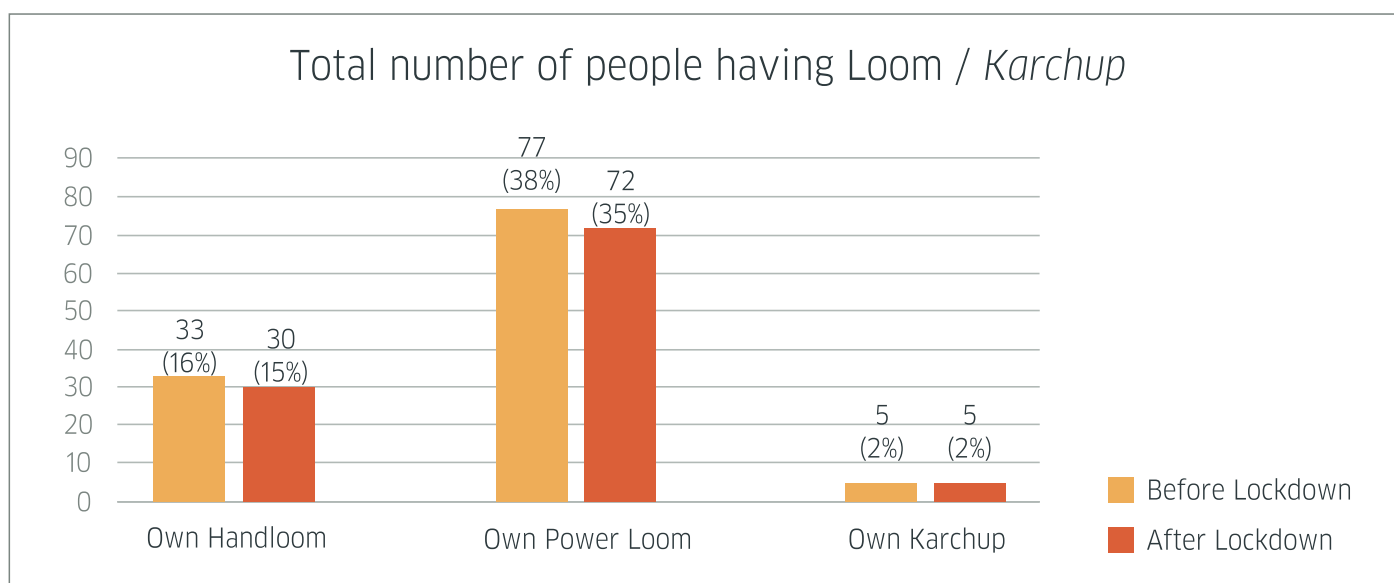


Figure 6: Total number of people having Loom / Karchup

As per figure 6, before the Lockdown 33(16%) people had handloom and after the Lockdown 30(15%) people had handloom so it shows 3 people sold their handlooms due to financial crisis and figure 8 shows that 77% of the handlooms were shut down, so even though people have handlooms, there was no work.

77(38%) people had power looms before the Lockdown, and after the Lockdown, this num-

ber declined to 72(35%) People who were trying to sell their power looms were getting a very low rate for it, so not many people sold their power looms. But as shown in figure 7, 80% of it was shut down after the Lockdown.

5(2%) of the people owned *Karchup* before and after Lockdown, no one sold their *Karchup* after the Lockdown because it doesn't have much resale value.



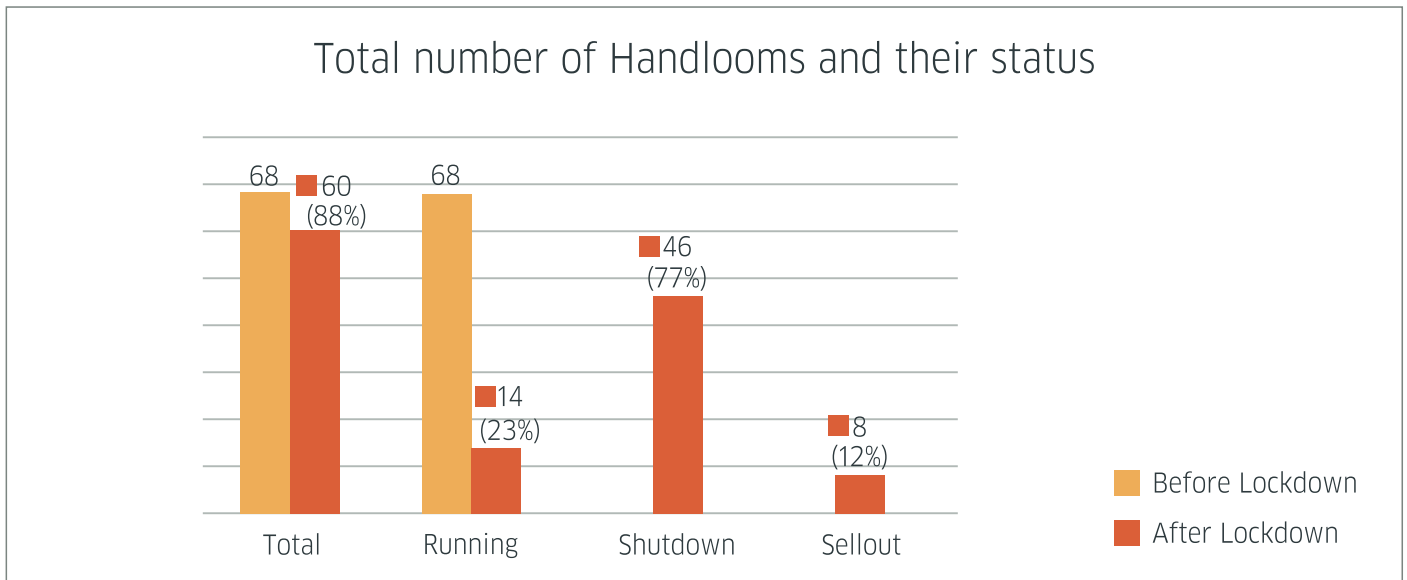


Figure 7: Total number of Handlooms and their status

Figure 7 indicates that the 204 respondents had 68 of handlooms (hand-operated looms) before Lockdown in our sample areas. After the Lockdown, this number has come down to 60. It shows that 8 (12%) handlooms were sold during Lockdown. It was reported by the respondents, they sold out their handlooms at very cheap rates.

Out of these 60 handlooms, only 14 (23%) handlooms were running after Lockdown, and 46 handlooms which is 77% of the total handlooms were shut down. After the Lockdown, weavers have very little work. It was reported by the respondents that now *Grihasta* (Master weaver) told them, “*Bhai jaldi Saree mat banana. Ek mahine baad aana. Kaam nahi hai*”, (meaning: There’s no need to rush a *Saree*. Come after a month; there is no work.)

Earlier a weaver completed a *Saree* in 6-7 days, now they have a whole month in the absence of enough work.

For the past two decades, handlooms have been disappearing gradually, because more and more people are turning towards power looms (electric looms). Before Lockdown also, the handloom workers had very less work, and the demand also fell because of the increasing number of power looms. Hence, they were

struggling to meet their daily needs and after Lockdown the situation got even worse.

Mohd Shoeb in Revri Talab, Varanasi, had 12 handlooms before the Lockdown. He used to give some out on rent, while using the rest for weaving. Now all 12 handlooms are shut down. The workers who were working on his looms, have started working as labourers.

Shahid Jamal Ansari in Madanpura, Varanasi had four handlooms, but now only one is there and from this he could only earn enough money to arrange for one meal a day!

These are few examples that indicate to what extent people have become constrained by the corona pandemic that they have been forced to sell their only source of earnings.



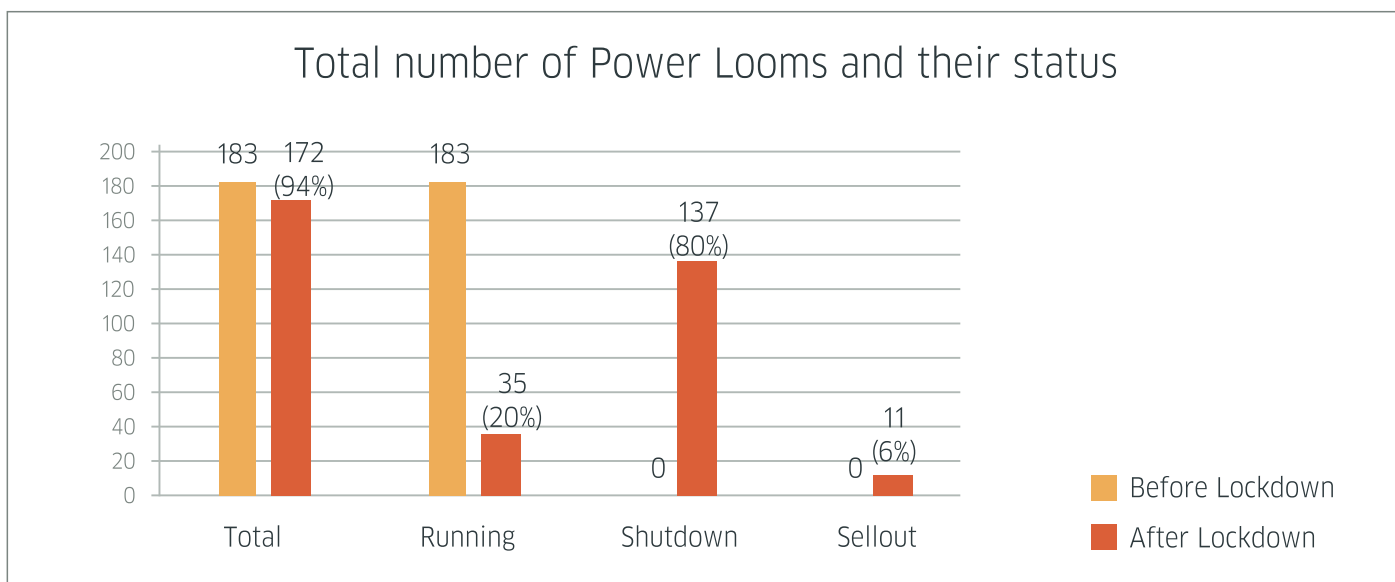


Figure 8: Total number of Power Loom and their status

Figure 8 indicates 204 respondents used 183 power looms (electric looms) before Lockdown. After the Lockdown, 11 power looms i.e 6% were sold off at a very low price.

*“Jo power loom Rs 5 lakh ka tha, us ko Rs 7,000 ke bhav bechna pada.”*

Hamid Ansari, who is a resident of Revri Talab, Madanpura, Varanasi, spoke to us on December 5, 2020. He told us that he invested Rs 15 lakh in his embroidery computer machine, but it was sold by the landlord without his permission, to collect pending rent and electricity bills.

“One machine was sold for Rs 32,000 and another for Rs 48,000. But we got no money from it,” said Hamid Ansari. As he was unable to pay rent during the entire Lockdown, the machine was sold as scrap based on per kilo price!

Another Ahmed Raza from Saraiya had five power looms before Lockdown. But due to financial distress during the Lockdown, he sold one for Rs.70,000.

Shakeel Ahmed, a resident of Badi Bazar, bought a power loom four years ago for Rs 62,000. But when work came to a grinding halt for four months, he was forced to sell it for as little as Rs 14,000 just to ensure his family did not go hungry. It broke his heart when the power loom was sold to a *Kabari* (scrap dealer) at 23 rupees per kg.

We discovered that power looms are shut not only in Varanasi, but also in the other parts of Eastern Uttar Pradesh. Riyazuddin in Gorakhpur has 10 power looms and reported that all are shutdown since March when the Lockdown was declared. Ansarul in Mau has four power looms. Ahmed Ansari and Karimuddin in Azamgarh have four and five power looms respectively. Both said that their power looms are shut due to no work. In fact, we found 16 respondents who originally had four or more power looms that were either shutdown, or that were forced to sell one or two of their looms due to financial distress.

Before the Lockdown, not a single power loom was shut down, but after Lockdown as we can see from the figure that only 35 power looms were running, which is only 20% of the total power looms, while 137 (80%) of the power looms were shut down. It was reported that even the power looms which are running, are not run regularly as they don't have enough work.

It is reported that looms were closed for the last several months, and machines can't start without repairing. For repair and restart, the expenditure comes to Rs 4,000 to Rs 5000 for one power loom, and Rs 5,000 to Rs 6,000 for one handloom. But the loom owners neither have money for repairs, nor do they have any work.



Shahnawaz from Saraiya asks, “*Machine to band hain, ekdam abhi pura jaam ho gaya hai. Paisa hai hi nahin ki hum chalu karen. Kahaan se 5-6 hazar rupiya laayen?*” (Translation: The machine is shut, fully jammed. I don’t have the money to repair and restart. From where will I get Rs 5,000 to Rs 6,000?)

During Lockdown he started to sell biscuit toffee and said, “*Yeh dukan Lockdown mai khola, bachhe ekdam khaye bina reh rahe thhe. Har chiz ke liye tadap rahe thhe, toh hum kahe ki pura kaam band hain toh thoda biscuit, mithai ki dukan kar len toh kuch to hamara aansoo pochha jayega. Yahi aansoo pochne ke liye humne yeh biscuit, mithai aur toffee ki dukan khol li hain. Bachhe chote chote hain.*” (Translation: I opened this shop during the Lockdown. My children were starving, so I thought I could make some money selling biscuits and toffees, just so I could wipe off my children’s tears! They are very young.)

The Varanasi edition of the newspaper Hindustan, published a report on weavers forced to sell power looms at the price of junk on July 27, 2020. The publication mentioned two cases:

### Case-study 1

Hasan Abbas of Doshipura bought a power loom 6 years ago for Rs 70,000. There are four members in the family, who were barely surviving in the absence of adequate food for nearly four months due to the absence of work and therefore wages during the Lockdown. Their savings were wiped out during the Lockdown. He was forced to sell the only power loom for just Rs 15,000!

### Case-study 2

Shakeel Ahmed, a resident of Badi Bazar, bought a power loom four years ago for Rs 62,000. Due to the shutdown of work for four months and in order to feed his family, he sold it for only Rs 14,000. The power loom was sold to a Naate Bhai (a scrap dealer) at 23 rupees per kg.

These are the only two examples that showcase

people’s plight amidst the pandemic. The situation is similar in other weaver dominated areas of Varanasi. Some are selling vegetables, some have started working as daily wage labourers to provide for their families, while some families are selling jewellery.

The condition of weavers has become critical in areas like Badi Bazar, Revri Talab, Sarraiya, Lallapura, Lohta, Bajardiha and Kotwa. Electricity bills have also taken a toll on the weavers, whose protests have fallen on deaf ears.

Dilwar (Nate Bhai), a scrap dealer in Badi Bazaar, said that many weavers are selling power looms. (Source: Hindustan, date 27.07.2020)



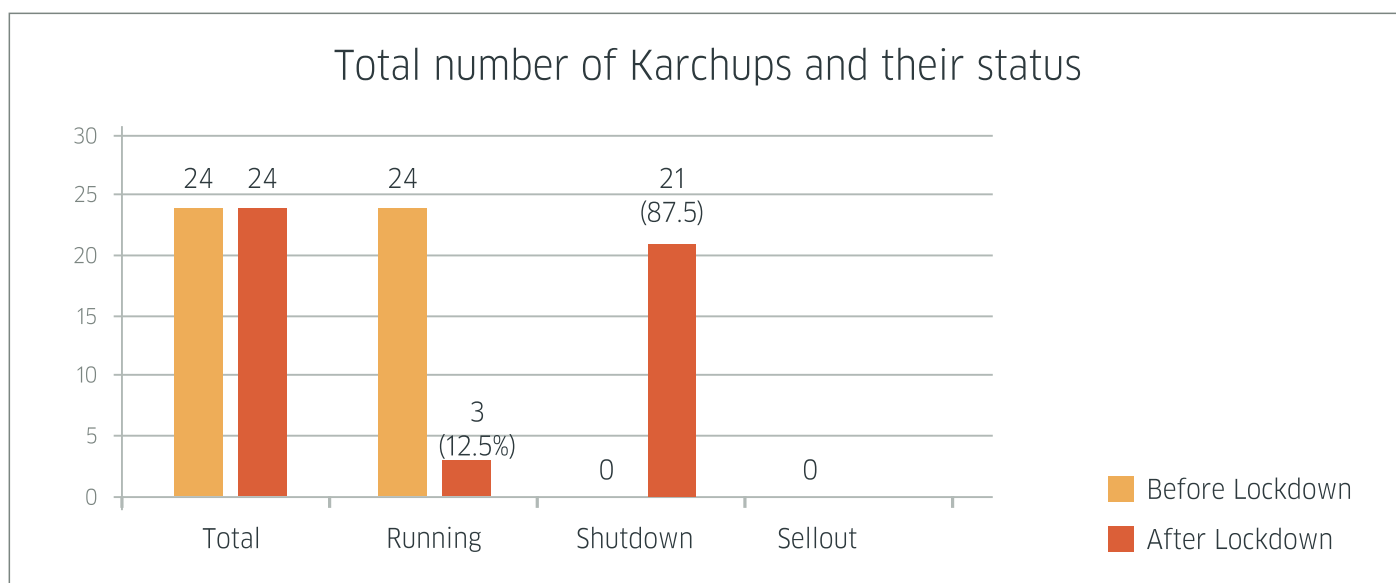


Figure 9: Total number of Karchups and their status

Figure 9 shows total number of own *Karchup*. Hand embroidery work which is called *Zari/Zardozi* is done on a wooden contraption called *Karchup*. Before and after Lockdown, the number of *Karchups* have remained the same, that is 24. This means no one sold *Karchup* because it is already very cheap. It costs Rs 500 and when sold, it fetches hardly anything in hand. But the number of *Karchups* still running after the Lockdown, is only 3 (12.5%) which means 21 *Karchups* were shut down due to lack of order, that is 87.5% of total *Karchups*.

Abdullah from Jalalipura said, he had 20 *karchups* before Lockdown but now even after eight months, 19 are shut down and only one is running for the last few days.

Aftaab from Chauhatta has a *Karchup*. He and four more *karigars* were engaged in *Aari* work (embroidery), but due to sudden Lockdown all work stopped. Owners (*Karkhandar*) as well as those who work on other *karchups* (*Karigar*) have no work.

Shahid Jamal from Koyla Bazaar, makes designs for banners. This design he gives to *Zardozi*

*karigars* who then do the *Zardozi*. He takes the orders from the foreign customers. These designs are also provided to him by the customers who mostly are from England, Germany and Belgium. Before Lockdown he earned Rs 10,000 to Rs 15,000 per month. But now he hardly makes Rs 2,000 to Rs 4,000 a month as he is not getting enough orders.

Shahid explains, “*Kaam complete kar ke bhej dete hain, par payment do ya teen mahine ke baad hota hai*” (translation: I finish the work and send it, but payment comes after 2-3 months.) The product gets ready in 10-15 days then it takes another 10-15 days for the product to reach the customers, then the money is paid, which adds to his financial distress. He feels that the government does not care.

International courier charges are anyway high, and now 12% GST has to be paid. Also, the cost of the price to be shipped has to be submitted first and then it is returned later. “The law isn’t good. If it continues like this the work will shut down,” he added.





## The bigger picture

There has been a loss of Rs 3,000 crore to Purvanchal's Handicraft and Handloom business because of the Covid-19 pandemic in Europe and UK. Orders received from these regions in the last two months after the Lockdown, are now being canceled or placed on hold. European countries import the largest amount of silk dress materials, *Sarees*, scarves, *dupattas*, bed sheets and cushion covers.

Rajan Bahal, General Secretary of the *Banarasi Vastra Udyog Sangh*, said that there is a concern among traders in view of the second wave of Coronavirus in European countries. The orders that were received are being cancelled. Many traders have reduced their production and many have stopped work.

According to Sudeshna Basu, president of Indo American Chamber of Commerce Varanasi Chapter, orders for products exported from Varanasi and surrounding districts are getting cancelled due to the second wave of Corona in European countries. (Source: *Amarujala Hindi Newspaper*, Varanasi edition, Date 24.12.2020)

Sheikh Abdullah from Koyla Bazar makes *mu-kuts*, and *mori* which requires very fine *Zard-oz*i work. He exports these items to European countries, but now has very little work in the absence of fresh orders. He reported due to lack of work, 22-25 *karigars* who work on his *karchups* have no work. They are skilled and fine *Zardozi karigars* but have now been forced to take up daily wage labour work.

Two localities namely Shiwala and Koyla Bazar Chauhatta in Varanasi are dominated by *Zari/Aari* works. After the Lockdown, due to lack of work, few *Karkhandar* and *karigars* open small shops and others are searching for some other work.





## IMPACT OF LOCKDOWN

### Before and after the Lockdown: Nature, scope and hours of work

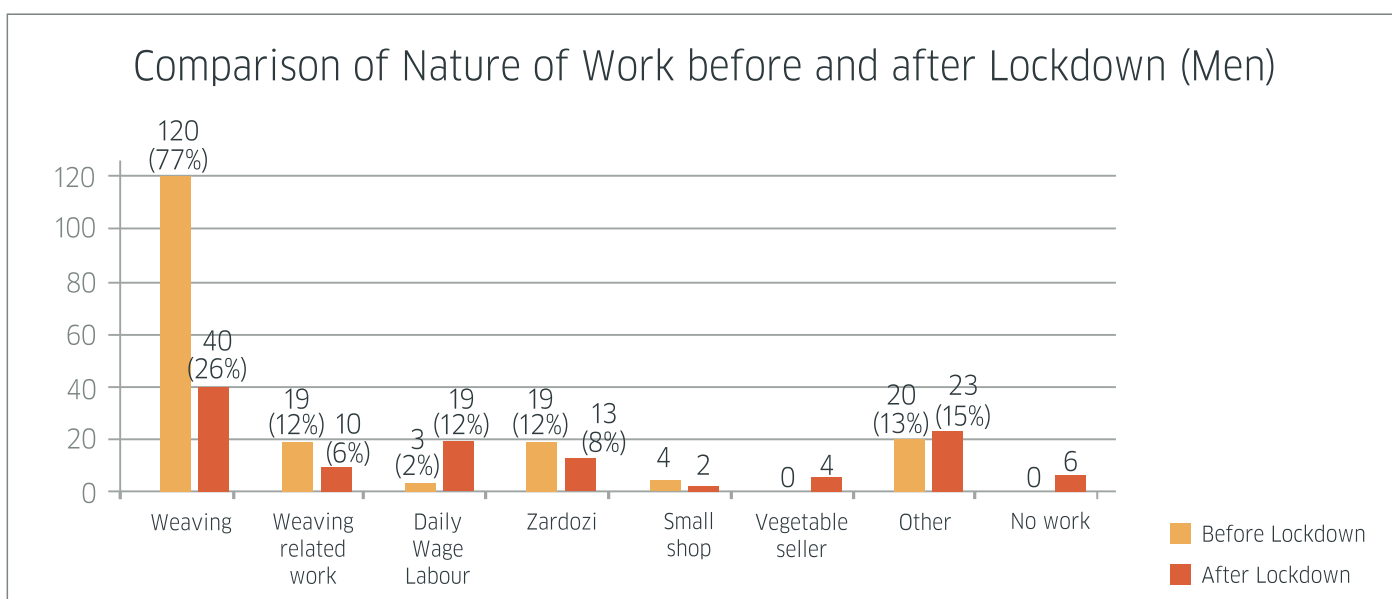


Figure 10: Comparison of Nature of Work before and after Lockdown (Men)

The above Figure shows the nature of work (for male weavers and workers) before and after Lockdown. Weaving is the main work when it comes to the loom industry. As per the graph, before the Lockdown 120 weavers were involved in weaving work which is almost 77% of the data collected, whereas after Lockdown, there was a drastic fall in this number. Only 40 men had work after Lockdown which is only 26 percent. Therefore, weaving as an activity was affected severely to the point that it effectively came to an end.

Due to this, men started taking up whatever work they were getting, because of the pressures of a patriarchal society where they are considered to be the breadwinner of the family. We can see that before Lockdown only 3 (2%) men were working as labourers, but after Lockdown the number went up to 19 (12%).

The other work in the loom industry for men include binding, finishing, dyeing, making *Pat-ta* (draft design) and embroidery. In all these weaving related activities, the number of men involved before Lockdown was 19 (12%) and after Lockdown it declined to 10 (6%).

*Zari/Zardozi* is a different work from weaving; it is mainly hand embroidery. As per the figure 19 (12%) of the men were involved in *Zari* and *Aari* work and after Lockdown the number declined to 13 (8%).

Before the Lockdown, 4 (2.5%) of the men had their own shop, and after Lockdown only 2 (1%) of the men had their shop.

20 (13%) men were involved in some other work before Lockdown and the number increased to 23 (15%) after Lockdown. The occupations of these men include working at someone else's shop, daily-wage labour, auto rickshaw driving, carpentry, running a tea stall etc.

There were 6 (4%) weavers who had no work at all after the Lockdown.

Before Lockdown



After Lockdown





## Comparison of Nature of Work before and after Lockdown (Women)

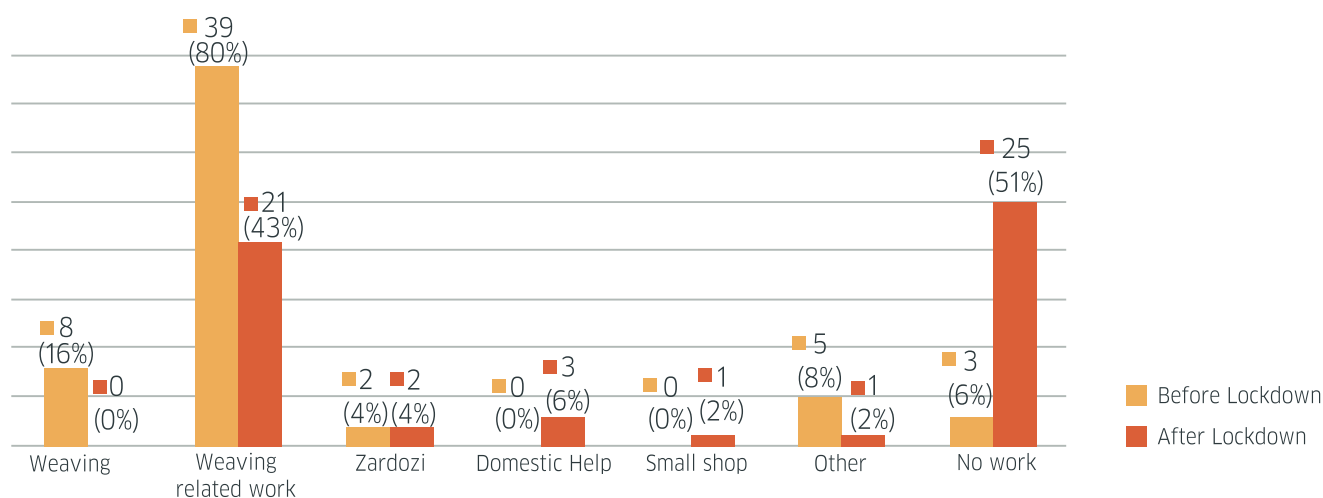


Figure 11: Comparison of Nature of Work before and after Lockdown (Women)

Household-based loom production has almost become insignificant. Men and women are no longer part of a single household-based unit, and they both work for other masters, because after Independence there has been continuous decline in the handloom industry. Women are mostly involved in preparatory and post weaving related work like spool feeding, application of 'Tikli', precious and semi-precious stones, finishing, sewing and making 'Mala'.

In weaving 8 (16%) of the women were involved before the Lockdown but after the Lockdown there is not a single woman working on the loom. These women all belong to the districts of Mau and Azamgarh located in the eastern part of Uttar Pradesh, as it is only in these parts that women weave on looms. The number of women involved in weaving is more than men in these areas.

In Zardozi work, which is mainly hand embroidery only 2 (4%) of the women were found to be involved. It is reported that after the Lockdown they are not getting regular work.

Before the Lockdown, there was no female respondent working as a maid (domestic help) but after the Lockdown there were 3 (6%) women working as maids. As far as own shops are concerned only 1 (2%) of the women had opened shops after the Lockdown.

Women working in this industry are most affected by this pandemic, we can see from the above diagram that 25 (51%) women didn't have any work after the Lockdown whereas before Lockdown 3 (6%) women had no work.

5 (8%) women were involved in some other work before the Lockdown such as pickle making, ASHA worker, running some small shop, or selling vegetables to support their family.

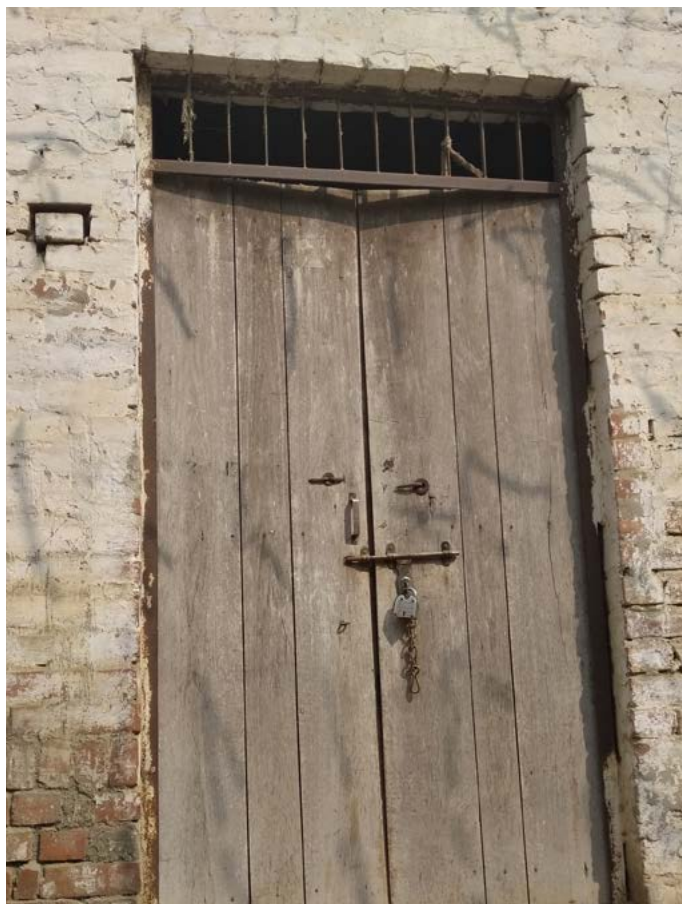




*Before Lockdown*



*After Lockdown*



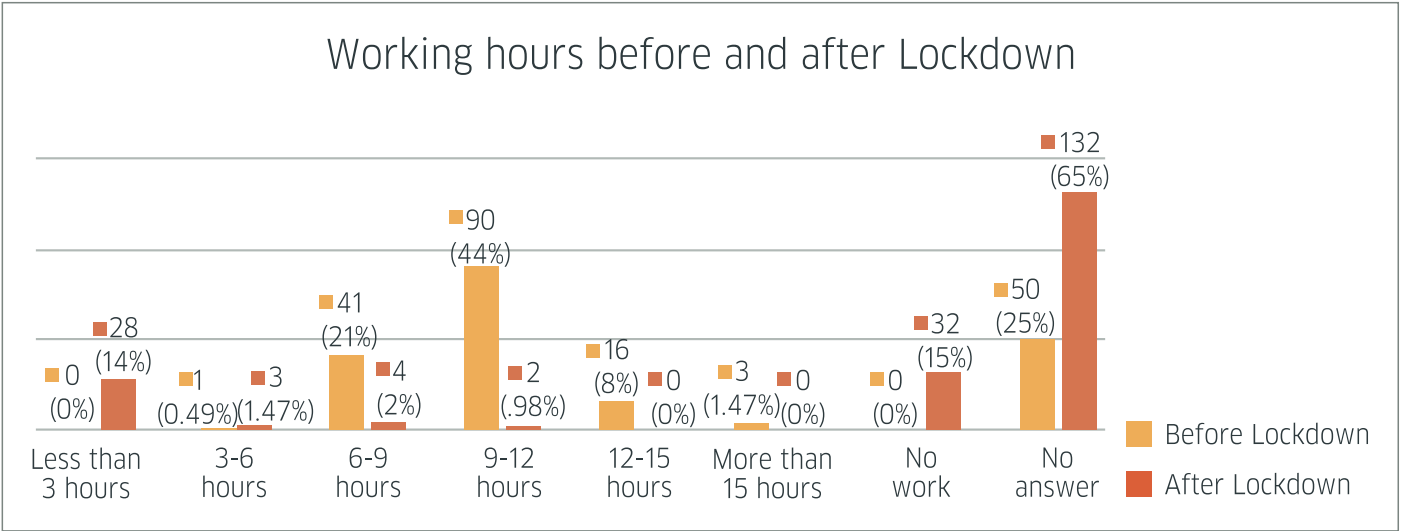


Figure 12: Working hours before and after Lockdown

Everything was shut down in wake of the Lockdown imposed to check the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic. Things are still not back on track, and unemployment is widespread. In the loom industry, before the Lockdown, weavers mostly worked anywhere between 6 to 15 hours a day on looms. Weavers had work, some on their own looms, others on looms owned by other people. The above Figure 12 shows only for the male weaving hours before and after Lockdown.

We can clearly see that, 90 (44%) respondents used to work 9 to 12 hrs daily before Lockdown, and after Lockdown only 2 (1%) respondent work for these many hours and these are mainly weavers in the loom industry.

41 (21%) respondents used to work for 6 to 9 hours before the Lockdown, but this number fell to only 4 (2%) people working for these many hours.

16 (8%) respondents worked for 12 to 15 hours and 3 (1%) people used to work for more than 15 hours before the Lockdown. But after the Lockdown in the absence of any work, people are struggling to meet their daily needs. We can say that 53% of respondents worked 9 hours or above per day before the Lockdown and they had enough work, but after the Lockdown only 1% of the respondents work between 9-15 hours.

After Lockdown 3 (1%) people worked for 3 to 6 hours whereas, before the Lockdown only 1 person worked for this many hours.

Before the Lockdown no one worked for less than 3 hours, but after the Lockdown, 28 (14%) of the respondents were working for less than 3 hours. It is not unreasonable to presume that their earnings have also gone down significantly.

The status now is that the *Grihasta/Karkhandar* gives one or one and half months to work on a single *Saree*, whereas before Lockdown the same *Saree* was woven within 6 to 7 days. Therefore, the income and working hours have been severely affected after Lockdown.

Out of the total respondents, 32 (15%) people had no work at all after the Lockdown, whereas before Lockdown there was no one unemployed. 132 (65%) of the people, which is more than half of the data collected, didn't have any specific answer to this question. When asked about current hours spent on weaving and related activities, they said, "*Khali baithey hain. Koi kaam nahin hai. Kabhi kabhar kuch mil ja raha hai. Kya batayen kitney ghanthey kaam kartey hain?*" (Translation: We are left sitting idle, there is no work. We are waiting to get news of some work. So, what to tell you how many hours I spend working?)





The reason behind their inability to give answer about hours of work, is that they can't calculate the hour as they are not getting regular work.

A general report from the women who are in weaver families, is that they start their work from early morning at 5 AM and work till 12 PM. There is no rest in between. Before the Lockdown they did work as weaving, weaving on looms, spool feeding, application of precious and semi-precious stones, 'Gota' application on chuunari, finishing work, and Aari work. There is no time limit as they do this work alongside their other household work like cooking, cleaning, child rearing, washing, fetching water etc.

It is difficult to say how many hours women work on weaving or weaving related work. There are two types of work that women do. Firstly, if there is a handloom or power loom in the house, then women with the household work do the weaving, spool feeding (*Nari bharna*) and they never get any money for this, as these activities are considered a part of their household work.

Secondly, women work on payment and do outside work like applying stone, Aari work, finishing work, *chunri* work (*Gota* application), and making bags. According to the women respondents, "*Lockdown se sab kaam khatm ho gaya. Pehle Saree par stone lagane ka, chunri ka*

*kaam milta tha. Ab loom band hai bunkari nahin ho rahi hai toh hum logon ko bhi kaam nahin mil raha hai. Kaam nahin hai khali baithe hain.*" (Translation: Ever since the Lockdown, all work has dried up. Earlier we still had stone application and *chunri* work. Now the looms have stopped working, so even we don't get any work.)

Women in Mau and Azamgarh weave *Sarees*, dress materials, *Lehenga*, *Kafan* (shroud) cloth, *dupatta* on looms and increase the income in their family. Some women are breadwinners running their families.



## Scope of work after Lockdown

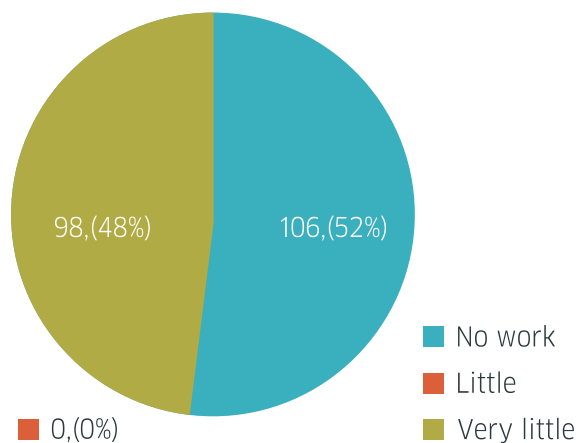


Figure 13: Scope of work after Lockdown

Figure 13 shows results of when respondents were asked about work after Lockdown and given three options 1- little work 2- very little work 3- no work. Figure 13 indicates that 98 (48%) of people had very little work. Not a single respondent said that she/he has little work. 106 (52%) of the respondents said they have no work at all. Due to the Lockdown their work stopped, and even after seven to eight months after the Lockdown, the situation is no better. It is reported that the labour charge was almost cut 50% for the same work. Both weavers and *Zardozi karigars* are in a very poor condition.

On the other side *Grihasta* (master weaver) also had material to sell, but couldn't due to the Lockdown. Badre Alam Ansari a *Grihasta* from Jalalipura said that after the Lockdown he has 3,000 *Sarees* at an average price of Rs 600 per *Saree*. A large amount of Badre Alam is locked due to the sudden Lockdown. He just wants the stock to get sold somehow. He has material worth lakhs and 14 power loom machines worth more than Rs 10 lakhs which are lying useless. All 14 power looms are not working at the time of interview. He said, "Nobody is taking my *Sarees*, I still have previous stock. What is the use of starting the looms?"

The situation in Mau, Azamgarh and Gorakhpur is also similar. Out of 34 respondents from Mau, Azamgarh and Gorakhpur only nine have han-

dlooms (*Kargha*) and all these are closed at the time of interview.

Muskaan, a 16-year-old from Saraiya, lives with her mother. She lost her father a few years ago. Both mother and daughter used to do stone work on *Sarees* before the Lockdown to earn money for their survival. Now, they don't have work even ten months after the Lockdown was announced. At the time of a group interview on December 25, 2020 she said, "*Ab toh Saree ka kaam bhi nahin mil raha hai. Lockdown se khali baithey hain. Khane ko nahin hai, bhooke so jaate hain. Kabhi kabhi chatni-chawal kahin se mil jaata hai toh kha letey hain.*" (Translation: We don't get *Saree* work anymore. We've been jobless since the Lockdown began. There's no food, we go to bed hungry often. If we are lucky, on some days we get some spiced rice to eat.)

She started crying while telling her story.

A very common answer we get from the weavers during our field work is that *Grihastas* often ask weavers to come back with the finished work after a month as not only is work limited, sales have also reduced significantly.

Wasim a *Zardozi* worker from Chauhatta said, "*Ek toh kaam nahin mil raha hai upar se karkhandaar ne Mazdoori ghata diya hai. Jis kaam ka pehle 150-170 milta tha, ab 80-100 mil*



*raha hai. Kaam nahin hai isliye Mazdoori bhi kam kar diya hai.*” (Translation: As it is, work is limited, now our wages have also been reduced. The work which previously earned me Rs 150 to Rs 170, now barely gets me Rs 80 to Rs 100.)

Akhtar Ali from Jalalipura reported that he works on a power loom and earned Rs 400 per day before the Lockdown when there was sufficient work. But now after the Lockdown, the wages have decreased to Rs 200 and in a week, there are only two days of work.

Ejaz Ahmed from Bajardiha stated that initially all types of *Sarees* like *Resham*, Chiffon used to be woven but now only Linen *Sarees* are woven so there is less work now and wages are also low.

The reason, weavers don't have work are:

1. there is no market (lack of demand)
2. strike due to electricity issue (withdrawal of subsidies)
3. no export
4. restrictions on gathering of people (due to Covid-19) during weddings and festivals

Mr Iqbal Ahmed from Sarai Mohana, Varanasi says, “There are three members in my family and I earned only Rs 2,000 after the Lockdown and that was also not regular.” He further says,

“There is no work at all. Sometimes we don't even have food to eat. I am not feeling well and don't have money to go to doctor and take treatment, seeing all this I feel like committing suicide!”

Another respondent Chandrika Rajbhar, Konia Sarai Mohana, Varanasi also had dark thoughts and said, “We don't have work and are fed up with this current government. I am praying that as soon as my daughter gets married, God please take my life.”

Raju Mallah from Sarai Mohana (age 55) lives with his wife. He has one handloom and earned Rs 5,000 before the Lockdown. But now the loom is shut down and he has no work. He does some daily wage labour work, and even this he is not getting regularly. Both husband and wife even now eat ‘*Namak-Chawal*’ (salt and rice). He is depressed and always thinks about what they will eat the next day. He told us, “*Bhavishya mein yahi sochney hain ki bhagwan dono praani ko maut de de, taaki ek agar rahega toh kaun aagey peechey dekhega. Isliye sochney hain ki humse pehley meri patni ko maut aay, taakee usko kisi ke aasrey nahin rehna padey.*” (Translation: In future I hope we both die, so that neither of us is left behind with no one to look after us. I pray my wife dies first, so that I don't leave her behind, with no one to depend on.)



“During the Lockdown all of us were troubled, the workers and the owners,” says Shahid Jamaal, the patriarch of the family of seven from Chauhatta, Varanasi, who spoke to us on November 28, 2020. “There was no way to be out and about,” he says, adding, “To pay for materials and to ensure there’s a return is the hardest task right now.” He continues, “There isn’t any source of income. Even if we work, we get the returns 2-3 months later. We are also expected to pay a 12% GST! The law isn’t good for us, the business will shut down if things don’t improve.”

Talking about his income he says, “I used to earn Rs 10,000 to 15,000 before the Lockdown. Now, it is very difficult to even earn Rs 2,000 to 4,000. There is no future.” There were six workers working for Jamaal before the Lockdown, now there are only a couple.

Mr Vakil Ahmed from Koila Bazaar said, “I don’t know what to do. I’m just fed up with this situation, I feel like committing suicide. But I have small children, and after me they will be in more trouble, so I control myself.” It is noteworthy that Varanasi is the Prime Minister’s constituency.





## Before and after the Lockdown: Income, survival and debt

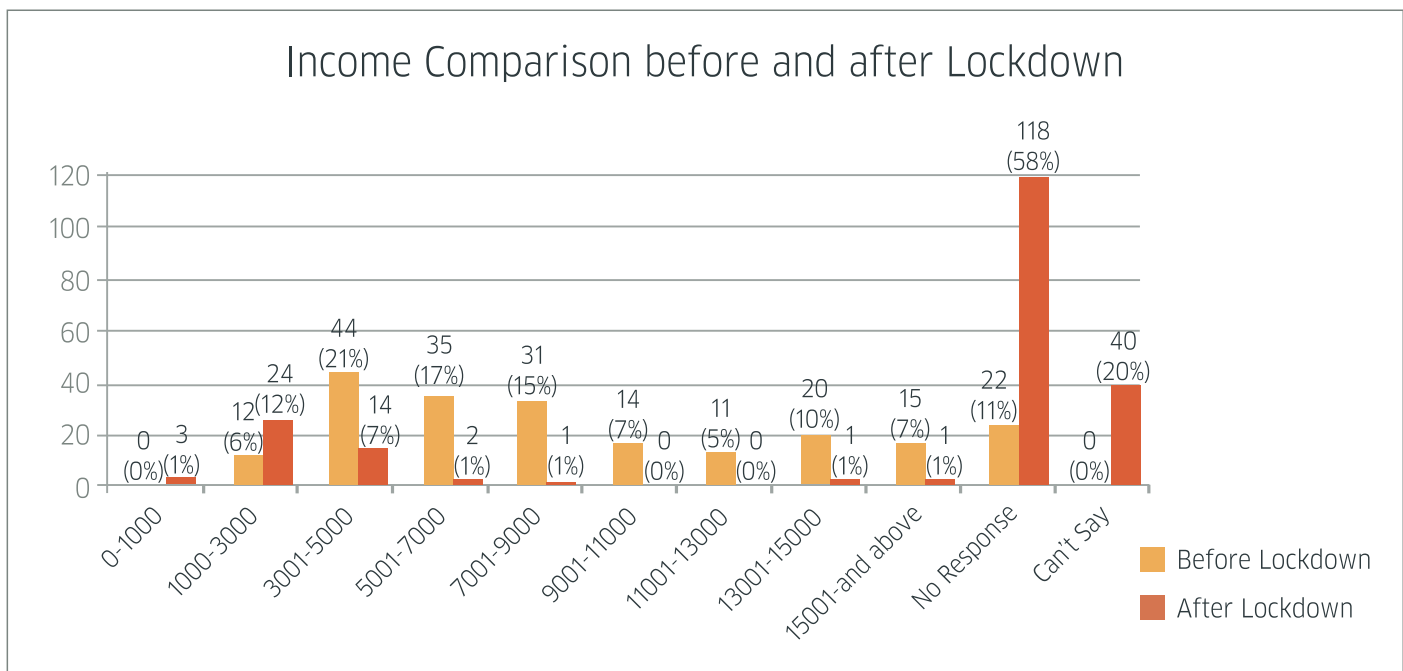


Figure 14: Income Comparison before and after Lockdown

Financial independence is essential for living a wholesome and happy life, and a steady income goes a long way in ensuring the health and wellbeing of a family. However, such is the plight of families involved in weaving and allied activities that even before the Lockdown they could barely make ends meet. Their situation became even more grim after the Lockdown with many such families pushed to the brink of starvation. Many people told us how they were often forced to go to bed hungry or depend on debt or the kindness of others in order to survive. Many people responded that they were lucky to find one meal a day!

44 (21%) people had income ranging from Rs 3,001 to Rs 5,000 per month before Lockdown. However, post Lockdown only 14 (7%) people are earning in this range.

35 (17%) people earned between Rs 5,001 to Rs 7,000 per month before Lockdown, but after Lockdown this number declined to only 2 (1%).

31 (15%) people used to earn between Rs 7,001 to Rs 9,000 per month and now only 1 person earned this much income after Lockdown.

14 (7%) people earned between Rs 9,001 to Rs

11,000 per month and 11 (5%) of the families earned Rs 11,001 to Rs 13,000 per month before Lockdown. But after the Lockdown, no one could earn this amount.

20 (10%) people used to earn between Rs 13,001 to Rs 15,000 per month before Lockdown. But this number declined and now only one person is earning this amount.

Similarly, 15 (7%) people used to earn above Rs 15,000 before Lockdown, but now only one person is earning above Rs 15,000 after Lockdown and that person is Mohd. Shahid, a businessman from Shiwala, whose monthly turnover was Rs 2,00,000 before Lockdown and around 10-12 people were working on his embroidery machine. But now they have very little work so workers have no work.

Before Lockdown 12 (6%) of the people used to earn between Rs 1,001 to Rs 3,000, and after Lockdown the number increased to 24 (12%), showcasing the widespread and abject poverty.

3 (1%) people are earning less than Rs 1,000 per month after Lockdown, whereas before Lockdown no one had such low income.

As their monthly income is not fixed, 118 (58%)

people could not give any clear answer to this question. After the Lockdown, 40 (20%) families had said that they can't say anything for sure. We can see a large number of respondents 158 (77%) are not sure about their monthly income as it varies from month to month. When they make some money, they are lucky to afford one meal a day. People are frustrated and don't know when things will get on track.

It was reported by Aijaaz Ahmed and Iqbal from Bajardiha that there were few *Sarees* which were ready in the month of March when Lockdown was announced suddenly forcing Ejaz to sell the *Sarees* that originally cost Rs 300 to Rs 400 at Rs 175. Meanwhile, a *Saree* made by Iqbal cost Rs 650, but the *Gaddidar* (shop owner) was willing to pay only Rs 250 for it.

Mohammad Sharif a *Grihasta* (chief weaver) from Revri Talab, Varanasi reported that before Lockdown he had ready made material worth Rs 1,50,000 to Rs 2,00,000. But after the Lockdown no one purchased it and it still remains unsold.

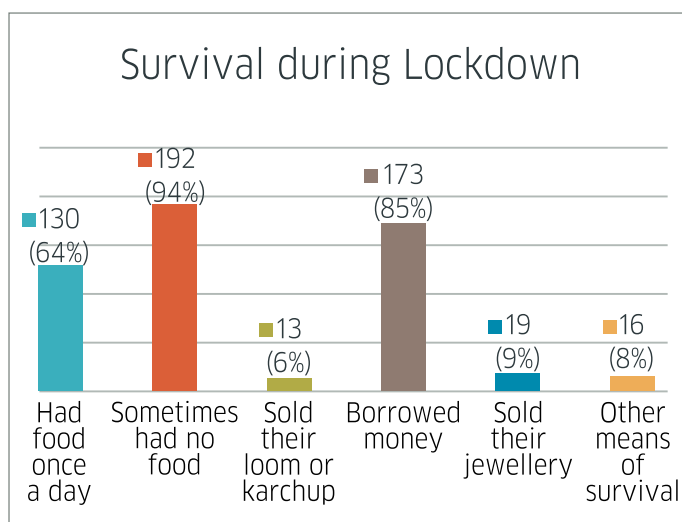


Figure 15: Survival during Lockdown

Survival was the biggest challenge for people of the low-income groups as well as the middle class, because millions of people have lost their jobs and the economy is at an all-time low. People tried all possible ways to survive and take care of their families. From figure 15, we can see that 173 (85%) of the people borrowed money from someone for their survival. 130 (64%) of the people only had food once a day, and 192 (94%) of the people sometimes had no food during Lockdown. This is really shocking!

It was reported that most of the families had namak roti or namak chawal not even during Lockdown but even today, because they don't have work. According to few families, "*Lockdown mai toh kuch khane ko mil bhi jaata tha log madad karte the lekin ab toh koyee madad bhi nahi karta. Koyee kaam bhi nahi mil raha hai. khane ko nahi hai kabhi koi kuch de deta hai wahi kha lete hai toh kabhi bhukhe hee rehna padta hai*". (Translation: Earlier when the Lockdown was announced, we would still somehow find something to eat thanks to the kindness of some people, but now even that option has dwindled. There is no work. There is no food. If someone offers something we eat, or go hungry.)

19 (9%) of the respondents said that they had sold their jewellery and 13 (6%) of the people sold their Loom/*Karchup*. 16 (8%) of the people reported other means of survival such as borrowing money from shopkeepers, selling uten-



sils, etc. One family said that their elder son had died by suicide because he was frustrated by Lockdown and mounting debts.

It was found out that people were selling their Handloom and Power loom to scrap dealers at very cheap rates so that they could provide for their household expenses. This may temporarily help alleviate the financial distress, but in the long run, they don't have a means of livelihood and sustenance.

We made a shocking discovery. Some people in Koila Bazaar were so frustrated with this economic crisis that they sold their blood to hospitals to earn some money!

### Some case studies

Quaiser from Saraiya tells her and other neighbours' stories. "During Lockdown children are hungry at home. They ask what will be cooked today, I tell them to cook rice and '*chutney*'. Some eat that, some don't, they stay hungry," she says. "The situation in our house is really bad. My husband and son work on looms but looms are not running as there is no work. Weavers who used to work on looms are sitting unemployed," said Quaiser, who also told us that she was planning to get her daughter married in 3-4 months when the Lockdown was suddenly announced. "Due to the Lockdown we had to postpone the wedding. When all the work stopped, we had no money for food. I therefore sold off my daughter's earrings, which I made for her wedding. What can I do, I have stomachs to fill? I sold utensils and other things too for my family's survival."

Quaiser informs us about the plight of others as well saying, "During the Lockdown there was widespread starvation. But what was even worse was when someone died, people couldn't even afford a '*Kafan*' (shroud) for the body." She also tells us about deaths by suicide in the area. "The crisis is so acute that some have hanged themselves on the looms," she says. "A family of seven jumped off a bridge. They threw their five children off the bridge first, and then jumped off," she tells us about another

shocking case. "In another case where the children were hungry and were asking for food, the father, unable to provide for them, went and hanged himself on the loom," she further added. The rations supplied by the government are both inadequate and inedible, she says. "We are getting rice and wheat, but it is not enough. Moreover, the rice is so thick it gets stuck in our throats," she explained.

Weavers are engaging in other activities for survival. Immaudin Ansari in Ghosi, Mau is now working as a carpenter. He owns a loom, which was his source of earning before the Lockdown. "The loom is closed due to Lockdown and lack of the material required," he says. Imamuddin who used to provide labour services in weaving, used to get the material required from the businessman he used to weave for, and earned Rupees 50 for one *Saree*. "We made 2-3 *Sarees* in one day, all family members worked together," he said. He narrates another instance of how the Lockdown impacted his livelihood. "I used to ride the e-rickshaw. To prevent the battery from going bad, I took it on a ride. But there was an inspector- Rai sahib. He hit a vegetable seller standing there with his cart, which made me run leaving my rikshaw. I came and took it later. I sold the rickshaw for 75 thousand rupees," he recalls how he lost yet another means of livelihood.

Bashir Ahmed from Nakki Ghat, Varanasi sent his wife and children to his in-laws' house as he could not feed his family during Lockdown. He asks, "How can I think of my future, if I don't know what I will eat today?"

Ansaar Ahmed from Lohta Varanasi has two power looms but currently both have been shutdown because of no work. There is also an electricity strike going on so he is thinking of starting work on a Handloom because it requires less space and no electricity.

Mohammad Haneef from Lallapura, Varanasi reported that before the Lockdown he used to do weaving work, but now there is no work at all. During Lockdown also, initially he managed the family expenses from his savings, but





then money got over. His son asked him, “From where will we get the ration now?” Then the little boy suggested, “We will make *chai* and *Chana masala* at home and then I will go and sell it.” This allowed them to run the household for some time, but when the Lockdown was gradually lifted, they found no customers. Then his daughter started going to teach sewing to girls from which she used to earn Rs 150 a month. However, a boy from their neighbourhood harassed and molested the girl! Mohammad Haneef now not only worries about his financial distress, but also the wellbeing of his daughter. He also mentioned that this is the first time in their life that during Eid *Sewaiyyan* were not prepared in their home.

Gulzaar and Mohammad Nishad from Lallapura reported that there was much tension in the house because of lack of money and food. They decided to keep their distance, fearing the prospect of violence. During our field work, we heard the stories of people who have sent their wife and children to their parent’s house, as they can’t arrange food for them.

Abdul *Salaam* from Lallapura used to work on another person’s loom and earn Rs 3,200 per month before the Lockdown, but now has no work. He has one fan and light but received electricity bills demanding Rs 65,000 for one and half years! His wife’s father died during Lockdown but they couldn’t go to attend the funeral due to financial distress. Narrating how they barely survived, he says, “*Kabhi bhooke rahe, kabhi ek time khaya, wo din yaad nahin karna chahtey. Abhi bhi pareshan hain. Dil kar raha hai ki jaan de den.*” (Translation: Sometimes we went hungry, some days we got at least one meal. I don’t want to remember those days. I’m still worried and feel like ending my life.)

Stories of weavers in all communities are very sorrowful. That is why, out of 204 respondents 48 (26%) said, there is no future in weaving. They are planning to shift to some other work. We feel extremely concerned for the 6 (3%) respondents who said that they want to commit suicide as there is no hope now.



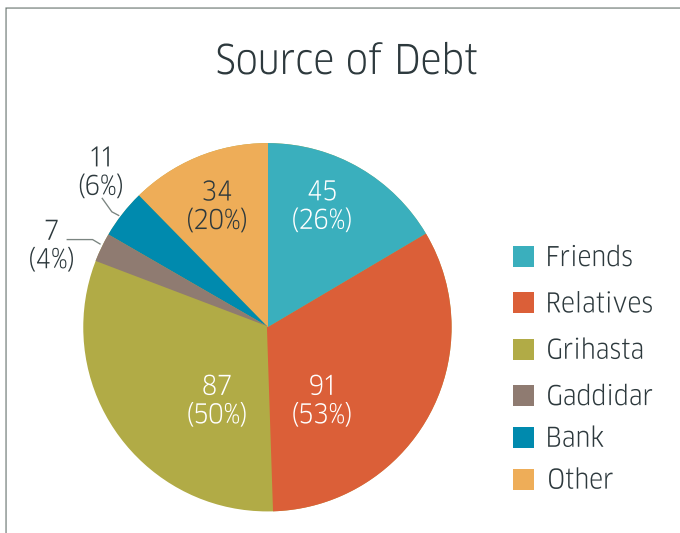


Figure 16: Source of Debt

85% of the respondents had borrowed money for their survival. 45 (26%) of these people were helped by their friends. 91 (53%) of the people borrowed money from their relatives. 87 (50%) of the families took money from their *Grihasta* (master weaver) and 7 (4%) borrowed from *Gaddidar* (shopkeepers). Only 11 (6%) of the people took a loan from a bank, because banks charge interest and paying interest during Lockdown was not possible. 34 (20%) of the people borrowed from other sources like self-help Groups, landlords and neighbors.

Many people also claimed that the *Gaddidar* didn't answer their call during the Lockdown. At this juncture, the role of *Grihasta* was very helpful. Weavers who work for *Grihasta* borrowed money from him during the Lockdown. This money was loaned free of any interest. But sometimes, *Grihasta* who sold *Sarees* to *Gaddidars* / traders seemed indifferent and sometimes behaved rudely with their weavers during the Lockdown.

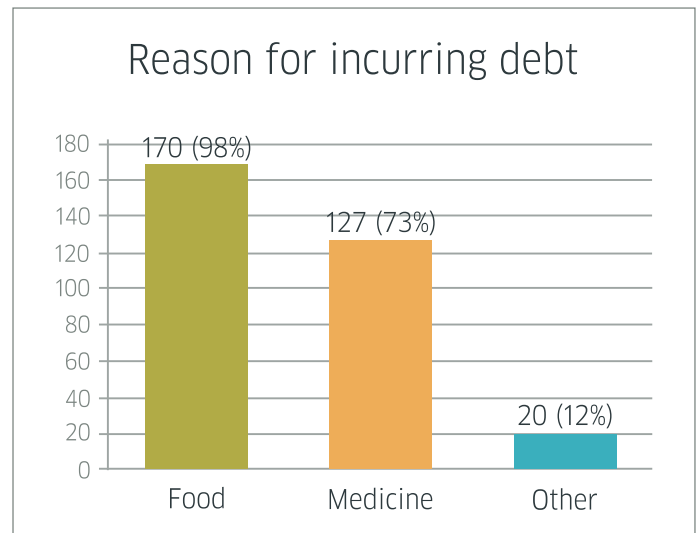


Figure 17: Reason for incurring debt

We discovered that almost all respondents incurred debt during Lockdown. This shows the financial condition of the weavers. They said, "*Bunkar ki halat pehle bhi bahut achhi nahin thhi. Aarthik roop se Bunkar kamzor hi thha. Roz khane bhar ke hi kaam kar leta tha. Itni kamayee nahin hoti thi ki saving kar sake.*" (Translation: Weavers were never really financially strong, and hardly ever made enough money to have savings.) Some others told us, "*Zyadatar bunkaron ke paas bank account hi nahin hai. Bachat karna chahiye ye in logon ne seekha hi nahin hai. Achanak lamba Lockdown ho jaane se Bana maal bika nahin aur khane ki musibat aa gayee. Pehle se garibi, aur phir bachat nahin hone ki vajah se karza sabhi ne khane ke liye liya. Kuch toh itne garib hain, ki unhen kisi ne karza bhi nahin diya. Aise bunkaron ko Lockdown mein toh NGO ki madad se khana mil ja raha tha, lekin ab khane khane ko mohtaaj hain.*" (Translation: Most weavers never had a bank account, and given their hand-to-mouth existence, are not familiar with the concept of saving. The sudden and prolonged Lockdown, drove many weavers to starvation. Many are so poor, no one wants to lend money to them. They were dependent entirely on food provided by NGOs during the Lockdown.)

We found in our study, the main reason for borrowing money was for food. 170 (98%) of the total respondents identified this as the main reason. Government didn't provide sufficient



ration, and NGOs were trying their best to reach out to every person, but they also had limitations. Situation after the Lockdown is worse than it was during Lockdown as per many weavers, both men and women, in Varanasi. This is because NGOs were distributing relief and running kitchens in needy areas during the Lockdown. After Lockdown all relief work stopped and weaving has not yet started properly. Weavers and *karigars* (artisans) have very little work.

Once a *Saree* is complete, then women do their work like application of stones or '*Tikli*'. Since there are not enough *Sarees* getting completed, hence women don't have much work. This crisis is also because there is no market.

Figures 10 and 11 also show that 100% men and women were involved in the weaving industry before the Lockdown, and they got work regularly, there was no need to incur debt for food. After the Lockdown, neither weavers are getting work regularly, and relief work has also stopped. Hence, the poor are suffering more after Lockdown and facing a food crisis.

127 (73%) of the respondents incurred debt for medicine. It was very obvious that people were going to fall sick in the absence of adequate nutrition. In some places, tap water was dirty. Many people suffered from anxiety and depression sitting at home. People were getting scared to go to hospital also because of Covid-19, but some had to go to the hospital because of surgery, pregnancy and other major illnesses.

20 (12%) of the people borrowed money for various reasons such as repairing looms, opening small shops selling tea, biscuits or *Paan*, payment of electricity bills, some had weddings in their family and some even borrowed for funerals.

Anees Ahmed from Lohta, Varanasi has five members in the family and is the only earning member in the family, he works on someone else's power loom and is paid for his labour. First the work stopped, then he got a huge electricity bill which he couldn't pay. Now the electricity has been cut off by the electricity department, he is thinking of some other work so that he can pay the bill.





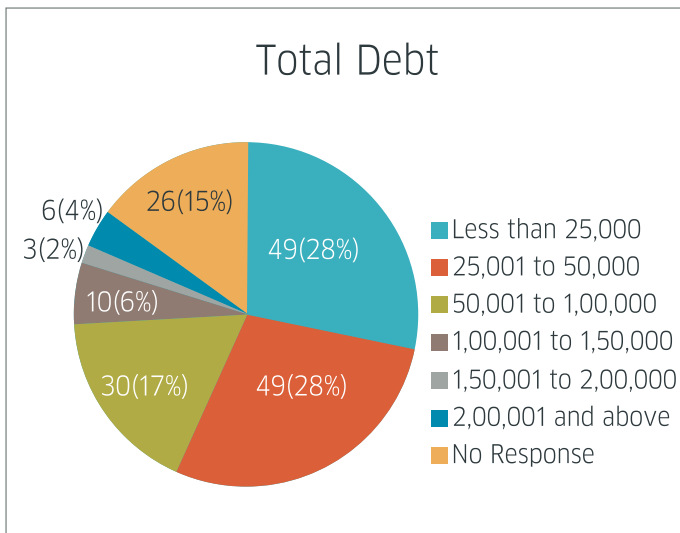


Figure 18: Total Debt

49 (28%) people have debt of less than Rs 25,000. Another 49 (28%) have debt of Rs 25,001 to Rs 50,000. 30 (17%) respondents have debt of Rs 50,001 to Rs 1,00,000.

10 (6%) have debt of Rs 1,00,001 to Rs 1,50,000 and 3 (2%) of the people have to repay between Rs 1,50,001 to Rs 2,00,000. 6 (4%) of the people are in debt for an amount greater than Rs 2,00,000.

The above figure shows, 56% of the respondents have debt upto Rs 50,000. The survey shows that Varanasi fares the worst when it comes to debt in comparison with Mau, Azamgarh and Gorakhpur. Out of 33 respondents from the districts Mau, Azamgarh and Gorakhpur, only 2 (6%) have debt between Rs 50,001 to Rs 1,00,000. Whereas in Varanasi, out of 171 respondents 55 (32%) have debt between Rs 50,001 and Rs 1,00,000. 19 (11%) people have more than Rs 1,00,001 in debt.

Nasiruddin, who has three members in the family lives in Nakki Ghat, and says he can't sleep well as he has debt worth Rs 97,000. He borrowed money for food and medicine during Lockdown. He works on someone else's power loom, and his wife does stone work on *Sarees*. Before the Lockdown, their family income was Rs 6,000 per month. But both have no work these days. Life is miserable. He also complains about the discrimination from administration during Lockdown. He was waiting for his good

days and asked, "*Hamarey acchey din kab aayengey, Modi ji ki tarah?*" (Translation: When will my good days come like Modi ji promised?)

26 (15%) of the people didn't respond to questions about debt.

Some women told us during a women's meeting, that nobody will lend to them as they are very poor. They said, "*Paisey walon ko hi log karza detey hain, hum gareebon ko toh karza bhi koyee nahin deta*". (Translation: People only lend to those who have money, not to those who are actually penniless.) We found in our field work that the poorest among the poor did not get any loans from anywhere, despite needing it the most, because there is no surety of repayment. This situation forced to weavers to sell their blood, utensils or in worst condition to commit suicide.

Allahuddin from Jalalipura, Varanasi said "As no one is offering loans, I have not been able to pay the vegetable vendor, milkman, ration shop for months and have been getting things on credit." He also told us about experiencing discrimination even in charity. He said, "I went to get a ration relief kit which was distributed by private people during the Lockdown, but I didn't get that because it was only for Hindus."



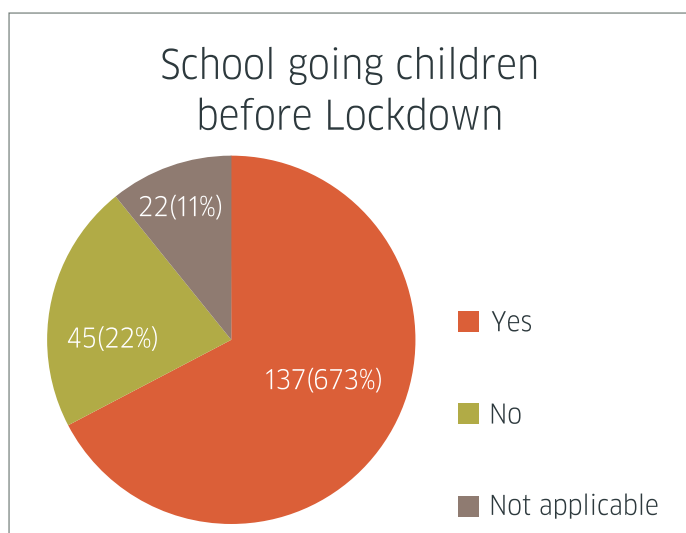


Figure 19: School going children before Lockdown

Education was majorly hampered by the Lockdown, even after almost 11 months, schools remain closed. Figure 19 shows that out of 204 families interviewed, 137 (67%) of the families had children who were enrolled in school before Lockdown, whereas 22% of the families have either not enrolled their children in school, or their children are too young to go to school. 11% of the families said the question was not applicable, as there are no children at home.

Children of 67% of the respondents go to school. The number of girls who are enrolled in school is also high. This shows that there is awareness among parents to educate their daughters. We found that these girls also help their parents in weaving related work. The other reason for sending girls to school is that girls are good in studies and doing all household work alongside their education. Parents have no complaints with their girl's education as far as they are studying in schools.

In some families not every child is going to school, and poverty is the major reason for this. For example: There are 5 children, but only 2 go to school and the rest go for daily wage labour work.

40-year-old Bilkis is an unlettered widow from Lallapura, Varanasi and has 7 members in the family: 2 sons and 5 daughters. Bilkis does 'Tikli' application work and makes 'Malas'. Her eldest son was a staff at a saari ki Gaddi shop. Bilkis

lost her husband 5 years ago, and since then, she and the eldest son have taken care of the family. Bilkis wanted her children, especially girls, to study well and make a bright career, but after her husband's death her in-laws didn't allow the children to go to school especially girls and even the relatives stopped talking to her. So Bilkis decided to move out with her children. Bilkis got one small room from her husband's side which was by right her room, so she lived there with her children. The second girl child named Kausar is very bright in studies, she has completed her M.A. in Political Science from Kashi Vidyapeeth and is preparing for UPSC. Last year, she was unsuccessful by only 2 marks. The eldest son also wanted his sister to have a stable career and he worked hard for it. During the Lockdown he had to borrow money from various sources to look after the family as well as for Kausar's studies, but the debt increased so much that he started thinking of how he would return it. This led him to die by suicide in the month of October 2020. Now the situation is such that Kausar has the responsibility of the family and she has taken up work as a cable operator, where she is paid only Rs 4,500 per month for working from 10 AM to 5 PM, and there is not a single holiday. Now she is not able to give time to her studies. The Lockdown has broken this family and the dreams of a bright young girl.

During our field work in a narrow lane in Mubarakpur district Azamgarh, we met Amira

Khatoon and Anisa, who were 6 and 5 years old respectively. Amira had covered her head with a scarf and was sitting with other girls. These five-six children were in the same age group. We also sat there and asked them questions and got a few photos of them. As soon as we turned on our camera Bhojpuri, “*Hum log photo nahi khichawate. Ladkiyan ko photo khichwana mana hai. Ladko ki khicho. Ladkiyan ki photo khichway per gunaah pari.*” (Translation: Girls are not allowed to have their pictures taken. Take pictures of boys. It is a sin to take pictures of girls.)

We turned off our camera, and asked them if they went to school. Amira said they went to a madarsa. On being asked who prohibited them from having their pictures taken as grounds for punishment, she said, “*Ammi-abbu kehtey hain. Hum log baahar nahin jaate. Ghar mein rehtey hain.*” (Translation: Mummy and daddy say so. We don't go out. We stay at home.)

This conversation shows that how girls as young as 6-years-old among the Muslim community in Mubarakpur are treated by their family. Muslims in Mubarakpur are very conservative, and practice 7<sup>th</sup> century traditions. They are very much against women's education or any kind of women's freedom. They are not allowed to go outside and forced to wear hijab and later on *Burqa*. The picture is very depressing. These two stories are from the Muslim communities and both are from poor weavers' families.





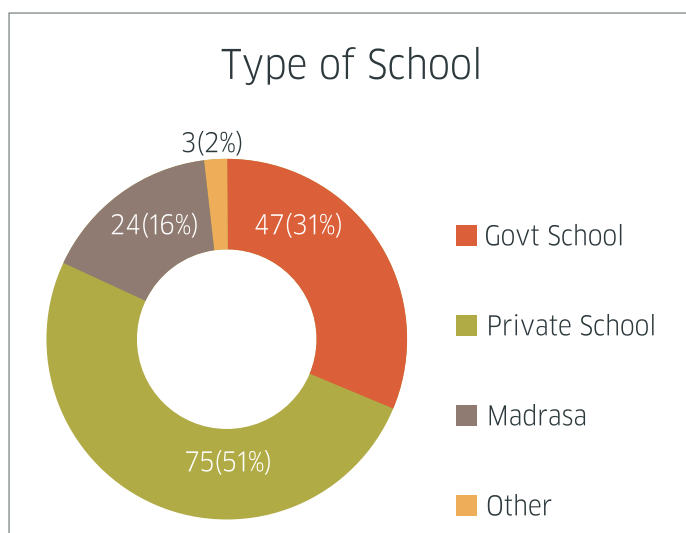


Figure: 20 Type of School

Figure 20 represents the data of the type of schools in which children are enrolled. From this figure we can see that 76 (51%) families enrolled their children in private school. This is 20% higher than enrolment in the government school, which is preferred by 47 (31%) families. The most frequently cited reason for this is the absence of a government school in the neighbourhood. These private schools where children are enrolled are often not high-quality schools. These are schools which are often 'English medium' in name only, and are run by unscrupulous elements. Meanwhile, parents who send their children to government school have no trust in the education which is provided in the government school.

24 (16%) families have enrolled their children in *Madrasas*. Among these 24 respondents 16 (67%) are unlettered, 3 (12%) are educated up to class 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4 (17%) are educated up to class 5<sup>th</sup> and 1 (4%) is up to 12<sup>th</sup> standard. This shows that parents' education plays an important role in selecting the type of school for their children.

Out of the 3 (2%) who have replied in any other way, one family said that there is no school in their locality that's why they can't send their child to school, one child was in Anganwadi. And one family didn't respond to this question.



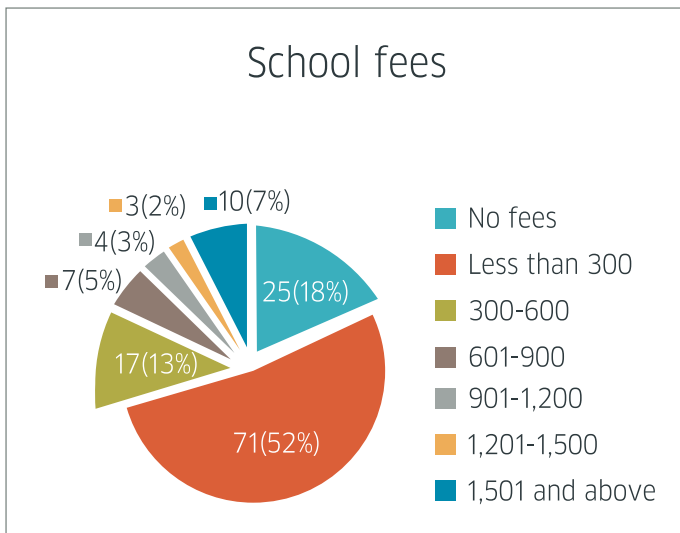


Figure 21: School fees

Figure 21 indicates the total fees paid by the families. 204 people were interviewed in the study. Total school going children are 433, and the total fees paid by everyone put together is Rs. 61,165, so on an average per child fees comes Rs. 141 per month.

As shown in the above figure, 25 (18%) families paid no school fees for their children's education, and almost all are from government schools, a few from *Madrasas*.

71 (52%) of families pay less than Rs 300 as their child's fees and they mostly are from *Madrasas* where the fees are as low as Rs 20. But there are private *Madrasas* also who charge between Rs 200 to Rs 300.

17 (13%) families pay between Rs 301 to Rs 600. 7 (5%) of the families pay Rs 601 to Rs 900.

4 (3%) families pay between Rs 901 to Rs 1,200 as their children's school fees and 3 (2%) of the families pay Rs 1,201 to Rs 1,500 rupees.

10 (7%) of the families pay Rs 1,500 and above as school fees, these are mostly families where there are more than 3-4 children in the house.

There are 22 responses where the parents have said that their children are in government school but they also pay some fees, which should not be the case, because according to the Right to Education (RTE) Act, children between the age of 6 to 14 should get free and compulsory quality education. But still some parents pay the fees because of lack of awareness and corruption.



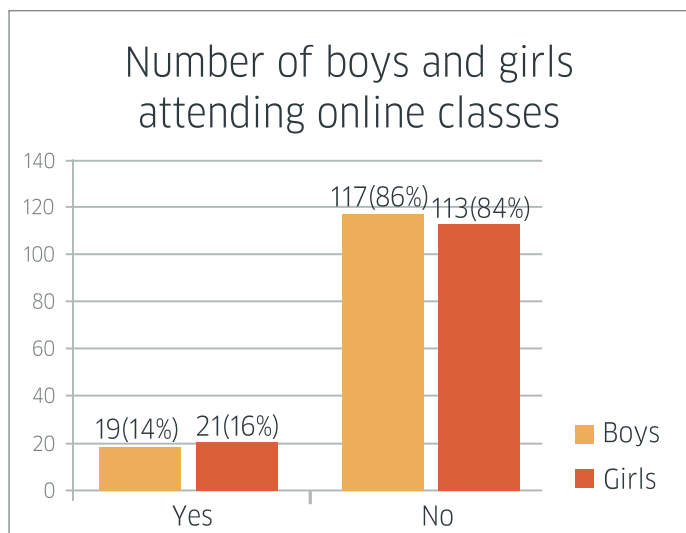


Figure 22: Number of boys and girls attending online classes

As we all know, education has been majorly hampered due to Covid-19 pandemic because children are more prone to getting affected by this disease due to a low immune system. Government without knowing the reality, announced that schools have to start online classes. Schools started online classes between July and August, 2020.

Figure 22 clears that out of 204 respondents 137 enrolled their children in schools. Out of 137 families total school going children are 270 (136 boys and 134 girls). The above graph 22 indicates that 117 (86%) boys and 113 (84%) girls didn't attend online classes. Only 19 (14%) boys and 21 (16%) girls have smartphones in their families, and they study through online classes.

There are various difficulties that children coming from low-income families face. For example: There is only one phone in the family, sometimes there is no data pack in the mobile, network issue in the rural as well as urban areas, people have even responded asking that if no one in the family has smart phone, how will the child attend online classes?

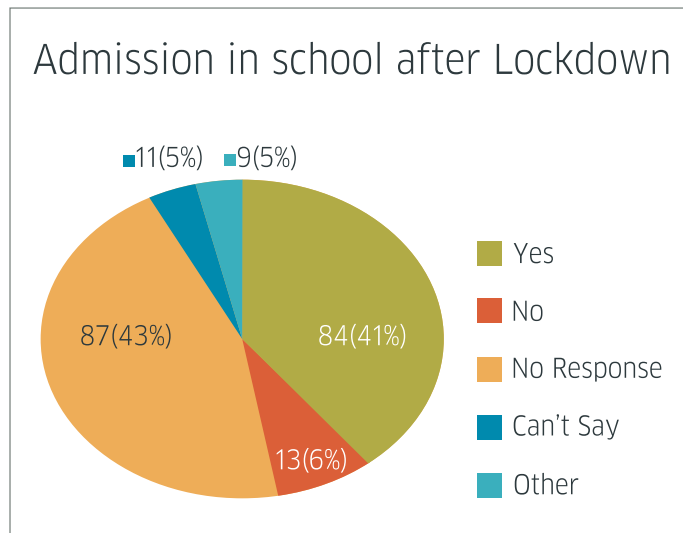


Figure 23: Admission in school after Lockdown

Figure 23 indicates that 84 (41%) of the families will enroll their child in school whereas 13 (6%) said they will not enroll their child in school, the main reason behind this was financial issues which the people are facing.

11 (5%) of the respondents have not decided whether to enroll their child or not, it all depends on the situation. 87 (43%) of the respondents didn't respond to this question because they are dealing with problems of basic needs and can't think of education. 9 (5%) respondents gave any other reason like hunger, poverty, children will work and help family etc.

Basically, at the time of the interview it was seen that people were not very sure about enrolling their children in school. Weavers who have said yes to this question are also dependent on the situation, because poverty has hit the poor weavers hard, and they are trying to stabilise the situation.





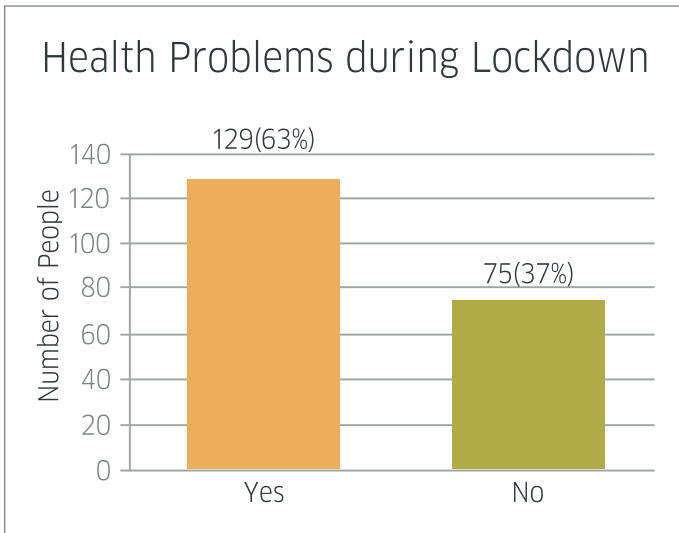


Figure 24: Health Problems during Lockdown

The sudden announcement of a strict Lockdown by the government forced people to stay at home. After a month or so, people started feeling anxious. But while privileged people found a healthy outlet, people from economically weak backgrounds, who have small houses, often only a single room and live in a joint family system, felt helpless and frustrated.

Due to the shutdown of all livelihood options, people had no money and the ration which the government provided was never enough. In the absence of proper nutritious food, people started falling ill. The above chart shows that out of the 204 interviews in 129 (63%) families there were one or two people suffering from major or minor illness whereas 75 (37%) families reported there was no one ill during the Lockdown.

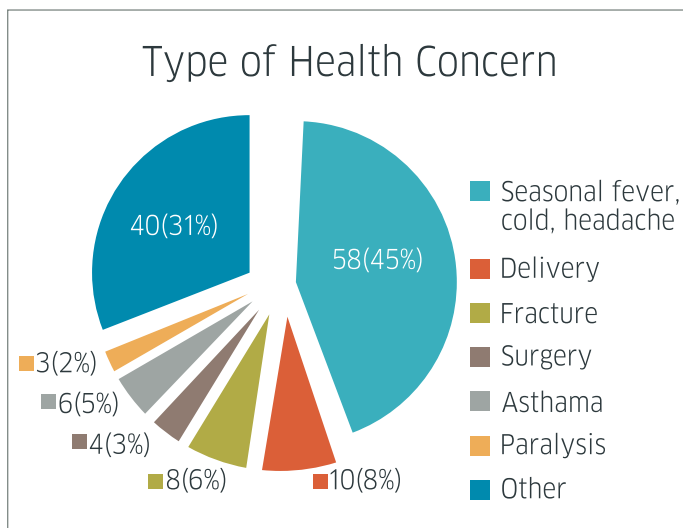


Figure 25: Type of Health Concern

The above Figure 25 indicates the name of disease or medical condition from which the respondents or their family members suffered during the Lockdown period. The main symptoms of Covid-19 are cold, cough and fever. In the present study 58 (45%) of the people suffered from similar kinds of symptoms. The government had advised people that whenever they show symptoms like cold, fever and cough, they should go to the hospital, maintain social distancing, wear masks and always use sanitizer. However, all this advice fails in the absence of privilege. Social distancing is impossible in small houses and low-income neighbourhoods where people live cheek-by-jowl, often in one room tenements.

We found that a large number of people could not afford even two meals a day, let alone buy a sanitizer or a mask. They said, “*Upar wale ke bharse hai. Hamarey pass kaha paisa hai ki mask aur dawa len? Allah hai, Bhagwan hai. Woh jis haal mai rakhey, hum uske saharey hai.*” (Translation: Where will we find money to buy medicines or masks? We have left it all up to God.)

8 (6%) people suffered from some fracture in their body part. 4 (3%) people had surgery, 10 (8%) women were pregnant and delivered a baby during Lockdown. 6 (5%) people suffered from Asthma out of which one person died due to Asthma and he was from Nakki Ghat, Varanasi and was being treated at a government hospital.

Three more people died due to some disease, and their families could not take the patient to hospital due to lack of money and Lockdown. Out of which 2 people were from Mau and one from Jalalipura, Varanasi.

59-year-old Mustakim from Bajardiha said that his elder son has become mentally ill due to no work during the Lockdown, he has borrowed money and is getting treated for his condition.

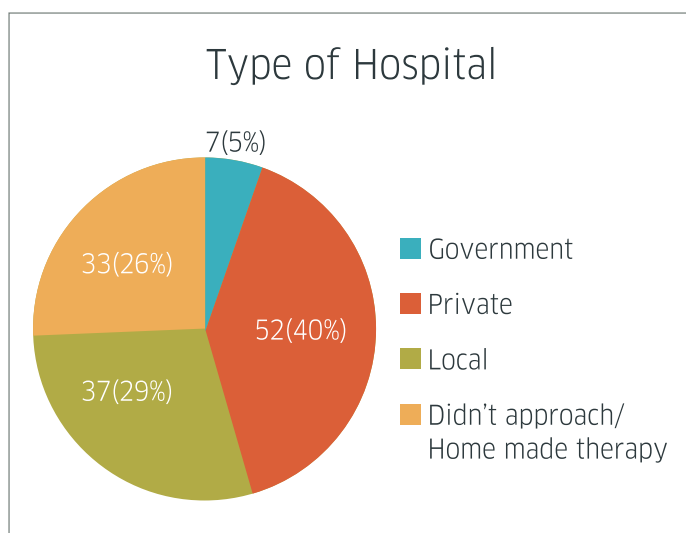


Figure 26: Type of Hospital

Figure 26 indicates that 52 (40%) people prefer to go to private hospitals rather than going to government hospitals. 37 (29%) people went to local medical shops and got medicine or to a local doctor of the community for minor illness, and merely 7 (5%) people took their family to government hospitals. 33 (26%) people are so poor that they are not bothered about minor illnesses. They said it is part of life and happens due to seasonal changes.

When asked why they are not going to government hospitals, people said, “Initially we went to government hospitals but they were not doing proper treatment so, now, we go to private hospitals.”

Rukhsana from Nakki Ghat told us that her husband works on someone else’s power loom, and earns Rs.5,000 per month, while she does stone application work on *Sarees* and earns Rs. 1,000 per month. They have seven members in the family and total income was Rs. 6,000 per month before the Lockdown. Rukhsana’s husband was an asthma patient and his treatment was going on in the government hospital. During the Lockdown she couldn’t go to the hospital as the hospital was far and police were very strict about letting people venture out. As a result, she lost her husband.

One more incident took place in Jalalipura, where a respondent named Vakil Ahmed lost his wife because he had no money to take her

to hospital for treatment as the government hospital was far away, and there was no public transport during the period of Lockdown.

Salman from Lallapura shared his story. During the Lockdown he went to the government hospital for treatment of his wife, but they were humiliated by the doctor. Salman feels the doctor was least bothered about his wife’s health. When his wife asked the doctor about dietary restrictions, he responded saying, “Eat whatever you want to eat. Don’t ask me.” This was not only rude, but failing to offer proper medical advice is also against medical ethics.

Few other responses were that staff of the government hospital didn’t speak properly and humiliated people.

So, the main reasons for going to private hospitals are:

- government hospitals are far away from where people live
- they are unhygienic
- absence of public transport

It was also observed during field work, that people avoided going to the hospital fearing being diagnosed with Covid-19, and they feared they would not have money for treatment.

Two young boys from Saraimohana, named Sanjay (18) and Vijay Gupta (20), had already lost their father a few years ago. Their mother Rajkumari Devi was getting a pension of Rs.11,000 per month, as her husband had been in a government job, and she was running her house using this pension money. She was sick during Lockdown and admitted to Sir Sundarlal government hospital, also known as BHU hospital. She was diagnosed with Covid-19 on July 20, 2020 and on July 31, she died in the hospital. Vijay is not sure if his mother died due to Covid-19, and he has also not been issued a death certificate despite attempting to get one for over five months. This suggests either corruption or negligence at the well-known BHU hospital.

Noorul Hasan from Badi Bazar, Varanasi took his wife to the government hospital to deliver their baby, but found that there was no proper treatment and the staff were least bothered about the patient's health. Then she was taken to a private hospital, where her health improved. But he had to incur a huge debt to pay for treatment at a private hospital as the expenditure was beyond his own financial means. The above examples show why people don't trust the public sector when it comes to health issues.

## Water and Sanitation

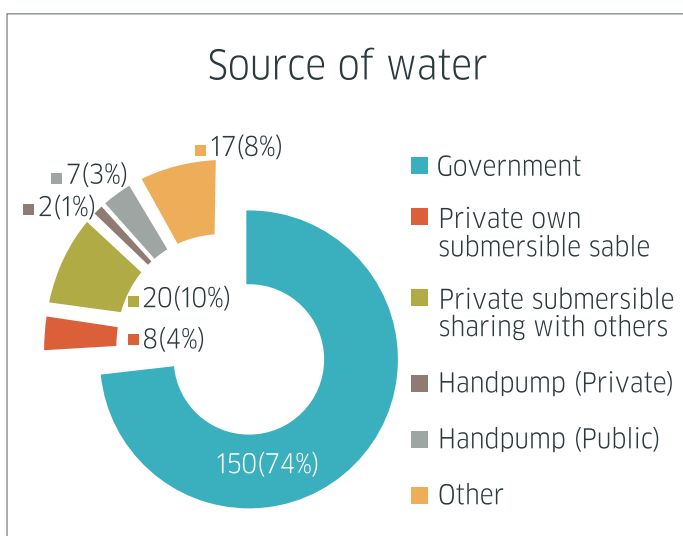


Figure 27: Source of water

We all know that consumption of clean water prevents ill-health, but that is a rare commodity in these areas. As shown in the above figure, 150 (74%) of the respondents have access to water which is supplied by the government. They pay Rs 50 per month as water charges. Generally, they get water for two hours in the morning, and for one hour in the evening, but the water pressure is reportedly very weak.

20 (10%) people have access to water from submersibles which they share with others. 8 (4%) people have their own submersibles. 2 (1%) people have access to water from their private hand pump whereas 7 (3%) people fetch water from public hand pumps.

17 (8%) people take water either from wells or bore wells and some even take from their



neighbour's water tap where they have to pay Rs 50 monthly.

Interestingly, respondents from Bajardiha, Varanasi fetch water from public submersible and pay Rs 50 per month. It's a kind of sharing system run by local people. Bajardiha locality is approximately three kilometers from the Prime Minister's constituency office which is in Ravindra Puri colony.

Abdul Gani from Revri Talab, Varanasi reported that the government water pipeline only produced dirty water. So, the people of the community decided to contribute and arranged their own water borewell system. In a single water borewell, 15-20 families can fetch water and the monthly expenses come around Rs 800. All the expenses are being shared by the people of the community.



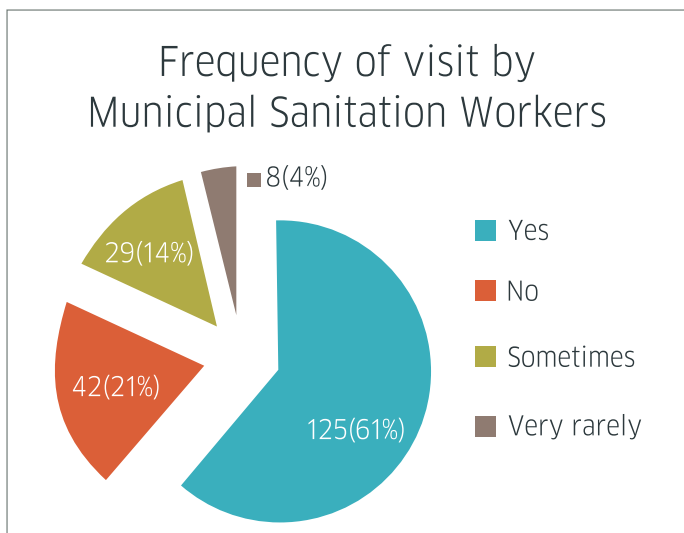


Figure 28: Frequency of visit by Municipal Sanitation Workers

Maintaining cleanliness helps to prevent deadly diseases which are very common under unhygienic conditions. If we see the above diagram 125 (61%) people said that the sanitation worker used to come to their locality regularly during the Lockdown, whereas 42 (21%) people said no one came to clean the road or collect garbage during the Lockdown.

29 (14%) people said that such personnel came sometimes, while 8 (4%) said that they very rarely saw anyone coming to their locality for cleaning. In Lohta local people complained, the sanitation worker comes and cleans the area where there is Hindu population, but very rarely comes to Muslim area. The community people themselves clean their area. It was reported in Mehmoodpur, Lohta that sweeper never came to their community to clean. He used to come and clean the government school which is less than half a kilometer from the community but didn't come to where the community lived. It was reported that even at the time of festivals very rarely somebody came to clean the area, otherwise people themselves had to dispose of the garbage.

Women in Nakki Ghat, Varanasi reported that they applied three years ago for a private toilet, but have still not got any response from anyone, and no one has ever visited this place. While the government has spent so much money to construct the toilets and says, “*gandagi ko*

*bhagana hai, shauchalay jaana hai*”, in reality women in our Prime Minister's own constituency have no toilets. and they have to go to an open field or railway tracks for defecation.

In Nakki Ghat, respondents even said that there were a lot of sewage problems during the Lockdown and that despite repeated calls, no one came to help them. For example, there was a complaint in Nakki Ghat, Varanasi about a big open drain in the locality. Local people complained to the municipality and administration to cover the drain, but nothing happened. Due to this open drainage people's health is constantly at risk from communicable diseases.

We can see in the three pictures the garbage in open spaces in Lohta, and in the middle of Nakki Ghat there is an open drain.

A newspaper also reported that garbage is getting picked from the larger housing societies that are home to privileged classes, but not from the inner localities and lanes in Varanasi. It has been three months since the work of Door-to-Door Garbage Collection started in Varanasi, but till now the whole area is not being covered. Municipal corporation officials themselves believe that all houses are not being covered yet. (Source: Amarujala, date 04.01.2021). This is the reality which we also found in our fact-finding study.





We found in the study that the sanitation workers never got Covid-19 safety kit. This was mandatory for the sanitation workers during the Lockdown period as per the government guidelines.

As per the latest report published by the Department of Drinking Water and Sanitation regarding number of Individual Household Latrines (IHHL) constructed from 02.10.2014 to 13.3.2020, there are total **10,29,21,674 IHHLs** constructed all over India, and in Uttar Pradesh the total number stands at **2,13,90,580 IHHLs**.

(Source: <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1607162>)

But in Nakki Ghat, Varanasi and Nayapura, Azamgarh it was reported that people still don't have toilets in their homes, and community toilets charge money, so people still go for defecation near railway tracks and open fields. This is the Prime Minister's own constituency.



## Government Relief Schemes

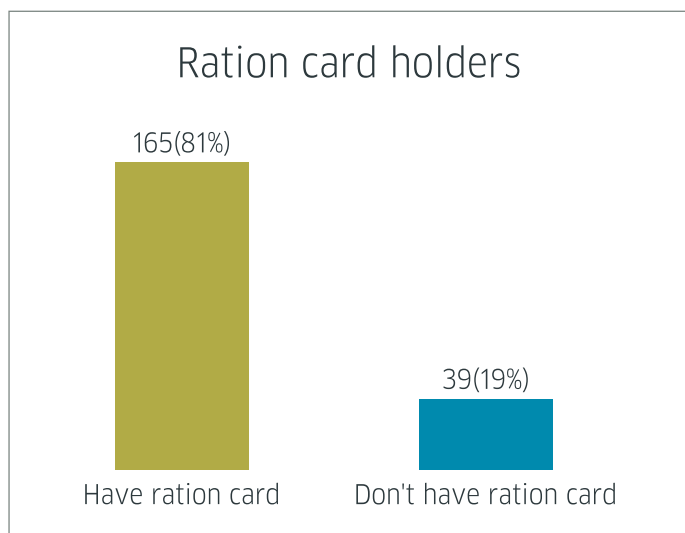


Figure 29: Ration card holders

Figure 29 indicates that out of the total respondents, 165 (81%) families have a ration card and 39 (19%) families don't. This means that these 39 families don't get the benefit of the Public Distribution System (PDS). Out of these 39 families, there are 14 families who have applied for ration cards but have not yet received it, due to either inadequate or improper documents or the process is taking time. 5 families said that they don't have an Aadhaar card, and that's why they were not getting a ration card.

There were few responses from the people that they have paid Rs 200-300 to the agent to get a ration card, but still haven't got it. Inquiries get vague promises of delivery in the near future.

Malti Devi Gond from Mubarakpur hails from an economically backward Dalit family and lives in hut made of mud. Her husband is blind and they have a 14-year-old son. She complained that she doesn't have a ration card or *Jan Dhan* account, and does not get any relief from the government even during Lockdown. She does not own agricultural land but works as an agricultural labourer on another person's land. This is seasonal work. Malti Devi Gond and her husband never received an old age pension or pension for disabled people. Her story suggests that despite crores of rupees spent on promotional activities for various welfare schemes, the actual money rarely reaches the people who need it the most.

Tariq Khan from Revri Talab, Varanasi reported that there were people in the community who didn't get ration as they did not have a ration card. This prompted them to write a letter to the local authority with signatures of various community members, and that is how they were able to finally get ration from the authority.

The Public Distribution System (PDS) is among the largest anti-poverty government welfare programmes in the country. It was implemented to provide subsidised food grains to poor families, to stabilise market prices of food items and to maintain a buffer stock. Until 1990, PDS was universal in its coverage.

However, due to the heavy burden of fiscal deficit, partly due to higher spending on subsidies, this programme was revamped in 1997 to a Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS). Under this revamped programme, the whole population was divided on the basis of the official poverty line norm into two categories, namely, Below Poverty Line (BPL) and Above Poverty Line (APL). Later, Antodaya Anna Yojna (AAY) was also initiated to benefit the poorest sections of the population.

Documents required for ration cards are Aadhaar card, old ration card, ID proof, passbook and photograph.



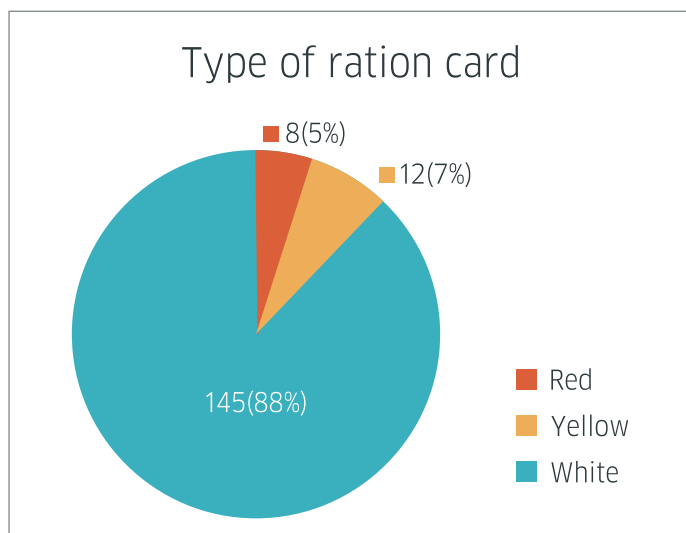


Figure 30: Type of ration card

Total 165 (81%) families out of the total 204 number of interviews have ration cards out of which 145 (88%) families have a white ration card. White ration card holders get 5 kg foodgrains (2 ½ kg Rice and 2 ½ kg wheat) every month per unit @ Rs 2 per kg for wheat and Rs 3 per kg for rice.

8 (5%) families have a red ration card. These are the poorest sections covered under the Antodaya Anna Yojana and get 5 kg food grains per unit every month free of cost.

12 (7%) families have yellow ration cards. These ration card holders are above the poverty line and hence they are not entitled for PDS.

It is found that most of the respondents have their ration shops within ½ km, a few have them at a distance of up to 2 kms from their homes.

During Lockdown in the month of April the government had announced a scheme where people will get ration twice a month, the first time they will get free (wheat, rice and 1 kg Chana) and the second time people will have to purchase at the usual rates and this scheme was going to be implemented for 8 months.

Out of the 165 families who have ration cards, only 111 (67%) families got ration twice during Lockdown; the first time it was given for free and the second time they had to purchase

wheat @ Rs 2 and rice @ Rs 3. Here also, there were alleged loopholes in the implementation of the scheme. People only got this for the first 5-6 months whereas according to the scheme, they were supposed to get it till the month of November, 2020.

In districts like Azamgarh, Gorakhpur and Mau, there are 47 (28%) families who had to purchase ration during Lockdown because they didn't get free ration from the government.

The distribution of foodgrains also differed from place to place. At some places people got ration as little as 1 or 2 kgs and in some places, people got as much as 51 kgs! So, there was no uniformity in the PDS, there were allegations of corruption. People also complained that shopkeepers sometimes don't give the assigned unit per member, keeping the difference for sale at regular prices. As a result, the neediest people got less ration from the ration shop during Lockdown.

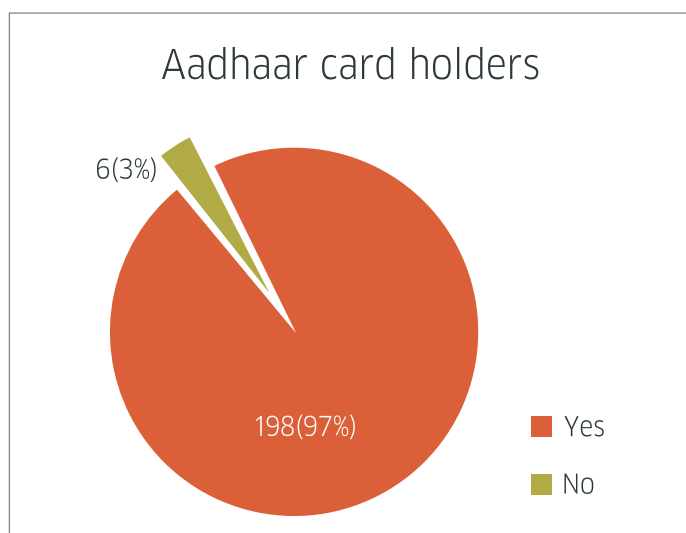


Figure 31: Aadhaar card holders

The Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) is a statutory authority established under the provisions of the Aadhaar (Targeted Delivery of Financial and Other Subsidies, Benefits and Services) Act, 2016 ("Aadhaar Act 2016") on July 12, 2016 by the Government of India, under the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MEITY). The Aadhaar Act 2016 has been amended by the Aadhaar and Other Laws (Amendment) Act, 2019.

UIDAI was created with the objective to issue Unique Identification numbers (UID), named as "Aadhaar", to all residents of India. The UID had to be:

- (a) robust enough to eliminate duplicate and fake identities, and
- (b) verifiable and authenticable in an easy, cost-effective way.

The first UID number was issued on September 29, 2010 to a resident of Nandurbar, Maharashtra. The Authority has so far issued more than 124 crore Aadhaar numbers to the residents of India.

Aadhaar has become a mandatory document. Now whenever you go to any government office, the first thing they will ask you for is your Aadhaar. This can be very clearly seen from the above figure where 198 (97%) people have an Aadhaar card and 6 (3%) people don't. People gave different reasons for not having an Aadhaar card. Sometimes the office was closed, other times officers denied them the card giving different reasons.

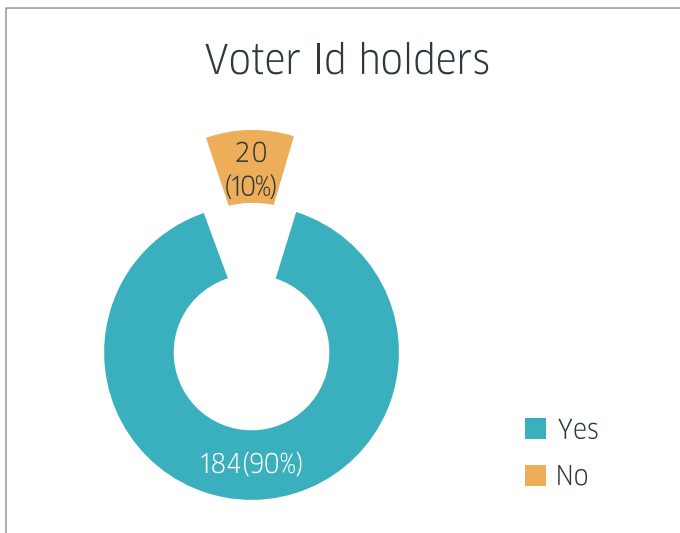
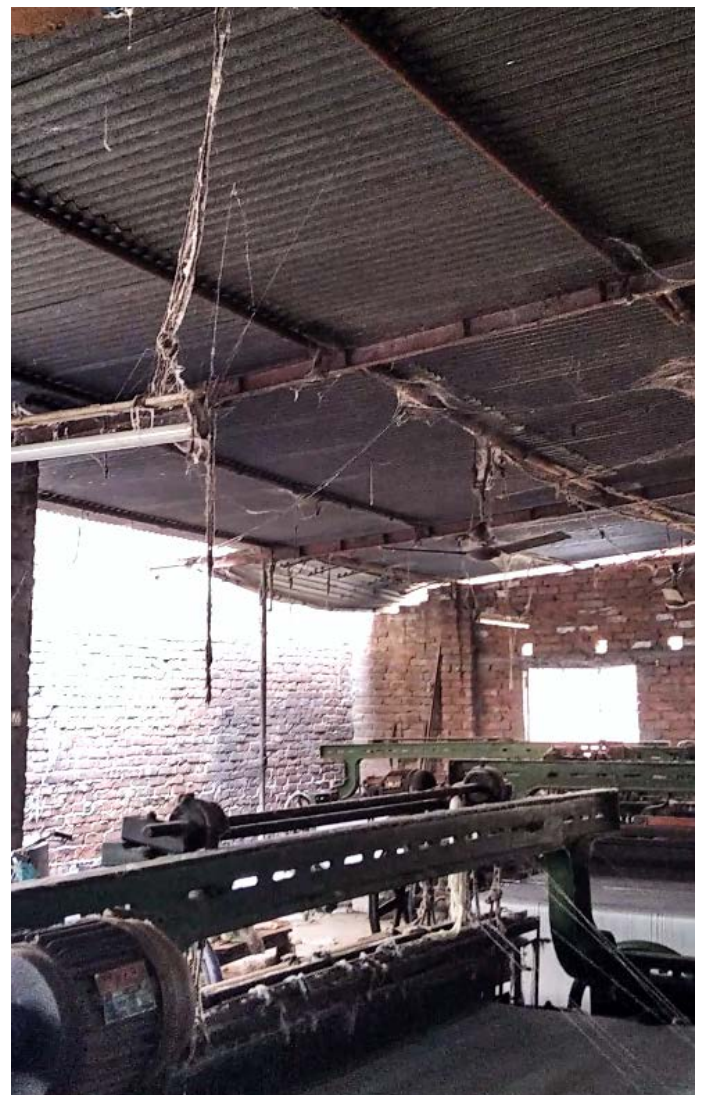


Figure 32: Voter Id holders

India is a constitutional democracy with a parliamentary system of government, and at the heart of the system is a commitment to hold regular, free and fair elections. These elections determine the composition of the government.

The democratic system in India is based on the principle of universal adult suffrage; that any citizen over the age of 18 can vote in an election (before 1989 the age limit was 21). The right to vote is irrespective of caste, creed, religion or gender. Those who are deemed unsound of mind, and people convicted of certain criminal offences are not allowed to vote.

Voting is very important in a democratic country and it is considered as a citizen's fundamental right which a person gets by birth. As per the figure, out of the total number of people interviewed, 184 (90%) of the people have a Voter ID card and 20 (10%) of the people still don't have it. When asked why, they said they had filled the form, while others were rejected for some mistake or lack of documents. This suggests that sometimes, people are either careless, or have inadequate information about proper documents required.





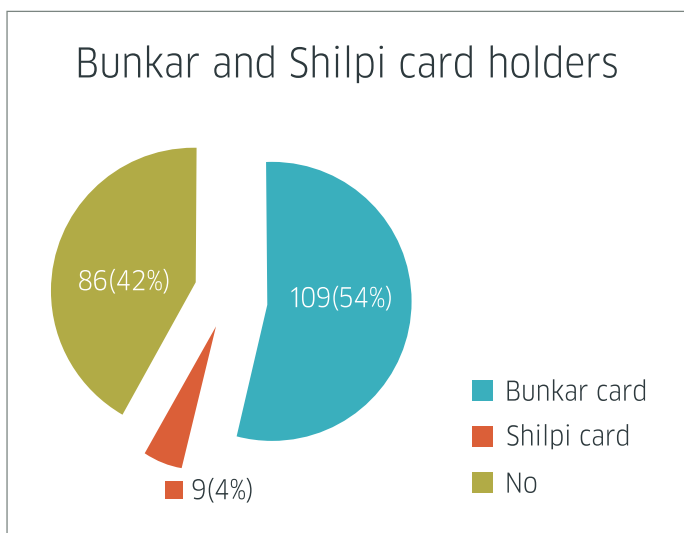


Figure 33: Bunkar and Shilpi card holders

Shilpi and Bunkar cards were issued as part of a state government scheme which was brought to provide monetary help and loan to artist or artisans in creative and productive activities such as clay modelling, painting, drawing, fashion designing, stone carving, weaving, embroidery work, etc. among many others, under the micro-industries sector. The loan was provided to them at low interest rates.

In the weaving industry, 'Bunkar card' is for people involved in weaving work and 'Shilpi card' is for people involved in Zari/Zardozi work.

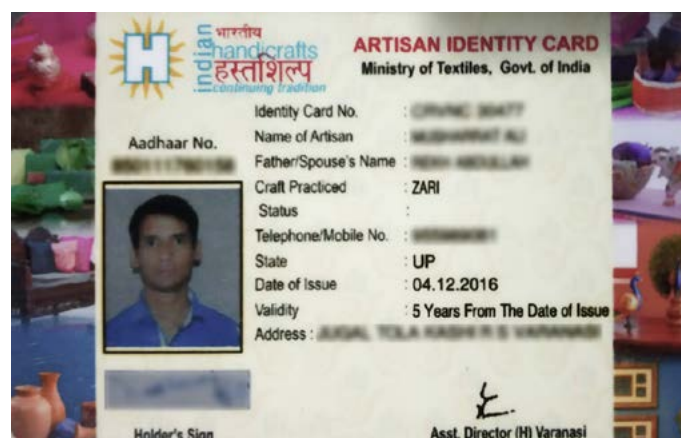
Out of the total respondents (204) interviewed, 109 (54%) people have Bunkar cards and 9 (4%) people have Shilpi cards. 86 (42%) people don't have either of these cards.

Deep Kumar Gaud and Bablal Rajbhar from Sarai Mohana, Varanasi told us, "During the Congress government, we used to get Rs 1,000 on Bunkar card. But since the BJP government came to power, we have not got a single penny in our accounts."



But unlike previous governments, it was discovered that none of the people have got any benefit from the current government.

The Uttar Pradesh government closed the Shilpi card scheme on January 1, 2020 claiming low demand for this scheme. But ground reality is different, because people have Bunkar and Shilpi cards but no one has got any benefit from it. There is a demand, and weavers/Zardozi karigars need help from the government. (Ref: <https://nsfdc.nic.in/hi/shilpi-samridhi-yojana>)



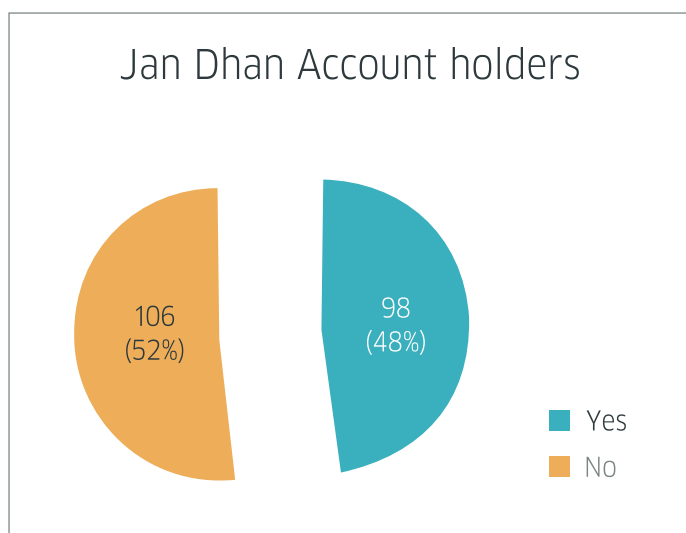


Figure 34: Jan Dhan Account holders

Pradhan Mantri Jan-Dhan Yojana (PMJDY) is a national mission for financial inclusion to ensure access to financial services, such as basic savings and deposit accounts, remittance, credit, insurance, pension etc. in an affordable manner. Under the scheme, a basic savings bank deposit (BSBD) account can be opened in any bank branch or Business Correspondent (Bank Mitra) outlet, by persons not having any other account.

#### Benefits under PMJDY

- One basic savings bank account is opened for unbanked people.
- There is no requirement to maintain any minimum balance in PMJDY accounts.
- Interest is earned on the deposit in PMJDY accounts.
- RuPay Debit card is provided to the PMJDY account holder.
- Accident Insurance Cover of Rs.1 lakh (enhanced to Rs. 2 lakhs to new PMJDY accounts opened after August 28, 2018) is available with RuPay card issued to the PMJDY account holders.
- An overdraft (OD) facility up to Rs. 10,000 to eligible account holders is available.
- PMJDY accounts are eligible for Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT), Pradhan Mantri

Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana (PMJJBY), Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana (PMSBY), Atal Pension Yojana (APY), and Micro Units Development & Refinance Agency Bank (MUDRA) scheme.

It is reported that during the Lockdown, for monetary help under the scheme, people were standing in long queues outside the bank to check if the government had deposited any money in the account. Those who don't have accounts, were trying to get the form from the bank but the banks were allegedly not giving them forms. There was a huge rush outside banks and no social distancing was practised at all because people had no other choice but to depend on the government because their source of income was completely shut down.

The above figure shows that only 98 (48%) have Jan-Dhan Account, whereas 106 (52%) respondents don't have this account. It was alleged that the bank gives the form only to influential people, and not those in need.

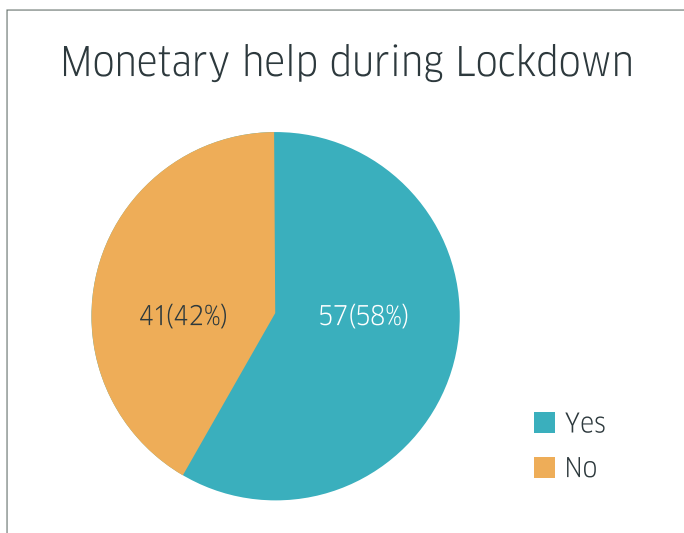


Figure 35: Monetary help during Lockdown

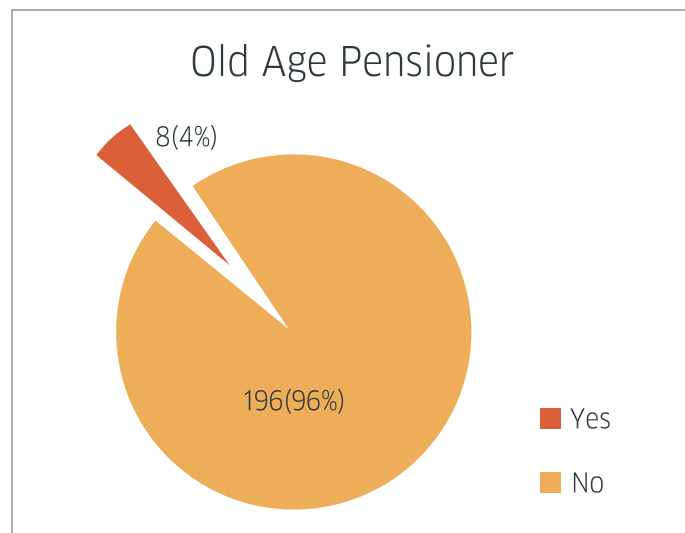


Figure 36: Old Age Pensioner

As part of the relief scheme the government had announced that it will deposit Rs 500, thrice in the Jan-Dhan Accounts of the people who have one. As per Figure 34, 98 (48%) people have Jan-Dhan accounts and 106 (52%) people don't have the account. Out of this 48% who have Jan-Dhan accounts, 57 (58%) people received monetary help from the government in which 50 people received Rs 1,500 (Rs 500 thrice), 9 people received Rs 1,000 rupees (Rs 500 twice) and 2 people only got monetary help once of Rs 500.

41 (42%) people didn't get any monetary help from the government in spite of having *Jan Dhan* accounts. Some respondents from Purana Gorakhpur didn't receive any money.

Haroon Ahmed from Lohta, Varanasi has five members in the family. He says, "I filled the Jan-Dhan form during Lockdown and I was expecting Rs 1,000 help from the government, but didn't get anything!" On a chilling note, he adds, "I am looking for some other kind of work so that I can take care of the family, but if I don't find any work then I don't have any other option but to commit suicide!"

Government pension schemes for senior citizens play a vital role in providing financial security to the elderly, while also initiating economic development in certain crucial areas of society. Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme (IGNOAPS) is one such pension plan in India. The scheme was introduced by the Ministry of Rural Development of India in 2007 and is popularly known as the National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP). The main aim of this scheme is to provide social protection to its beneficiaries by providing pensions to senior citizens, widows and disabled people.

Figure 36 shows that out of 204 families there are 196 (96%) families that don't have pensioners or they may have not registered. Merely 8 (4%) families have old age pensioners. Among these 8 pensioners, only 4 people got pension of Rs 1,500 during the Lockdown.

Aaftaab from Chauhatta said that he opened an account and applied for an old age pension for his mother, but got nothing.



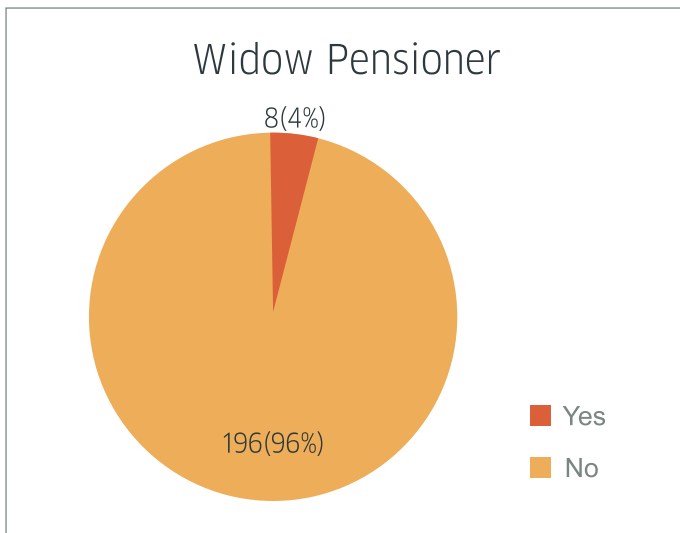


Figure 37: Widow Pensioner

Widow pensioners are also entitled to get pension under Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme (IGNOAPS). Figure 37 indicates that there were 8 (4%) widows, and 196 (96%) of the families didn't have any widows. Out of the 8 widows who were entitled to get pension, only 4 got widow pension during the Lockdown. They received Rs 3,000, Rs 1,500 and Rs 1,000 respectively. One woman got pension, but didn't mention the amount.

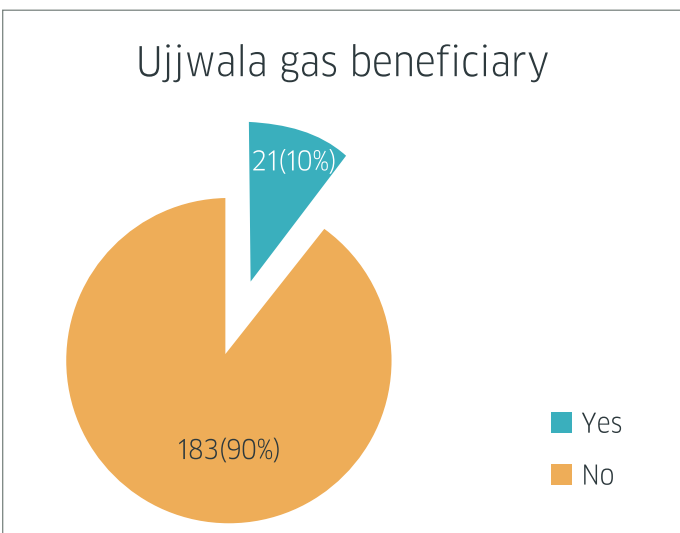


Figure 38: Ujjwala gas beneficiary

With the tagline “Swachh Indhan, Behtar Jeevan” the Union Government has launched a social welfare scheme “Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana” (PMUY) on May 1, 2016. Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas is implementing the scheme.

The scheme envisages a smoke-free rural India, and aims to benefit five crore families, especially the women living below poverty line (BPL) by providing concessional LPG connections to the entire nation (the original deadline was by 2019). The scheme will increase the usage of LPG and would help in reducing health disorders, air pollution and deforestation.

This scheme was highlighted a lot by the current government. Everywhere one could see big banners and advertisements on television. But we found that only 21 (10%) women among our respondents are registered to get Ujjwala Gas under this scheme and the remaining 183 (90%) don't. Many have been trying to get Ujjwala Gas for the last 1-2 years, and have even filled the form 4-5 times but to no avail.

Out of this 10% who are registered under Ujjwala Scheme, only 10 women got Ujjwala gas cylinders during the Lockdown, while the other 11 women who are registered and are below poverty line but didn't get the gas cylinder.

As per the scheme by 2019, the entire nation was to have LPG connection, but we discovered that there are families who still cook food on clay ‘chulhas’. Even though they have applied for Ujjwala Gas, they still have not got it. This was seen in Nakki Ghat in Varanasi which is the constituency of the Prime Minister.

## Approaching local government

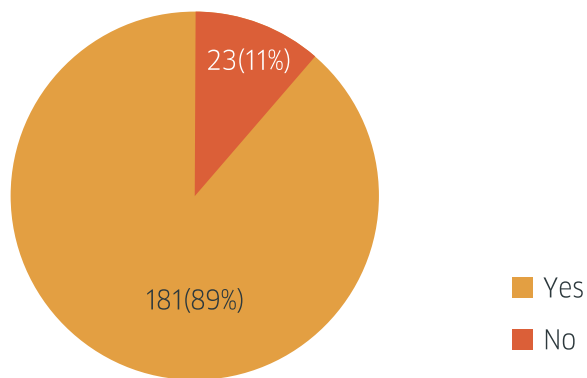


Figure 39: Approaching local government

As per the figure 39 out of the total respondents interviewed, 23 (11%) people approached the local and state government for a variety of relief measures such as rations, monetary help under Jan-Dhan Scheme, wrong or inflated electricity bill, and for sewage related problems. People who approached the local government were generally not satisfied with their response.

181 (89%) of our respondents didn't approach the local government.

Ruksana from Lallapura, Varanasi reported that they were thinking that they would die of hunger rather than Coronavirus, because there was nothing to eat at home. They didn't approach the local authorities for help out of fear as everyone was saying that Muslims were spreading the Coronavirus. Perhaps fearing backlash, Kurshid Alam and Mr Gulab from Koyla Bazaar, Varanasi said, "We can't say much, but yes, we didn't get any help from the government. Too much trouble from their side."



## DISCRIMINATION DURING LOCKDOWN

During our fact-finding mission, we came across several people who had faced religion-based discrimination. This ranged from communal slurs to being left out of welfare schemes to being blamed for the spread of the Coronavirus. Here are a few examples:

- Aaftaab, an *Aari* worker, says “I travelled to another city in search of work, and came back on the first train scheduled. When I got off the train the Police asked me my religion and I was quarantined, whereas my Hindu counterparts were let go.” He added, “Areas occupied by the majority community are regularly cleaned, but not those inhabited by the minority community.” Aftaab continued, “We are told to close down our shops at 9:00 PM whereas our Hindu counterparts are allowed to sell even after that deadline.”
- During the Lockdown the government was announcing one after the other relief packages for the people, and one of these was the Modi Relief kit in Varanasi. It contained wheat flour, rice, pulses, oil, sugar, tea powder, salt etc. This was distributed in some parts of Varanasi, such as Shiwala, Revri Talab and Madanpura, all areas where there is a high percentage of BJP votes.
- A person named Razauddin (name changed) reported, “During the Lockdown, Modi kit was being distributed. So, my friend Krishna (name changed) and I went to get the kit. They asked us our names, but only gave the kit to Krishna.” He went on to say, “They were openly saying that these kits are only for Hindus and not for Muslims. So, during this difficult time also people were spreading hate between Hindus and Muslims.”
- It was further reported that people faced discriminated at the time of relief distribution on the basis of caste and religion. In some places lathi charge was done on the people. It was reported by some respondents that in some places during the time of distribution of relief, local officers said that it was only for Hindus. Some people were told that they should ask help from who they had voted for as their sabhasad (MLA).
- Patiram Prajapati from Azamgarh has 7 members in the family. Before the Lockdown, he used to work on someone else’s loom, and earn Rs 1,600 per month, but has no work now. Patiram has a Jan-Dhan account, but did receive any direct cash transfer. Patiram reported that when he went to get the relief package, there was a huge crowd at the place where kits were being distributed, and police started a lathi charge of sorts. He also suffered lathi blows and came back empty handed. This is noteworthy when one factors in the caste element here. The Prajapati are among 17 OBC communities that were proposed for Scheduled Caste status by the Samajwadi Party Government of Uttar Pradesh in 2016. However, this proposal, which is allegedly driven by vote bank politics, was stayed by the courts; the prior attempt had been rejected by the Government of India. Patiram’s story is an example of how socially and economically weak people suffered and faced discrimination on caste grounds.
- Mehboob Alam, Jallalipura, Varanasi also alleges that when the ration was being distributed, it was not given to all the needy, just to people following a particular religion. Thus, distributors were discriminating on the basis of religion.
- Shamshad Ahmed, Lohta Varanasi approached the Police and *Sarpanch* regarding poor disposal of sewage and unclean water supply, which were causing people to fall ill. But the administration turned a deaf ear to their pleas. Then, the women of the community went and sat in front of the *Sarpanch*’s house for a whole day demanding ration supplies, but the *Sarpanch* reportedly told them, “*Tum logon ko jitna bhi milta hai, utna hi maangte ho. Yahaan se chale jao, tumhe kuchh nahi milega.*” (Translation: No matter how much you get, you keep asking for more. Begone! You will get nothing!)





- Mohammad Salim from Badi Bazaar, Varanasi and Gulam Nabi, Zainulabdeen, Nasiruddin, Kausar jahan, and Nisar Ahmed from Nakki Ghat, Varanasi told us that there is communal tension, which has vitiated the atmosphere. The situation is so toxic, that they didn't even try to approach the government in light of open discrimination during ration distribution on the basis of religion.
- Iqbal Ahmed, Badi Bazaar, Varanasi shared his experience that when he went to purchase ration from the grocery shop which was owned by Hindu person, people around him at that time passed very hateful comments such as, "*Corona aa gaya, isko kuchh mat dena, Corona aa jayega!*" (Translation: Corona has come. Don't give him anything, else he will spread Corona.)
- Mohd. Talib from Revri Talab reported, that during the Lockdown, when he went to buy flour which he had to distribute to people, the shopkeeper denied him saying, "You are Muslim, we won't give you flour." He was also heckled (*Bolee baaza* in local parlance), comments such as "*Mia aa gaye,*" meaning "Muslims are here." *Mia* is a word, originally meant as an honourific, but has now become a communal slur. "They said - Corona is here, we won't give you, run away," recalls Mohd. Talib who then asked them, "Why are you saying this? Give me flour, we have been living here for so long. There was no corona, now there is corona?" They allegedly put tins in the ground in the neighboring area to prevent the entry of Muslims. "Now, if we had to go to buy vegetables or elsewhere, we are scared less of being shooed away, and more about being beaten up/killed. It is difficult to go anywhere, we avoid going outside. We don't go anywhere for amusement/leisure either, we think we'll go when the environment is better. Now it will take a year for the environment to get better," he lamented.
- Warisa Bano from Bajardiha, Varanasi told us that in Bajardiha even during the Lockdown, Hindus and Muslims all lived in peace and harmony, but just outside the community, along the roadside, people of Bajardiha faced discrimination. The news spread that the people of *Tablighi Jamaat* are hiding in Bajardiha, so the grocer refused Muslims groceries. Then, a Dr. Saxena allegedly refused to see any patient from Bajardiha and there was a camera put outside his clinic. He allegedly instructed his staff to first ask the address of the patient and if they are from Bajardiha not to entertain them.
- Nasim Ahmad Ansari from Revri Talab, Varanasi reported that when he went to take ration which was being distributed, people who were distributing asked him about his political affiliation and preferences, point blank asking him for whom he voted. This is not only a major violation of privacy, but was turned into a tool for systematic discrimination against those who did not vote for the ruling dispensation. Thus, Ansari felt that there was no point in approaching the authority with his complaint.
- Wasim Akhtar from Revri Talab reported that there were private people who were distributing food near the police station, but were not letting anyone take it home. They allegedly insisted that beneficiaries sit and eat there itself.
- Asif Jamal from Revri Talab reported that the Municipal Council of the locality took names of everyone for ration relief kits and sent them to higher authorities, but only three kits were given to Muslims in the locality and others didn't get anything.
- Throwing light on the discrimination Khurshed alleged, "Hindus are given more, they were given 75 kgs, while Muslims were given only 5 kgs. Only some of us got money under the Jan-Dhan scheme," adding, "We also followed the rules of wearing masks and avoiding crowds and gatherings, but the government hasn't been kind to us."

- Wasim from Lallapura, Varanasi reported that ration distribution was clearly happening on the basis of religion.
- Dilshad Khan, Lohta Varanasi said that the shopkeeper refused to give groceries on credit. According to him, the relations between Hindus and Muslims were good, but after the NRC controversy, people were talking about removing Muslims from the country. He further said that it didn't happen because both communities are dependent on each other like *Tana-Bana*.



## IMPACT OF LOCKDOWN ON WOMEN

- Azizul Nisa from Badi Bazaar, Varanasi states that the male member of the family used to get angry at times when there was no food in the house, and this sometimes led to arguments.
- Mehrunissa and Chintamani from Nakki Ghat, Varanasi are victims of Domestic Violence. They reported that during the Lockdown their husbands were at home all the time in the absence of work. The men vented their frustrations by verbally and sometimes even physically abusing their wives.
- A woman from Lohta, Varanasi was worried during Lockdown due to limited and sometimes no ration. She couldn't bear to see her family hungry, and due to this, there were arguments and fights between husband and wife.
- 46-year-old Afzanul Nisa from Bari Bazar, Varanasi has studied till 8<sup>th</sup> grade. There are five members in the family, and the financial situation is so poor that her daughter who was 14-years-old and studying in 10<sup>th</sup> grade, had to leave her education to support the family by working on a loom. Her 9-year-old son also works on a loom. She used to do the cutting/finishing work of *Sarees*. In a day she used to work on five *Sarees*, for which she used to get Rs 40-50 before the Lockdown, but now after Lockdown that also she doesn't get even that, because there is no work.
- In Saraiya, Varanasi a meeting was conducted on December 25, 2020 with women associated with weaving work. But when the meeting started girls of age 12-16 also joined the meeting. When asked why, they said that they too used to do weaving work before Lockdown, but now there is no work. Women spoke about their poverty, and a hunger problem which is still prevalent. Young girls reported that even now, they are lucky to get food once a day. Muskan, Rani, Chandini, and Shanno, all between the age group of 12-16 started crying.



- Ruksana Fatima a resident of Ghosi, Mau is an unlettered person who weaves shroud (*Kafan*) cloth on her own power loom. There are six members in the family - four children, a husband and a wife. Ruksana and her husband used to weave 40 meters of cloth every day. They got Rs 30 for 10 meters of weaved cloth. So, in a day they used to make Rs 120. Now the Lockdown has been lifted, but they still don't have any work, there is no business at all. During the Lockdown she borrowed money from relatives and friends for food and medicine. She is Rs 50,000 in debt and is worried about her family and future.
- In Mubarakpur, Azamgarh, we found three young women were weaving on a handloom (*Kargha*). They were weaving a *Lehenga*. They were aged 24, 20 and 16. But as soon as we started our conversation, two of the older women went inside the home, and the youngest one Mehzabi (name changed) sat with us. She told us that she has studied till 8<sup>th</sup> grade in a *Madrassa*. After that, she was forced to leave her studies and do household work, and stay inside the home, as now she has grown up. While talking to us, she appeared happy, telling us about her hobbies and other things, and also asked us questions. After a few minutes, the elder sister came and slapped her! She said, "*Ghar mai chalo. Kyun baat kar rahi ho? Ye log baahri hain. Hum logon ko baahri logon se baat karna mana hai. Andar chalo warna mai tumahri shikayat ammi se karungee.*" (Translation: Get inside. Why are you talking to them. These are outsiders? We are not allowed to talk to them. Get inside or I'll tell mom.)
- I then asked her, "Why did you slap her? She is innocent, enjoying conversation. She is only telling about her studies." But then, the elder sister was rude, and forcibly took Mehzabi inside the home. This shows the '*Jahalat*' of women in Mubarakpur. Women are not supposed to take a photo, even the small girls are not allowed for this. Muslim women in Mubarakpur only live inside the house, work on looms and do other household work. Rarely do they attend their relative's marriages as Mehzabi told us. They don't have TV in the houses. They get only *Dini Talim* and practicing veil (*Burqa*) is very common. During our field work we saw 5 to 6-year-old girls wearing '*hijaab*'. They told us, "*Bade hokar hum Burqa pehnege. Burqa nahi pehnne per gunaah hota hai.*" (Translation: We will don a *Burqa* when we grow up. Not wearing one, is a sin.) They saw outsiders, even the women, with suspicion.
- Rekha Suri from Sarraiya, Varanasi said that



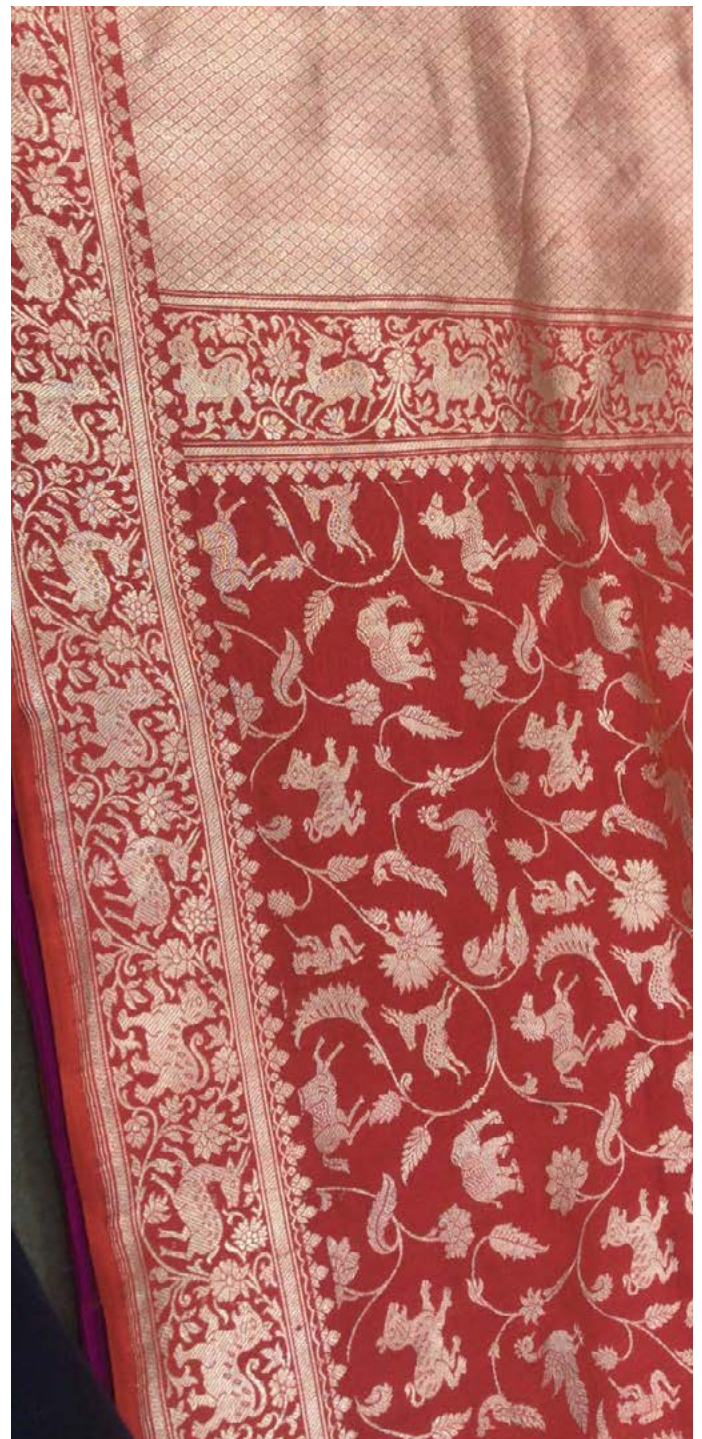


due to tension of work, her husband started drinking alcohol after the Lockdown, and he is violent with her.

- Workload for women increased during the Lockdown as all members were at home. Women don't have time to rest.
- Lockdown had an adverse impact on education, especially on girl's education. In many families, there is little to no hope of sending grown up girls back to school.
- While doing some weaving related work in households, women could earn and save money and spend sometimes as per their wish. Due to the shutdown of women's work, that opportunity has gone.
- Women usually don't know about debt/loan options.
- In Azamgarh, 60 percent of women and 52 percent of children have anemia. The Azamgarh district, which was once known for Rahul Sanskritayan, the poet Kaifi Azmi, and Ayodhya Singh Upadhyay Hari-audh's literature, is now known for malnutrition and anemia. Mothers don't get nutritious food due to poverty, causing anemia in newborns. The number of malnourished children from impoverished families in the district is more than 42,000. Despite this, children are not admitted into the Nutrition Rehabilitation Center. The parents of malnourished and anemic children in the district do not even know that their children have been affected by malnutrition. Statistics show that more than 42,000 were malnourished and 7,415 were severely malnourished. None of them got treatment at the Nutrition Rehabilitation Center. (Source: *Amarujala*: January 8, 2021)

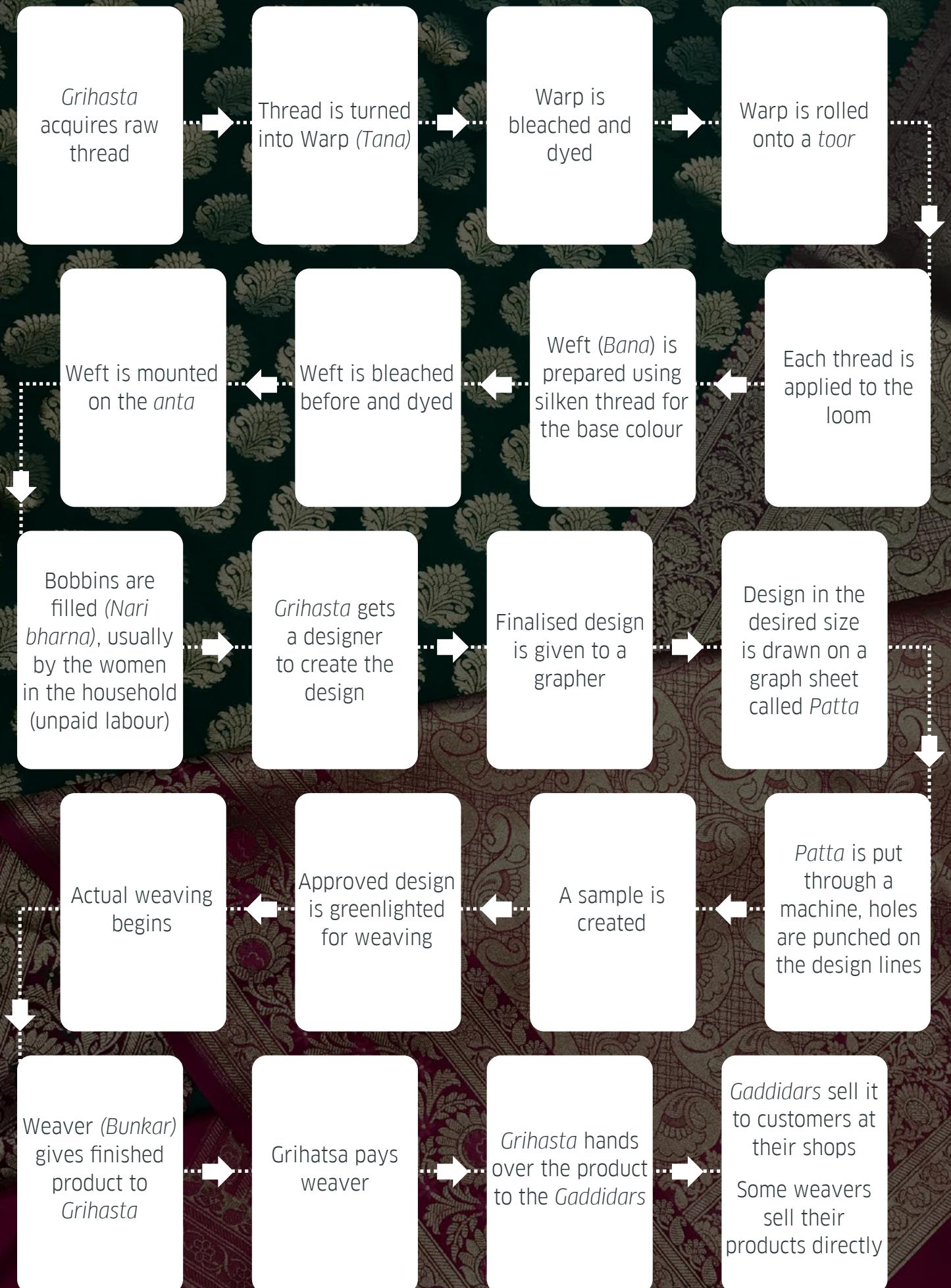
## SUPPLY CHAIN IN THE WEAVING INDUSTRY

To understand the impact of the bad policies of successive governments and the Covid-19 Lockdown on the traditional weaving industry in Uttar Pradesh's Purvanchal region, we must take a deeper look at the various stages in the manufacturing and sale of the products, with a special emphasis on how different materials are sourced and put together at each stage. Here's a look at the supply chain and the manufacturing process.





## Traditional supply chain





## Traditional supply chain

It all begins with the *Grihasta* (master weaver), who acquires the raw thread from suppliers who get it from manufacturers in China and Bengaluru.

This thread is then turned into Warp (longitudinal thread) that is called *Tana* in the local language. The Warp is then bleached and dyed.

The Warp needs to be rolled onto a toor. But because a Warp is typically 26 meters long, this procedure cannot be carried out indoors.

After the Warp has been rolled in, each thread is then independently applied to the loom.

After this process is complete, the Weft (latitudinal thread) that is called *Bana* in the local language, is prepared.

In the Weft, silken thread is used for the base colour. It has to be bleached before it is dyed. This is then mounted on the *anta*.

After this the bobbins are filled (*Nari bharna*), usually by the women in the household who are mostly engaged in unpaid labour, their work considered a part of their household duties.

Meanwhile, the *Grihasta* gets a designer to create the design that needs to be woven.

This finalised design is given to a grapher who is told what size the design needs to be.

This design in the desired size is then drawn on a graph sheet called *Patta*. This sheet is then put through a machine where holes are punched on the design lines.

A sample is created first and once approved, the design is greenlighted for weaving.

Threads are also dyed as per design requirements.

It is only after all these procedures are completed, that the actual weaving begins.

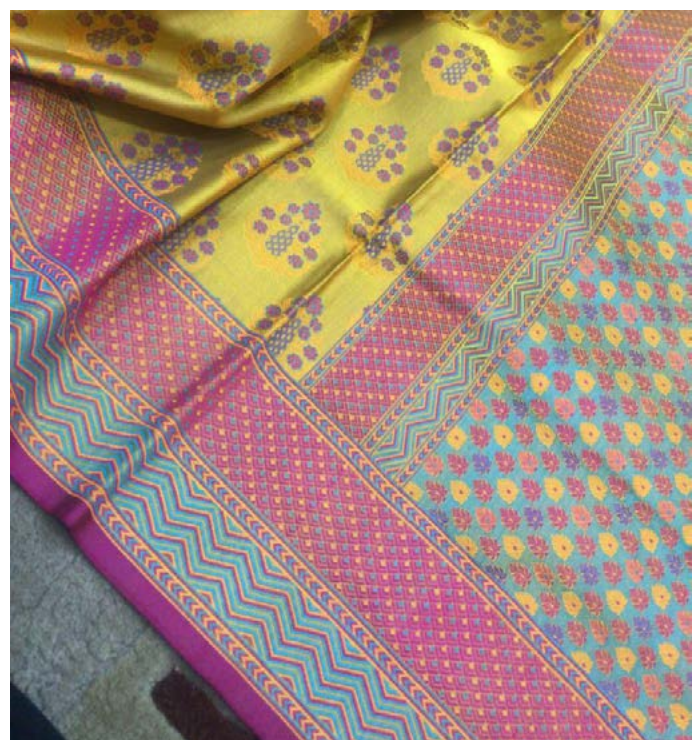
Typically, 40-45 people are involved in the creation of a single piece of fabric, be it a *Saree*, or dress material. While someone is involved in designing, someone else does the graph work,

some others do the dye work, some do warp related work, some do weft related work, some only handle the silk threads, others work on specific parts of the machine. Often multiple weavers are involved.

The weaver, called *Bunkar* in the local language, is paid on a per *Saree* basis. After the *Saree* is weaved, he gives it to the *Grihasta*. The weaver's payment is usually made as soon as he delivers the *Saree*. The *Grihasta* then hands over the product to the *Gaddidar* (traders and businessmen) who in turn sell it to customers at their shops.

Some weavers used to sell their products directly in the traditional evening market called *Satti* which used to be located in the Golghar area of Varanasi. This market has been shut for nearly two decades, but in its heyday, it was frequented not only by wholesale buyers and traders, but also ordinary people who would buy directly from the weavers.

The *Grihasta* (master weaver) and *Bunkar* (weaver) have traditionally hailed from the Muslim community, while the *Gaddidar* (trader) has usually been a Hindu. The weaving industry therefore helped bring together the two communities, in a way weaving their lives together.





## Impact of influx of corporate houses



## Impact of influx of corporate houses

With the entry of large corporates, many elements of the traditional supply chain have been discarded. Some of the big players in the industry include brands like FabIndia, and even Taneira under the Tata Group and Aadyam from the Birlas, and several other brands and even celebrity designers. They have showrooms in big cities like Mumbai, Delhi, Bangalore, Kolkata, Hyderabad and Ahmedabad, that help in taking these products to urban consumers. However, weavers in Varanasi can take membership of Weaver Service Centre (WSC) in order to build their network. Moreover, silk product manufacturers also hold exhibitions.

Types of items woven have also increased. Instead of just *Sarees*, now weavers are creating cushion covers, scarves, stoles, bags and other décor items that are not only sold across India, but also internationally. In fact, Tibetan and Buddhist motifs have also become popular. These are sold in China via Kathmandu-based traders.

The influx of corporate entities has in many cases either replaced the *Grihasta*, or they source the finished products from the *Grihasta*. These companies not only place direct orders with the *Grihastas*, but also share designs.

Some large manufacturers have as many as 150-200 *karghas* which they have dedicated to create products to fill orders from large corporates. They get the weaver to come to their *Karkhana* (factory) to work.

Otherwise, the weaver, whose entire family is engaged in the process spends 8 to 10 hours every day for 10-15 days to make one *Saree*. For this he gets Rs 5,000/- to Rs 6,000/-.

The finished product is then branded by them and often sold at profit margins in the range of 150 to 200 percent. In some cases, if a trader from Varanasi sells his product to a corporate for Rs 3,000/- per meter, the rebranded item is sold by the corporate house for Rs 8,000/- to Rs 10,000/- per meter. If a *Saree* is sold for Rs 10,000/- by the Varanasi trader, the corporate sells it for upwards of Rs 25,000/-.

However, some of the *Grihastas* we spoke to say that malpractices are aplenty with some unscrupulous corporate brands passing off power loom products as handloom products!

The entire supply chain has been altered and though the corporate houses reap rich profits, they have done little to improve the condition of the weavers. The development has not led to any trickle-down effect and many weavers still lead a hand-to-mouth existence; the pandemic has only exacerbated this pushing many to the brink of starvation. Many weavers were virtually arm-twisted to slash their already meagre fees even further during the Covid-19 pandemic, by corporate interests who now control the trade. Another fall-out of the corporate culture is the growing gap between the haves and have-nots. Very few master weavers had enough financial might to own a hundred or more handlooms. They are now working for the corporate entities and have started calling themselves “manufacturers”. Therefore, now the supply chain is: Weavers -> Manufacturers -> Corporate entity



## Banarasi Weaving Industry and Human Rights

The United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, that were unanimously endorsed by the UN Human Rights Council in June 2011 (i.e, over a decade ago), have contributed, at least as accepted standards, both the duties of Member States and the responsibilities of companies *to ensure that businesses operate with respect for human rights*.

The International Bill of Human Rights and the core International Labour Organisation (ILO) conventions provide the basic reference points for businesses in starting to understand what human rights are; how their own activities and business relationships may affect them; and how to ensure that they prevent or mitigate the risk of adverse impacts.

Depending on the circumstances of their operations, companies may need to consider additional human rights standards in order to ensure that they respect the human rights of people who may be disadvantaged, marginalised or excluded from society and, therefore, particularly vulnerable to impacts on their human rights, such as children, women, indigenous peoples, people belonging to ethnic or other minorities, or persons with disabilities.

The Guiding Principles are founded on three pillars:

1. The State duty to protect human rights against abuse by third parties, including business, through appropriate policies, legislation, regulations and adjudication; this would include the issue of dignity of work and labour; a dignified wage; social security for the worker and artisan when it comes to the weaving industry.
2. The corporate responsibility to respect human rights, meaning to act with due diligence to avoid infringing on the rights of others and address adverse impacts with which they are involved; we see however in the detailed investigation available in this report/study that there was a complete breach of these Guidelines and minimum

standards; during the despair caused by the Covid-19 Pandemic and Lockdown, the larger, national and international chains, businesses, corporations and brands *completely abandoned any obligation to the key creators of the products that their businesses make profits from*.

3. The need for greater access to effective remedy, both judicial and non-judicial, for victims of business-related human rights abuse.

Since their endorsement, the Guiding Principles have attempted to drive a convergence in standards on business and human rights across the international arena, reinforcing their position as the authoritative global standard on business and human rights. However, in the case of India in general and the *Banarasi Weaving Industry* in particular the absence of any adherence to these standards is stark<sup>[1]</sup>.



[1] <https://www.ungpreporting.org/resources/the-ungps/>



## Banarasi Saree and Intellectual Property Rights

A little-known fact is that the creators of the *Banarasi Saree* and Brocade – are ‘owners’ of this intellectual property. The weaver and artisans are completely unaware of the fact that the *Banarasi Saree* and Brocade registered in 2009, under Geographical Indication Handicrafts[2] are the intellectual property[3][4] of the Purvanchal crafts people.

If governments, other stakeholders and businesses and corporations made this fact public knowledge, the exploitation of the creator of this treasure could be mitigated.

प्रारूप O-2

बौद्धिक सम्पदा भारत

भारत सरकार  
GOVERNMENT OF INDIA

FORM O-2

INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY INDIA

भौगोलिक उपदर्शन रजिस्ट्री  
Geographical Indication Registry

वस्तुओं का भौगोलिक उपदर्शन (रजिस्ट्रीकरण तथा संरक्षण) अधिनियम, 1999  
Geographical Indication of goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999

धारा 16 (1) के अधीन भौगोलिक उपदर्शन अथवा धारा 17 (3) (ई) के अधीन प्राधिकृत उपयोग के रजिस्ट्रीकरण का प्रमाणपत्र  
Certificate of Registration of Geographical Indication under section 16 (1) or of authorised user under section 17(3)(e)

भौगोलिक उपदर्शन संख्या:  
Geographical Indication No.: 237

CERTIFICATE NO: 193

प्राधिकृत उपयोग संख्या  
Authorised user No.:

दिनांक  
Date : 29.04.2011

प्रमाणित किया जाता है कि भौगोलिक उपदर्शन (जिसकी समकृति इसके साथ उपाबद्ध है) / प्राधिकृत उपयोग

के नाम से वर्ग में संख्या के अधीन दिनांक को

के लिए रजिस्टर में रजिस्ट्रीकृत किया गया है।  
Certified that the Geographical Indication (of which a representation is annexed hereto)/ authorised user has been registered in the register in the name of Banaras Bunkar Samiti; Human Welfare Association; Joint Director Industries (Eastern Zone); Uttar Pradesh Handloom Fabrics Mktg.Co.op Federation Ltd; Eastern U.P Exporters Association; Banarasi Vastra Udyog Sangh; Director of Handlooms & Textiles U.P; Banaras Hath Kangha Vikas Samiti Ltd; Adarsh Silk Bunkar Sahkari Samiti Ltd.

Condition & Address continued in page -2

in class 23, 24, 25 & 26 under no. 237 as of the date 29.04.2011

in respect of "BANARAS BROCADES AND SAREES (LOGO)"

Falling in Class-23 in respect of - Silk Brocades like Amru Brocades etc.  
Class-24 in respect of - Textiles Good not classified elsewhere  
Le Bod and Table covers, etc.  
Class-25 in respect of - Silk Saree, Dress Material, like Silk Jamdhani, Jangla Sarees, Jamawar Tanshoi Sarees, Tissue Saree, Cut Work Saree, Butidar Sarees, etc.  
Class-26 in respect of - Silk Embroidery Sarees, etc.

आज दिनांक माह 20 को चेन्नई में मेरे निदेश पर मुद्रांकित किया गया।  
Sealed at my direction this 30 day of March 20 13 at Chennai.

रजिस्ट्रार, भौगोलिक उपदर्शन  
Registrar of Geographical Indication.

[2] <https://search.ipindia.gov.in/GIRPublic/Application/Details/237>

[3] <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/varanasi/Banarasi-silk-gets-gi-recognition/articleshow/5023601.cms>

[4] <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/bangladesh-manufacturing-Banarasi-Saree-in-gross-violation-of-geographical-indication-law/>



## Interviews with industry leaders

### Haji Hasin Mohammed

Haji Hasin Mohammed, son of Haji Moinuddin, says, “Our family has been in the weaving business for 150 years.” His establishment is located in Pili Kothi, Varanasi and he is one of the most respected people in his line of work. Before independence, they worked predominantly in production of Tibetan brocade, often for royal customers. “But this work came to a grinding halt in 1952 after the annexation of Tibet by China. My father was deeply disturbed by this for many years, till we were able to resume it in 1975,” he says.

He however laments the decline of the traditional handloom, and the emergence of the now ubiquitous power loom. “These days 75-80 percent of the work is done on power looms and only 20 percent or so is genuine handloom woven product,” he says. “Only we know what we had to go through to save this traditional form of weaving,” he says.

He explains the supply chain saying, “We get the thread for the warp from Bangalore and China. This warp is bleached and dyed before being given to the weaver.” He refers to the painstaking effort of rolling the warp on the toor before it is applied on the loom by the weaver, one thread at a time. A similar process is followed for the weft where coloured silken threads are used and applied on an *anta*.

“After this he (the weaver) gets the *Nari bhar-na* process done at home. “He fills the *Nari* at his own place, after that we decide if we want to add the *Zari* thread or something else. *Zari* comes to Varanasi from Surat. In Varanasi, we purchase the *Zari* from the local market, and only then the actual weaving begins.”

The finished *Sarees* are then sold to customers. Haji Hasin Mohammed also works with larger corporates, one of them are the Birlas. “We have been working for six to seven years with them, mainly producing interior furnishings like cushion covers. But for the last one year, they have also been giving us designs and colour

matching (combinations) for *Sarees*. We get the graphs made and cutting done, and they give it to their workers and the finished product is sold under the Grasim or Adhyam brand name.” He also supplies to designers like Ritu Kumar. “We offer her ready material for selection. Then we courier it to her and send a bill. She then sells it under her brand name,” he explains. Meanwhile other designers like Manish Arora and Rajesh Pratap work a little differently. “They don’t take our designs much, they give their designs to us. I get the graph card cut and give it for weaving on our looms. They tell us the colour matching, we make the things like that and send them through courier. Then we bill them and get paid,” says Haji Hasin Mohammed.

But he is a little disheartened at how some designers use celebrities to wear *Sarees* made by Varanasi weavers but sold under their brands, allowing the high-profile designers to command a high price. “A designer got a famous Hindi movie actor to wear our *Saree* and sent me the picture by Whatsapp. I could have sold the *Saree* for Rs 25,000, but now they will sell the same thing for at least Rs 80,000.” Because he commands a lower price, he can only pay a proportionate amount to the weaver. Therefore, while the designers earn huge profits, the benefits don’t trickle down to the weavers who are at the bottom of the pyramid.

However, now some weavers and other artisans have started demanding more. “Little by little, the weavers have started increasing their rates. We are also helpless. If we don’t pay higher wages, he will leave us and go elsewhere,” he says. But this increases the per unit cost of production and he fears this would make *Sarees* unaffordable, unless the government offers some kind of an economic incentive that allows people like him to pay his weavers higher wages.

Haji Hasin Mohammed has of late also started



working for clients in China who prefer Buddhist motifs. “The customer in China has a man in Kathmandu, that’s where we send the product. They then send it to China,” he says.

He aims to get a profit of 25 percent, but the mounting stock of unsold products is pushing him to revise his expectations.





## Amresh Kushwaha

Amresh Kushwaha of Gulhaghat Ramnagar in Varanasi is another master weaver. His family has been in this business for 40 years. Though he is a qualified lawyer, he left his practice in 1994 and got into the weaving business full-time in 1995.

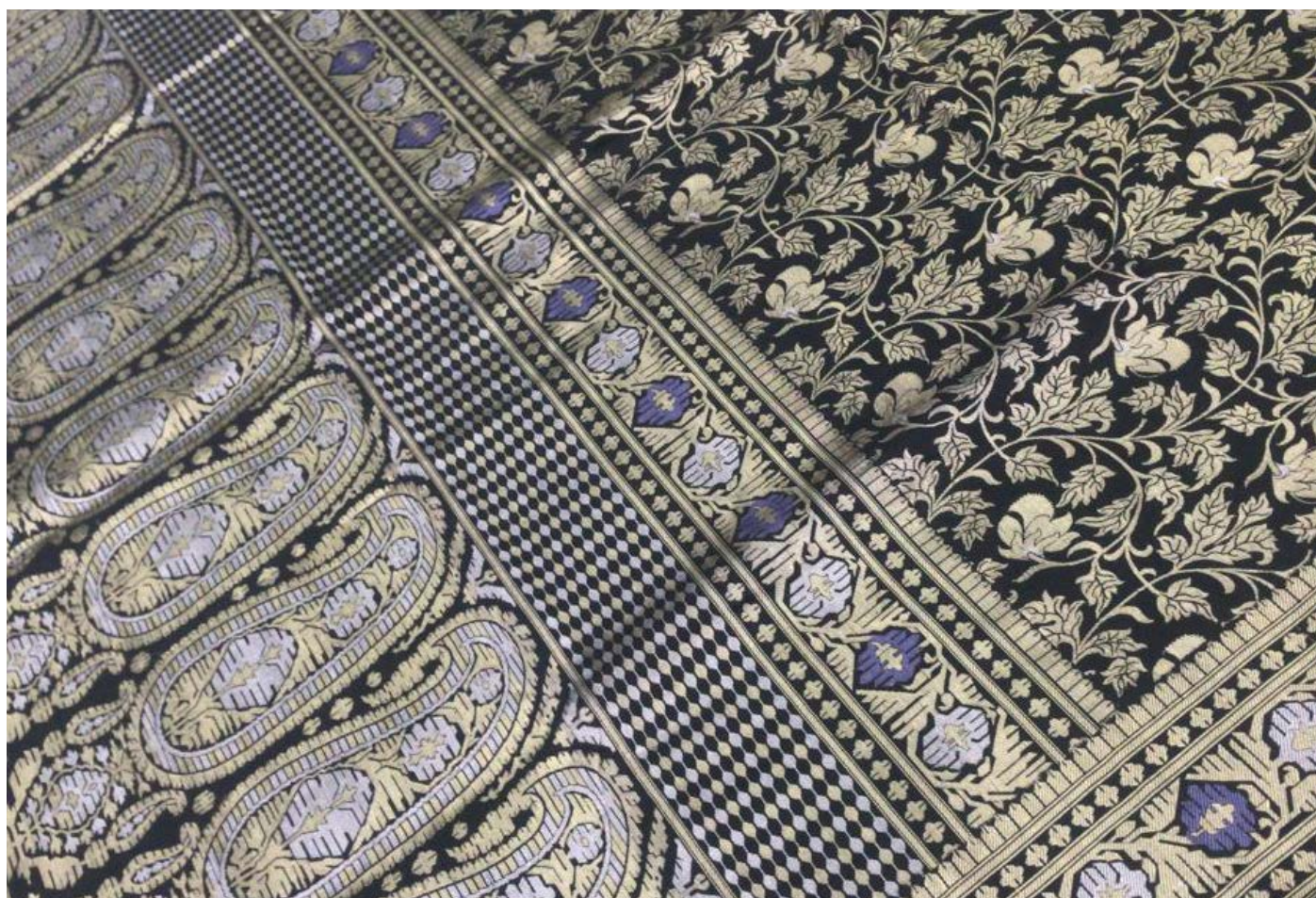
“I own 100 looms and employ 200 skilled weavers, and 100 assistants. Additionally, I also source finished products from 200 other weavers,” he says. “We make *Banarasi Sarees*, *Lehenga*, *Dupatta*, dress material, curtains, and also handloom *Sarees*, stoles, scarves, shawls and *dupattas*,” he says. He has his own showroom in Ramnagar and most of his clients come to him due to his reputation as one of the best manufacturers of authentic products.

“The cost of producing one *Saree* ranges from Rs 18,000 to Rs 20,000 at the lower end of the spectrum, but can go up to as high as Rs 3 lakhs to Rs 4 lakhs,” says Kushwaha, who then aims for a minimum profit margin of 60 to 70 percent, sometimes even 100 percent.

Kushwaha works closely with the apparatus set up by the government for marketing handloom products. He has his own registered cooperative establishment. His products are sold not only across the country, but have also found some takers abroad in countries like Japan, Switzerland and Germany.

“We had a good market for handlooms, but the Lockdown spoiled everything. For four months, not a single person could come to work. So suddenly, these 500 people found themselves in dire financial conditions,” he says. His money was stuck with buyers at the time, though he tried to help his employees to whatever extent he could. “75 percent of them hail from the minority community, and 25 percent from the majority community. These are usually OBCs,” he says, explaining the demographic break-up of his employees.

Social security schemes for weavers have been much debated. “The Mahatma Gandhi insurance scheme where we put in Rs 40 per year per





weaver and the government matched it had been around for nearly 15 years,” he says of the insurance scheme. But it was discontinued in 2017. “Plus, those with children studying in schools, get a wazifa of Rs 100 per month,” he says. But the sudden Lockdown brought about an unprecedented economic calamity.

“I have given loans to my long-standing employees to tide over crises and sudden expenditures. After all, some of them have been working here for 25 years or more. I can’t ignore their pleas when there is an illness in the family, or if they need money for any other urgent reason,” he says.

“My clients hail from Mumbai, Hyderabad, Kolkata and Delhi. But during the Lockdown work with some of the biggest clients came to a grinding halt – including that with big names like Tata’s Taneira and FabIndia. For four to five months, we could do absolutely nothing,” he says.

Kushwaha also laments the decline of handlooms. “Back in 1995, there were around 1,20,000 handlooms. But after two successive economic downturns in 2000 and 2010, the numbers fell drastically by over 80 percent. Now there are barely 20,000 to 25,000 handlooms,” he says. But Kushwaha swears by the handloom. “*Kabhi bhi nahi power loom*,” he asserts. “Earlier we had 400 handlooms, but now it is down to 100. However, I am gradually trying to take the numbers back up again.

“Most people prefer working on the power loom these days. Working on a handloom is backbreaking labour where one has to sit on a *Gaddi* and work throughout the day and people earn Rs 500 to Rs 600 per day. It takes longer to produce fabric on the handloom as it is a specialised art,” he explains. “But, one can stand and be more comfortable on the power loom, and also make more money. Therefore, even the older generation is not teaching the youth to work on handlooms. Moreover, the educated youth prefer working on power looms,” he says.

Kushwaha feels that if training centres are set up in neighbourhoods where weavers live, interest can be revived in handloom operations. “I like how weavers are focusing on ensuring that their children get educated. It is good that these educated children then undergo training at dedicated centres and master the handloom craft. But the government needs to invest in this,” he says. He also feels customers need to be made aware of the difference in quality of pure and synthetic fabrics. “Many manufacturers sell products made of synthetic fabric, but call it pure silk or pure cotton. They are fooling customers,” he says. “The synthetic yarn is cheaper at Rs 200 per kg, compared to the original high-quality yarn that we purchase from Bangalore or China that costs upwards of Rs 400 per kg,” he says explaining why many manufacturers are using sub-standard raw materials. “The government also needs to educate customers to look for the GI tag, so that they get authentic high-quality products instead of the cheap sub-standard stuff being peddled by some unscrupulous people,” he says.







## Mumtaz Ahmed

Mumtaz Ahmed runs IFFCO Sarees in Madanpura in Varanasi. “We have been in this business for the last four to five generations. But I have never seen the financial health of the entire industry take a beating like it did after the introduction of demonetisation and Goods and Services Tax (GST),” he says, adding, “But the Lockdown was the last straw.”

“Earlier even small traders and shopkeepers used to sell *Banarasi Sarees*. But now only those people who have large establishments and showrooms can survive,” he explains.

“Things were bad in the year 2000 as well, when there was a slump in the demand for *Banarasi* as embroidery work was more popular. Many weavers left – some went to Bangalore, some to Surat,” he recalls. He sheds further light on the decline in the industry saying, “Handloom industry has shrunk to merely 20 percent of what it was originally.”

But that’s not all. Ahmed feels it is the unfair and unscrupulous manufacturing and trade

practices of some people that have had a detrimental impact on the industry as a whole. “Weavers in Surat are able to make copies of our *Sarees* using Korean machines for a fraction of the price,” he alleges, adding, “What we manufacture for Rs 10,000 to Rs 11,000, on handlooms, they can produce for just Rs 1,200 using power looms. But they sell it in the market claiming it to be a handloom product!” He says that most of these corrupt practices are carried out by traders in Mumbai and Surat as a result of which it is no longer economically viable for smaller businesses to operate in Varanasi.

Lamenting the lack of knowledge about handlooms he says, “Most people are fooled by these unscrupulous manufacturers because few people in this generation can tell the difference between handloom and power loom products. Plus, they get swayed by the lower price point.”

Mumtaz Ahmed feels there is only one way to deal with this. “The government should buy the products and pay weavers a dignified wage,” he suggests.





## CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS AND FINDINGS

The present report deals with the impact of the pandemic and the consequent Lockdown on the artisanal cottage weaving industry and the weavers and other stakeholders since early 2020.

The impact on the complex, multi-tiered and interdependent structure of the weaving industry is at one level, simple enough to comprehend. The bottom-most layer of loomless weavers, i.e. wage workers (both handloom and power loom) are understandably the worst hit during the Lockdown. But the impact of the pandemic and Lockdown has had a snowballing effect on the entire industry. The entire industry came to a standstill and the various relief measures presumably intended for the people did not reach most of those who were the neediest.

### Fourth Handloom Census, 2019-20

Unlike in past decades since the mid-1990s, when the Joint Census of Handlooms and Power Looms provided the marker, the Fourth Handloom Census of 2019-20 has been conducted not by academic institutions and experts (as in the past, i.e. NCAER), but by what can be termed as Data Management Agencies. The data generated out of this last Census are full of contradictions and draw conclusions which fly in the face of the data of the Third Handloom Census.

Some of the conclusions are as follows:

1. Majority of the weaver households are located in 4 states, i.e. Assam (10.9 lakh), West Bengal (3.4 lakh), Manipur (2.1 lakh) and Tamil Nadu (1.7 lakh)
2. Handloom weaving is still predominantly a rural activity as 88.7% are located in villages
3. Nearly 72% of handloom weavers in the country are female
4. Average number of person-days per year is 208

5. Cooperatives and such organisations are categorised as non-household units

There are some contradictory observations that have been made in the report of the fourth handloom census which disprove the reality at the ground level. The report claims that the number of households engaged in handloom activities in the country has gone up to 31.5 lakhs from 27.83 lakhs as per the Third Handloom Census, 2009-10 (NCAER, 2009). The government attributes this rise to the success of numerous policies targeting handloom weavers. But the same Census Report also points out that as many as 66 % of the handloom weavers in the country earn less than Rs. 5,000 per month. In this context, it is necessary to reiterate that an important finding of the Third All-India Handloom Census of 2009-10 was that the number of handloom weavers had reduced drastically between 1995 and 2010, by three lakhs. (Bhowmick, 2019. EPW article, Vol.54, issue no.49. 14 December, 2019)

This supposed rise in the number of weaving households is accompanied by a fall in the production of fabric in the handloom sector from 7,104 million square metres in 2013-14 to 5,134 million sq. metres in 2017-18 as per the Annual Report of the Textile Ministry of 2017-18. This is inexplicable.

Moreover, if one were to examine the budgetary allocation for the fiscal year of 2014-15 and 2018-19, the allocations have sharply fallen, from Rs. 621.51 crores to Rs.386.09 crores.

These observations deriving from the Fourth Census Report and other official reports seem to contradict the facile conclusions that the Government wishes to derive, i.e. that the supposed rise in the number of weaving households are due to the success of the government's policies; at the same time the report claims that 65% of the handloom weavers are unaware of welfare schemes.

Besides, there has been a discontinuation of welfare schemes. One 'flagship' programme



of the present government has been the Micro Units Development and Refinance Agency (MUDRA) has been to offer loans to small business enterprises at low interest rates. Handloom weavers are also eligible for loans under Mudra. However, the latest Census Report points out that only 23% of the weavers across the country possess bank accounts and the scheme is envisaged as a direct cash transfer to bank accounts.

The present government has dealt another blow to the weavers by downgrading the Mahatma Gandhi Bunkar Bima Yojana from 2017 and making it redundant. Thus since 2017, there is no dedicated life insurance scheme for handloom weavers. All this raises serious questions about the reliability of the data from the Fourth Handloom Census. (Bhowmick, Ibid)

There are also serious flaws in data collection. One major flaw is that according to the latest report 82% of the weavers in the rural areas work independently, i.e. they are self-employed. But this goes against the observations of the Third All India Census of Handlooms, 2009-10 apart from various other reports and articles which have noted the steady fall from the status of independent weavers to being wage workers and loomless weavers. Apart from the question of the categorization of the weavers for purposes of data collection (which accounts for the large number of 'independent' weavers according to the report)), the fact that most of the weavers may be working in their own houses does not make them financially independent; in fact they are tied to the master weavers and various intermediaries in a variety of putting out arrangements, what in Varanasi and eastern UP is referred to as bani.

The master weavers and intermediaries have control over the supply of the yarn, the marketing and often even the looms, with the weaver finally getting a meagre amount. This by no definition can be considered 'independent'. The persona of the independent weaver is a myth which has disappeared into the mists of history.

All in all, the Fourth Handloom Census, 2019-20

cannot be considered a reliable report of the status of handloom weavers.

The Bankers Institute of Rural Development, Lucknow, brought out a report -- *Study Report on Problems and Prospects of the Handloom Sector in Employment Generation in the Globally Competitive Environment in 2016* (Bankers Institute of Rural Development, Lucknow, 2016). The study was taken up in three states, Andhra Pradesh (AP), Uttar Pradesh (UP) and West Bengal (WB) to understand the sector for its uniqueness, its operating ecosystems, the issues, concerns and interests of various stakeholders in the handloom sector.

The Report begins by pointing out that despite the numbers of weavers declining between 1995 and 2010, the numbers of full-time weavers has remained more or less the same during this period (28.6 lakhs in 1995 and 28.16 lakhs in 2010). There is also an increase in the number of days of work per weaver household from 197 to 234 during this period.

This indicates that despite the immense problems facing this sector, it is not dying and there are signs of vibrancy and revival.

The above report has made many suggestions for the revival of the handloom sector which are very useful and if implemented could indeed improve the prospects of the sector. Some of the observations and suggestions are as follows:

1. Despite the fact that the handloom sector in the country was encouraged to adopt a cooperative model and government policy facilitated the formation and running of Primary Weavers Cooperative Societies (PWCS) at the village and taluka level and the Apex Weavers Cooperative Societies (AWCS) at the state level to arrange for procurement and supply of yarn and also undertake marketing activities. The Handloom Development Corporations at the state level were meant to cater to those weavers working outside the cooperative fold.
2. However, in the last 5-10 years, several



Apex societies and Handloom Corporations have become dormant due to a variety of reasons, i.e. lack of professional management, overstaffing and poor marketing and distribution channels, compounded by the weakness in Short Term Cooperative Credit Structure.

3. The report also points out 85% of the weavers are outside the cooperative fold as they work either under master weavers/traders or an insignificant percentage who work independently.
4. Along with detailed suggestions for improving the functioning of the handloom sector, the report points out that employment in the handloom sector can increase through the livelihood promotion route, i.e infrastructure development, skill enhancement and availability of credit through the formal credit delivery system. The report suggests a series of strategic interventions in key areas.
5. But the critical point is: “Many of these interventions may be market led and ushered in by private market players... Government must play the role of enabler and facilitator....”

While the above-mentioned points/suggestions are in order, the elephant in the room, so to speak, is government policy and the overall policy framework within which all these suggestions can be realised; it is here that the BIRD report blithely glosses over the paradigmatic changes that have ensued which have induced far-reaching changes in the entire handloom sector. For one it is no longer employment generation that is the priority, it is greater mechanization and the need to power the national economy and therefore giving it greater dynamism. From the last-mentioned point, it is quite clear that it is the market that is going to lead with the government just being enabler and facilitator.

Ironically, the safeguards that have been suggested in the report for the handlooms are precisely ones that were already in place ear-

lier except that it assumes a policy framework which prioritises the market, with the government only facilitating the market and private players.

An analysis of the policy framework is essential for suggesting possible recommendations to revive the weaving sector. One major factor that needs to be kept in mind is that *official policy for many decades has floundered between the acknowledgement of the criticality and centrality of state policy as indispensable for the survival of the handloom sector and the role of the market as the final and most efficient arbiter of policy regarding the textile sector as a whole.*

Our own report dealing with the impact of Covid-19 and the consequent Lockdown in Varanasi and Eastern UP is a disturbing testimony to the consequences of government policy towards the weavers and the artisanal cottage industry.

The fact is that the destruction of the handlooms has been accompanied by the rise of power looms. First the handlooms were wiped out and replaced by power looms and now small, decentralised units of power looms of between 3-5 per unit are now facing extinction in the facing of competition both from other places and from bigger corporate players and the weaving sector in other states for example, West Bengal are facing threats from Varanasi and UP power looms. (Bhattacharya, Rajesh and Sharmistha Sen, 2018. “Pride and Prejudice: The Condition of Handloom Weavers in West Bengal”. Bengaluru, Azim Premji University)

To reiterate a point made by many policy analysts, i.e. the contradiction in official policy which perceived the handloom industry as important in providing rural livelihoods and also protecting the country’s cultural heritage and therefore needing protection and also simultaneously it was viewed as sunset industry which could not provide a catalytic boost to the national economy as a whole.

The contradictions in official policy have intensified over the last few years with not even a nodding recognition to urgent demands of the



handloom sector. The Fourth Handloom Census is evidence if indeed evidence is needed, along with all the measures that the present government has taken to undercut the handloom sector and the artisanal industry.

Our report is about the impact of Covid and the consequent Lockdown on the weavers and allied workers, when the handloom weavers have been reduced to an insignificant minority, though there are voices that are raising the issues and demands of the handloom weavers.

We have tried to represent the different sections of the weaving community, both handloom and power looms, allied workers, dyers, *Zari* workers, entrepreneurs etc.

The women of the weaving community are an important voice considering they are the backbone though invisible and often unrecognized. In short, we have attempted to capture the voices of the weaving community as a whole.

One of our advisory committee members, Ateeq Ansari, businessman and long-time participant in the travails of the weaving community of Varanasi has suggested that we need to view our recommendations from the immediate, medium term and long-term point of view. He suggests that the government should take the initiative in calling a meeting of the different stakeholders wherein all sections are represented and listen to the different viewpoints for reviving and examining the questions of sustainability of the industry as a whole. In his view, the three classes or categories of people are yarn dealers, traders and *Bunkars*. All these people should be part of a sustained dialogue.

Apart from all else, the International Bill of Human Rights and the core ILO conventions provide the basic reference points for Corporations and Businesses in imbibing a human rights culture, understanding and practice while working towards profit. The fact that this artisanal industry involves peoples, in Eastern Uttar Pradesh, from the most marginalized sections (Muslims, Dalits, OBCs and women and girls among these sections) make these obligations more urgent. (*see details in section above*).

To give teeth to these obligations, the 2011, United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights which were unanimously endorsed by the UN Human Rights Council in June should ensure dignified and fair working conditions result after companies *adopt business practices that operate with respect for human rights*. No such sensitivity or obligation was evident in the abandonment –economic and social–experienced by the weaver and her family in Eastern Uttar Pradesh during the Covid-19 Lockdown. Since their endorsement, the Guiding Principles have attempted to drive a convergence in standards on business and human rights across the international arena, reinforcing their position as the authoritative global standard on business and human rights. However in the case of India in general and the *Banarasi* Weaving Industry in particular the absence of any adherence to these standards is stark. (<https://www.ungpreporting.org/resources/the-ungps/>)

All sections of the weaving community have suffered undignified losses especially during the Covid-19 Lockdown. There is gross anomaly in the fact that the Businesses and Corporations who's trade in exotic *Banarasi* silk that has meant pleasure and profit for many, have shown no sense of involvement or responsibility to the backbone of this exotica and profit.

Historically, but especially since the 1990s, the significant participation of India's religious minority, Muslims, in the weaving industry of Eastern Uttar Pradesh, where the emergence of a trading class and entrepreneurs from within the community has emerged, has also made it particularly prone to acts of targeted, communal violence. Without going into the causes thereof, it is sufficient to observe here that an enabling social, business and economic environment also involves the crucial issue of security of life of all the various players within.

Covid-19 and the Lockdown has provided us an opportunity to revisit many questions and knotty issues of government policy, policy perspectives, international law and treaties and the obligations that India, central and state



governments and corporations and businesses, have therein.

Needless to say, the issues of the weavers and artisanal weaving industry intersect with many other issues of the agrarian sector and also industrial sector. All the various strands need to be disentangled.

But our own investigations on the ground have yielded many rich insights of the different sections of weavers. We provide these so that our own investigations and research will be enriched by those who weave the tapestry of our lives.







## RECOMMENDATIONS FROM RESPONDENTS

**Dignified and Fair Wages:** Private companies and *Gaddidars* control the wages paid to weavers because of their hold on input supply as well as marketing. Often a weaver who works 10-12 hours for 15 days to complete one *Saree*, gets Rs. 1,800 to 2,000. In Gorakhpur weavers weave bed sheets and suiting-shirting material. While working 8-10 hours on power looms, their payment is a measly Rs 3 per meter! In Mau weavers (usually women) weave *Kafan* (shroud) cloth on the power loom. They get Rs 25 per meter and usually weave 4-5 meter per day. For this they have to work 8-10 hours a day. Clearly, in all these instances, the monetary compensation is not even remotely adequate for a weaver to live with dignity. Meanwhile, the '*Gaddidar*' and the private companies who are running big showrooms in big cities enjoy the huge profits made from the sale of *Banarasi* products.

Therefore, weavers feel that the Government should fix a minimum wage for weavers, so that they get paid fairly and adequately for their work. These wages should be calculated in a manner that ensures that they don't push weavers to a hand-to-mouth existence. The wages should enable dignified living. Additionally, women should be paid for their labour as without the work they put in, the industry cannot survive. The Department of Handlooms and Textiles and various nodal departments can help oversee this.

**Financial assistance:** While there are provisions on paper for subsidies, these are rarely made available to weavers. These include subsidies related to electricity, subsidies for small-scale industries, loans etc. that can go a long way in enabling weavers to improve their financial condition. These subsidies need to be made available to weavers across the country and implemented uniformly. For example: Weavers get a subsidy in Gujarat which allows them to produce products at competitive rates. In the absence of the same subsidy in UP, weavers are forced to quote higher prices to cover expenses, thus making their products more expensive.

Weavers told us how due to poor implementation, many small-scale industries are deprived of the 30-40 percent subsidy to which they are entitled. There are also loan schemes for groups and clusters, for an amount up to Rs 5 crores. If implemented properly and made available to those who are eligible, these could go a long way in encouraging co-operative entrepreneurship and self-reliance among weavers.

Additionally, many weavers were forced to either sell their looms or set them aside due to lack of work during the pandemic. The government can offer them financial assistance to purchase new looms or restart old ones so that they can get back on their feet.

**Social security and Insurance:** Weavers feel that the government should start a *Bunkar* pension. This would help weavers live with dignity even after retirement.

Handloom weaving requires long and patient hours of work in various harmful postures and positions. Therefore, knee pain, joint pain and back ache are common among them. Moreover, the *Zardozi* '*Karigar*' often suffer from weakening eyesight. However, neither the '*Karkhandar*' nor the government have any health schemes for them.

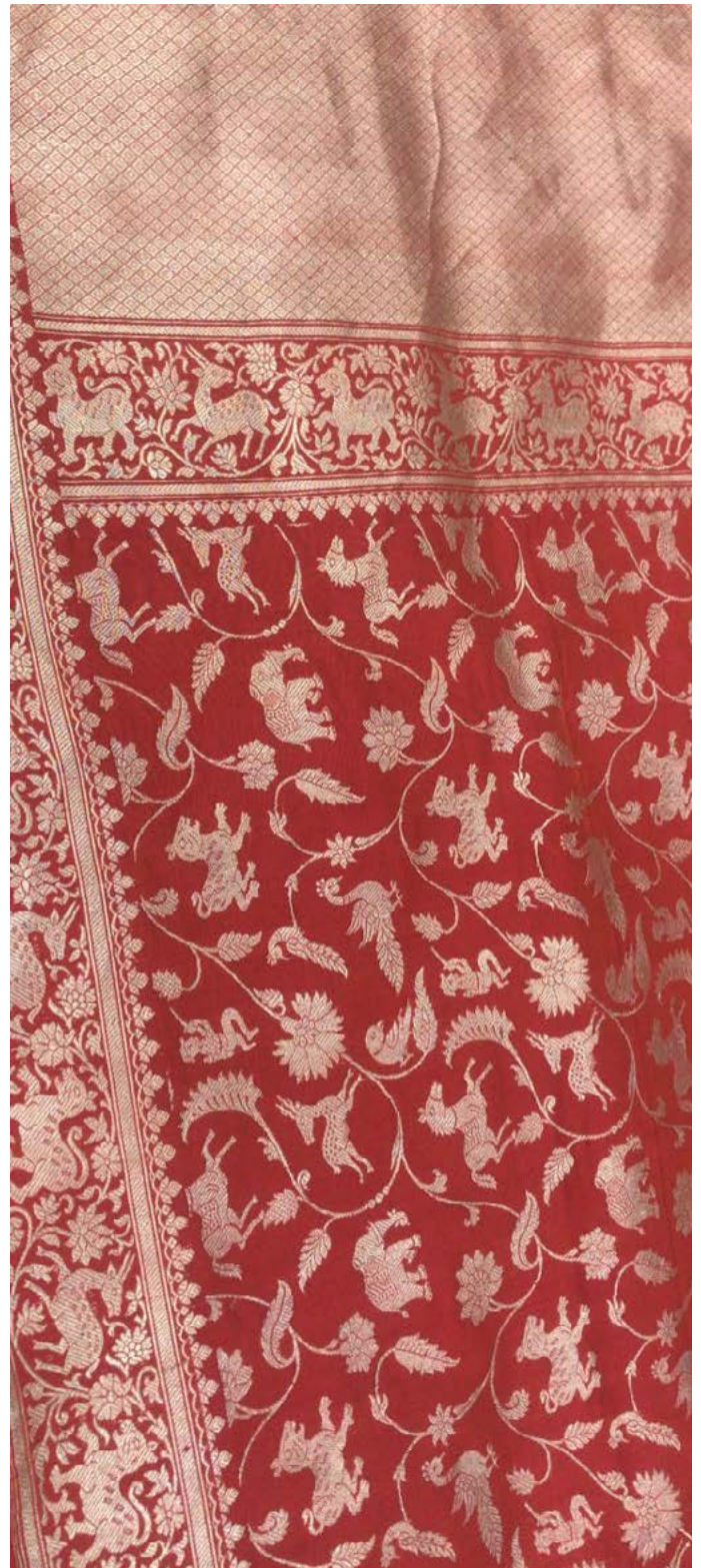
In 2009-10, the Government of India launched a Health Insurance Scheme for handloom weavers in collaboration with the ICICI Lombard. The same was discontinued after a few years. Therefore, there is a need for an effective insurance scheme for the weaver households given how the operation involves multiple members from each family.

**Policies:** Many weavers and small entrepreneurs in the weaving sector still rue the ill-conceived demonetisation and Goods and Services Tax (GST) policies of the government. It is this socio-economic class that bore the worst brunt of these two policies because even the limited wealth they had suddenly vanished. Weaving is a cash-driven economic activity where the weaver is paid immediately after the final

product is delivered. Absence of cash often translates into absence of food. When it comes to small entrepreneurs, GST payment due dates that often fall before receipt of payment from clients add greater strain on limited finances. This also affects how they pay the weavers working for them. These policies only serve to widen the gap between small and large entrepreneurs and only those who have large operations and showrooms survive due to economies of scale. Smaller entrepreneurs get wiped out.

**Hygiene and sanitation:** Many neighbourhoods where weaver families live suffer from poor hygiene, often due to poor sanitation facilities. Weavers therefore urge that the District Urban Development Agency/ District Rural Development Agency/Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs), may be made responsible to create basic amenities on health and hygiene, drinking water, lights, drains, etc., in such areas.

**Strict enforcement of the Handloom Reservation Act:** The Handlooms (Reservation of Articles for Production) Act, 1985 was enacted to protect handlooms from power looms and the mechanised sector. Under the Act, 11 textile articles are at present reserved exclusively for production on handlooms (with certain technical specifications). The Enforcement Offices of the offices of the Development Commissioner for Handlooms, Weavers Service Centres and State Governments/UTs are regularly inspecting Power looms and Mills to prevent violation of the provisions of the Act. But several unscrupulous producers often get away with selling power loom products as handlooms. The Act must therefore be implemented more stringently.







## RECOMMENDATIONS

The task of suggesting recommendations for an industry that has suffered shocks, which can only be termed as tectonic, over the last two decades, is extremely difficult. Yet after this comprehensive survey and relying on the advice of practitioners and experts who have either been part of this artisanal industry or close observers and therefore, experts, we have attempted to list a few.

### Central and State governments

- I. Increase budgetary allocation of the Central and State governments to this sector to reach the pre-2014 industry levels.
- II. Ensure that government micro-credit schemes reach artisans and weavers who are part of this industry as is also envisaged (see below in recommendations of the Amitabh Kundu Report)
- III. Reinstate the Mahatma Gandhi *Bunkar* Bima Yojana to ensure some social security for the weaver community.
- IV. Ensure that exercises like the Handloom Census and other Data Collection Exercises by the government are conducted by academics and statistical institutes equipped for the exercise.
- V. Ensure co-operative structures, with support and finance, to be created (Primary Weavers Co-Operatives at the village and taluka level) and Apex Weavers Co-operatives at the State level, something that can only happen with the requisite policy pushes required from the State and Central governments.
- VI. Ensure the revival and professional functioning of Handloom Development Corporations with an understanding of the Short Term and other Credit structure in the industry.
- VII. Employment generation with an emphasis on community participation and management, fair wage practices and dignified work needs to be the thrust and focus of

government policy, not the market. While the government is bending over backwards to facilitate mechanization and private players, it is simply not devoting the same energy or expertise in reviving this variegated artisanal industry that has a tremendous social, cultural and economic potential.

- VIII. Need for a National-Level Dialogue: It is also our considered opinion that there is a need to have a national level dialogue among those organisations and individuals who have been advocating the interests of the weavers for decades. Dastkar is one such example among many others.
- IX. The government should also take the initiative in calling a meeting of the different stakeholders wherein all sections are represented. Three classes or categories of people are yarn dealers, traders and bunker. These must be the sections whose Voices form the basis on which the Handloom and Textile policy of the country and states is framed.
- X. The Government must create an environment so that the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights 2011 are actually uncompromisingly implemented by Indian and international businesses that operate in this sector. Under this, the State has a duty to protect human rights against abuse by third parties, including business, through appropriate policies, legislation, regulations and adjudication; this would include the issue of dignity of work and labour; a dignified wage for all including the female artisan and weaver; social security for the worker and artisan when it comes to the weaving industry. This approach, obligation and duty to a principle of international understanding is sorely missing in the Policy Approach of the Government of India.



- XI. The Central Government should create public awareness of the fact that the creators of the *Banarasi Saree* & Brocade –are, ‘owners’ of this intellectual property. The weaver and artisans are completely unaware of this fact that the *Banarasi Saree* & Brocade registered in 2009, under Geographical Indication Handicrafts (<https://search.ipindia.gov.in/GIRPublic/Application/Details/237>) are the intellectual property of the Purvanchal crafts people. Creating large-scale awareness of this could further empower the weaving community and lessen it's exploitation by brands and corporations.
- XII. Tabling and Passing of the Prevention of Communal and Targeted Violence (Access to Justice and Reparations) Bill 2011 (commonly referred to as the Communal and Targeted Violence Bill) by Indian Parliament. (<https://sabrang.com/cc/archive/2011/nov11/index.html>)

## Businesses, Corporations, Traders, Brands

- A. Large corporations, Brands and Traders make substantial profits from the art and craft spun by the weaver who should be central to the trade. These establishments should follow and adhere to the United Nations Guiding Principles on Human Rights that were unanimously endorsed by the UN Human Rights Council in June 2011, that is, over a decade ago, have contributed, at least as accepted standards, both the duties of Member States and the responsibilities of companies to ensure that businesses operate with respect for human rights.
- B. Corporations, Brands and Traders must develop an understanding of human rights and adhere to various aspects of these in their business practices. The corporate responsibility to respect human rights, meaning to act with due diligence to avoid infringing on the rights of others and address adverse impacts with which they are involved; we see however in the detailed investigation available in this report/study that there was a complete breach of these Guidelines and minimum standards; during the despair caused by the Covid-19 Pandemic and Lockdown, the larger, national and international chains, businesses, corporations and brands completely abandoned any obligation to they key creators of the products that their businesses make profits from.
- C. The Weaver community needs greater access to effective remedy, both judicial and non-judicial, for victims of business-related human rights abuse.





## Recommendations as per Prof Amitabh Kundu Report

Post the Justice Rajinder Sachar Committee report that documented vast areas of discrimination against India's largest religious minority, Muslims, the Prof Amitabh Kundu Report (2014) assessed the extent to which the Sachar Committee's Recommendations were actually implemented<sup>1</sup>.

In light of that, this investigation deals in large measure with the particular conditions of a community within which there are SCs, OBCs and Muslims. Therefore, we think some of the following recommendations based on the Kundu Report can be adopted:

### Diversity Index, Equal Opportunity, Anti-Discrimination legislation

- i. The Sachar Committee had recommended implementation of a Diversity Index based incentive system, covering all citizens to promote equality and diversity in all spheres of social and economic development. An expert committee constituted for this purpose recommended the constitution of a Diversity Commission to oversee the incentivisation of diversity both in public and private domain, particularly in education institutions, employment establishments and housing societies.
- ii. This Committee recommends that the ambit of the Diversity Index should include spheres of education, employment, housing, healthcare, access to development schemes and various other sectors; and seek to provide remedies.

- iii. This Committee, in addition recommends formulation and enactment of a comprehensive Anti-Discrimination Legislation to prohibit discrimination based on disability, sex, caste, religion and other criteria. There is a need for such a comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation that

- recognises multiple, sometimes overlapping, grounds of identity along which discrimination takes place
- includes both State and non-State spheres in terms of discriminatory acts
- protects against discrimination in a wide range of fields

The legislation must provide a statutory definition of discrimination that specifies a legal threshold for recognising the many ways the latter manifests itself and provides legally mandated civil remedies.

- iv. These recommendations represent a paradigm shift in India's approach to equality. Moving beyond reservations, they use diversity promotion and anti-discrimination to achieve social justice. Reservations are only one of several tools to address widespread, systemic discrimination in a society. Diversity index and Anti-discrimination legislation together can help build a more equitable society and a deeper and more widespread notion of equality that go beyond group-specific quotas and accompanying quota politics. Yet, anti-discrimination legislation does not in any way seek to derail the existing right to reservation, and can run parallel to existing reservations. It will, however, be a positive paradigm shift in how India as a democracy seeks to institutionalise equality for a wide spectrum of its population.

- v. This Committee is of the view that this equity framework (promoting diversity and anti-discrimination) must be used to promote inclusion of all deprived social groups and communities and not be restricted to any one social group alone.
- vi. The Committee further recommends extensive application of the Diversity Index in resource allocation, implementation of policies and programmes of the government and functioning of the institutions. This would help initiate a new process and trend in the country, enabling the idea of diversity taking root in the minds of the decision makers at all levels. The Committee proposes extending the incentive framework for promoting diversity to all public and private sector institutions and building public awareness on this. This would go a long way in taking the country to a scenario when the manifestation of diversity becomes a matter of celebration rather than a cause for social turmoil and political anxiety.

Besides there are many other sections that have important recommendations such as:

- Section B - Equity in Employment and Wellbeing
- Section C - Access to Housing and Basic Amenities
- Section D - Access to Health
- Section E - Access to Education that includes a special proviso for OBC Muslims
- Section F - Schemes and Programmes: Structure, Implementation & Monitoring

Also - a) Prime Minister's New 15 Point Programme for the Welfare of Minorities that includes special emphasis for Muslim women and girls, needs to be applied and implemented with reference to the Eastern UP (Purvanchal) artisanal weaving industry.

## CALL FOR A NATIONAL AND REGIONAL CAMPAIGN

The issues raised through this report, from the detailed on-ground survey and in the concluding observations and recommendations make for the urgent need for a sustainable and concerted national and regional campaign. This campaign needs to be multifaceted and multi-dimensional aimed at:

- Ensuring a sustained revival of this industry and craft so closely linked to rural-urban livelihoods and the cultural heritage of India
- Democratic engagement before policy, economic and business practices are conceived, emerge or are promoted by governments, central and state
- Social Security Schemes for different levels of the craftsman, artisan and weaver with a special emphasis on women
- Reaching out to Corporations and Businesses to incorporate a component of social responsibility and human rights when dealing with the creators of products
- Ensuring that the elected representatives also respond to the campaign demands in this report
- All Indians, consumers of these products and others, should get involved to raise their voice and ensure that this crucial heritage industry is saved



## CASE STUDIES

### Weavers forced to become tea sellers!

The once thriving *Banarasi* weaving industry has come to a grinding halt in wake of the Covid-19 induced national Lockdown. But despite the heritage status accorded to the traditional handloom industry that has been a part of Varanasi's culture for more than a millennium, *Banarasi* weavers are struggling to make ends meet, mainly due to government apathy. Last October, when we started our fact-finding mission, our team came across this group of weavers who are now forced to sell tea!

"There is no market, nobody has money. It is this tea business that is just about keeping us afloat," Mohammad Ziauddin of Bajardeeha Varanasi, told our team when we met him last year on October 30, explaining the reason behind converting a *Saree* shop into a tea shop.

The irony that this man was forced to sell tea in Varanasi, the constituency of Prime Minister Narendra Modi who often recalls fond memories of having sold tea at a railway station, is not lost on anyone.

"We were able to earn rupees 15-20 thousand before the Lockdown," Ziauddin reminisced about the pre-Lockdown period. But now things are very different. "All of us who worked in weaving are out of work. We don't know when work will resume, right now everything is shut, there's just no work, no customer... Weavers are now forced to work as labourers," he said.

"We are 12 people at home. The rest still weave, they get work for two days, but there no sign of work for the other four days," says Ziauddin, adding, "If the market emerges again, we might get back to work otherwise, we will continue with this (tea shop)."

Nadeem\*, a friend of Ziauddin and co-owner of the operation explains, "The subsidy for power looms has also been taken away. Now, they are charging 12 rupees for one unit!" He asks helplessly, "How will people be able to pay for that?" But that's not all, electricity is being dis-

connected due to non-payment of dues, further pushing the weaving units and their employees into economic despair. Unemployment is on the rise.

"There is no weaving work. We are not doing anything," says Samar\* a young former weaver and employee of the *Saree* weaving unit-turned tea shop, adding, "Somehow we are able to earn enough to feed ourselves." Worried about the future he says, "We get only half the wages, this is our livelihood, we do not know what else to do."

\*Some names have been changed to protect identities on request.

This story was first published on [cjp.org.in](https://cjp.org.in) in March 2021 and may be read here:

<https://cjp.org.in/Lockdown-impact-purvanchal-weavers-forced-to-become-tea-sellers/>



## Weaver family drowning in debt

The traditional *Banarasi* weaving industry in India's Purvanchal region is withering, and people engaged in the trade are struggling financially. Entire families have been pushed into poverty, girls are suffering in the absence of online education as schools are shut.

Our team came across 18-year-old Amina whose family of ten in Mubarakpur, is struggling to get back on their feet financially after the Lockdown.

"Three family members work on each of our two looms," says Amina, who hails from a family of weavers. Amina is one of six sisters and also has two brothers. They all live with their parents. They own one handloom traditionally called a 'karga' and one power loom, both are operated only by members of their family. Three sisters work exclusively on the handloom.

"The material is supplied by the people for whom we weave *Sarees*, we do the weaving and earn '*Mazdoori*' from it," explains Amina.

Amina says, "We work in shifts from 5 AM to 2 PM, then 3 PM to 6 PM, and finally from 8 PM to 11 PM." This comes to a total of 15 hours a day that the family operates the looms. "Our feet, backs and hands ache from working till 11 PM each day," says the 18-year-old explaining all this only earns them a meagre Rs. 2,000/- for ten to fifteen days spent on weaving one *Saree*! "They often withhold the wages, because of a loan we took two years ago for building our house," adds Amina, shedding further light on her family's financial distress.

"When the Lockdown started, all work suddenly came to a standstill. My father and brothers started selling pakodas when there was no weaving work," says Amina.

Amina's father says, "The government gave us rice and wheat during the Lockdown, but it isn't enough to sustain us. There are other expenses that forced us to borrow from relatives and neighbours, who now refuse to lend any more money."

The impoverished family is deep in debt.

"During the Lockdown we were forced to borrow around one lakh rupees. We opened a Jan-Dhan account, but no money has been received yet," says Amina's father. "We also got two Bunkar cards, costing 30 rupees each, we didn't have money for more," he laments. It is noteworthy that the Bunkar card is issued free of cost.

But that's not all, the family is also deeply concerned about Amina's sister Mariana's education. Mariana is a 9<sup>th</sup> standard student, but has been missing out on studies as schools are shut and there is no online education. "We have one mobile phone for everyone in the household, and everyone, including us girls, use it. But, I can't study because there are no online classes," says Mariana.

The family has suffered another huge financial loss during the pandemic. "The house was submerged in water around the time of Eid and all the machines had to be built again, we didn't employ anybody else for the work but it still cost us," says Amina. "An expense of fifty thousand," added her father. Thankfully, their electricity is under a special scheme for power loom operators, though they have been unable to pay their bills lately.

Her mother sounds heartbroken as she says, "All our jewelry got sold too, during the pandemic. Three pieces of jewellery: a *bala* and two *jhalas* were sold off for a mere Rs 50,000 to a goldsmith."

Concerned about their eldest daughter Amina's wedding, her father says, "Families approach us asking for Amina's hand in marriage, but we don't have the money right now, with the jewelry sold too, we tell them it will take two years, but people refuse."

This story was first published on [cjp.org.in](https://cjp.org.in) in March 2021 and may be read here:

<https://cjp.org.in/weaver-family-drowning-in-debt-girl-childs-education-in-limbo/>



## Crushing debt, mounting bills

In the by-lanes of Purana Gorakhnath locality of Gorakhpur, we came across Shahjehan, who was carrying mounds of yarn on his bicycle. His business has failed, family is in debt and the punishing electricity bills just rub salt into his wounds.

"I am taking this yarn to be put on spindles, so that we can use it on power looms," Shahjehan tells us. "It is a cotton-roto mix, we use the thread to manufacture bedsheets," he says. Shahjehan owns two power looms, but the father of seven is now struggling in wake of the Lockdown and the subsequent economic misery.

"Business has come to a standstill. I can only run my business if my client pays me, but he can't because he is making no sales," says Shahjehan. His children have also been rendered unemployed. "I am deep in debt. I used to borrow Rs 500 to Rs 1,000 depending on the need. So far, I have borrowed a total of Rs 35,000 from my relatives and the *Mahajan* (local money lender). I fear I might not be able to repay my debts," he says.

Shahjehan's list of woes is long, "The *Mahajan* (local money lender) will no longer lend to me, there's barely enough to eat, we make about Rs 200 in a day and the electricity bill keeps mounting!"

He says he has a ration card and has been getting some free grains from the government, but no monetary assistance. For water, he has a borewell installed in his home. His biggest concern though is paying his electricity bill. "Whether or not I have enough work to put both my power looms to use, I have to pay electricity charges," says Shahjehan.

The spectre of business failure looming large, Shahjehan's last resort is bleak for a resident of Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's former constituency. "If no more work comes, we will be forced to take up '*Mazdoori*' (daily-wage manual labour)," says Shahjehan resigned to his fate.

This story was first published on [cjp.org.in](https://cjp.org.in) in March 2021, and may be read here:

<https://cjp.org.in/crushing-debt-mounting-bills-a-weavers-lament/>





## A Zardozi artisan vows to never teach his children his craft

In November 2020, while conducting our fact-finding mission in the Koila Bazar locality of Chuhatta in Varanasi, we came across Mur-taza Hussain, a *Zardozi* artisan. The Lockdown has hit him hard. His future is uncertain, but he doesn't want his children to suffer the same fate.

"I will never teach them this work," he says, his voice equal parts anger and hopelessness. "Never," he then reiterates quietly, as if making a silent promise to himself. He then breaks into tears.

"A friend of mine died, because he couldn't afford medical treatment due to financial distress. His name was Pappu. He had three children," says Hussain wiping away his tears. It is noteworthy that Pappu died even before the Lockdown, as his earnings from *Zardozi* work weren't enough to pay his medical bills.

This is true of many artisans we came across during our fact-finding mission. They were already in dire financial straits well before the pandemic struck. A lot of this is due to several policy decisions taken by the government that have had an adverse impact on their ability to earn a living. The economic upheaval brought about by the Lockdown was just the final nail in the coffin.

Hussain has been a *Zardozi* artisan for over 25 years and there are roughly 80 people who still do the kind of intricate *Zardozi* work that he does. His friends and fellow *Zardozi* artisans are all in agreement with him about training their children in their craft.

"You cannot earn a living or support a family with this line of work," they say, adding, "We don't want our children to take up this work, as there is no future in this work."

"Even if someone tells us they want to teach their children their craft, we talk them out of it," says Hussain.

At the heart of this disaffection lies a disillusionment born of hardships experienced during the Lockdown. Hussain works eight to ten hours a day, producing intricate work that requires skill and precision, but earns as little as Rs 150 to Rs 180 a day, sometimes even less. This is barely enough to make ends meet!

"*Bunkars* (weavers) got Bunkar cards and subsidized electricity. They use it to power other appliances in their homes," alleged one of Hussain's livid co-workers. He asks, "What did *Shilpis* (artisans) get?"

He says, several NGOs have done the rounds and yet artisans have not received a single penny in financial aid. "We will never beg, we are skilled artisans," says Hussain's colleague, but trails off saying, "As long as we have our eyesight, we will work. But once that is gone, it's the end of this work for us."

This story was first published on [cjp.org.in](https://cjp.org.in) in March 2021 and may be read here:

<https://cjp.org.in/Lockdown-impact-a-Zardozi-artisan-vows-to-never-teach-his-children-his-craft/>





## Lungi weavers left in the lurch

CJP's fact-finding team studying the impact of the Lockdown on weavers in Uttar Pradesh's Purvanchal region, found itself in Shahpur, Azamgarh in November 2020. Here, we came across Ahmed Ansari, who weaves and sells lungis or traditional waist cloth. He told us how the increasing cost of raw materials and electricity charges as well as low sales prices had caused his business to incur heavy losses... so much so that he had to borrow money to feed his family.

"I have been in this business since 1979-80," says Ahmed Ansari as he shows us around his *Karkhana* (factory) that appears to be in shambles with exposed brick barely held in place by crumbling cement. "We haven't been able to carry out repair work as our business has been operating at a loss," explains Ansari.

### Increasing input cost, competition pose a challenge

"Before the Lockdown, we used to get the cloth material for Rs 300-350 per kg. Now it is a whopping Rs 1,200-1,250. Add to that colouring charges of Rs 400-500 per kg," he says, adding that electricity charges have also increased. "Earlier, it came to Rs 75 per loom, but now the government wants to hike the tariff," he says. At the time of our visit a huge protest was going on in the region against the proposed hike in electricity tariffs.

Ansari's son Ashfaq also joined us. The family operates the factory that has four power looms. They also have a hired worker who works on a daily wage basis. "Weavers are not only struggling due to high input costs like cost of raw material, electricity, colouring, wages, transportation etc., but also because of competition. Shopkeepers prefer selling readymade lungis that are colourful and come in more varieties. There are lungis coming in from Chennai. Those sell for Rs 250-300, while ours make Rs 150 a piece," he told us.

## Burden of debt

"During the Lockdown, everything came to a grinding halt. We had to borrow money from friends and family members. We couldn't even celebrate Eid properly. Luckily, the stock that was left over when things shut down because of the Lockdown, got sold off during *Ramzan*," says Ansari. He says he had to borrow Rs 40,000-50,000 mostly to feed his family.

The family also spent Rs 1,000 per power loom to oil, repair and restart the machines. Previously they used to buy material from Mau, but now Ansari's nephew gets it from Khalilabad. "We have our own shop, and our lungis are also sold in other shops," says Ashfaq. "It takes one and a half hours to make a two-meter lungi, but that is only if we get uninterrupted power supply. That is rarely the case," says Ansari.

"I don't see a great future ahead if the situation continues to be like this. Now let's see what happens to the Light Strike which is going on," says Ansari referring to the weavers' protest against the hike in electricity tariffs. "If our demands get fulfilled, then we can easily run our business. Otherwise, we will have to shut down the factory," he says, adding, "Now, I am too old to do any other work, perhaps my children will do something."



## Impact on family

“I have three grandsons and a granddaughter. My youngest grandson used to go to a *Madrasa*, but now we have enrolled him in school. The granddaughter is way too young right now,” says Ansari. The education of the children was hampered. “They are too young to attend online classes,” explains Ansari. Moreover, given how the electricity supply itself is erratic, one wonders if they have proper access to wifi internet or internet access over mobile phones that also need electricity for charging.

Ashfaq is worried about his children’s future. “I have to think about my age when I look for a salaried job. But I won’t teach my children our traditional craft. My father worked in this *Karkhana* all his life. I have also worked here. But we barely make ends meet. We were never able to save enough to even buy a small plot of land,” he laments.

This story was first published on [cjp.org.in](https://cjp.org.in) in September 2021 and may be read here:

<https://cjp.org.in/Lockdown-impact-lungi-weavers-left-in-the-lurch/>





## Unemployed fathers, abused mothers and daughters deprived of education

As part of CJP's fact-finding mission in Uttar Pradesh's Purvanchal region, we held a meeting with some young girls from weaver families in Saraiya in December 2020. They told us that after failing to find work the men in their homes would often vent their frustration by getting physically violent with the women. Some of the girls were practically starving, surviving on only one meal a day.

Chandni, a young teenager, wiped away tears and told our team, "My Abbu (father) doesn't have a job and stays at home. If my mother says something, he hits her." She broke into fresh tears.

The pandemic has hit the weaving community hard, but the women of the community harder, as they have become virtual punching bags for their frustrated menfolk. During our fact-finding mission we found that many women who would also otherwise contribute to the household income by engaging in allied activities like spool threading, polishing *Sarees* or embroidery work, we also left without any source of income. This left them vulnerable.

Education of girls has also been impacted. Chandni, who lives with her parents and two brothers, is enrolled in school, but it is shut due to the pandemic. "I can manage school with work," she asserts. The only silver-lining in her life, otherwise overcast with challenges, is that she had a meal today. Meanwhile, Muskaan, another young teen who was baby-sitting a young sibling told us, "I was exempt from paying school fees till class five, but now if I want to go to school my family has to pay."

Another young girl shed light on the financial state of families saying, "Are we going to make *Sarees* or spend the 10 odd rupees we make on household needs? Our fathers are unemployed, a private school costs Rs 30 per month," she says, asking, "Are we to run our households or pay school fees?"

Her father too is unemployed. "When my mother insists, he goes and sometimes finds work helping load and unload goods. He never makes more than 10-20 rupees," she says. "What do you think we can afford with that income? We survive on *chutney* and rice," she says.

It is noteworthy, that this meeting took place on December 25, 2020 when the Lockdown was somewhat relaxed in the area. However, even after all those months of Lockdown and despite announcements of critical aid for needy families, people were struggling to put food on the table. It appears that many of the schemes announced by the government to provide rations and other essentials did not reach the people who needed it the most.

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## Religion-based discrimination rampant in Varanasi?

CJP's fact finding mission analysing the plight of workers from the weaving industry and allied activities, in face of the Covid induced Lockdown, has also come across several allegations of religion-based discrimination, even amidst a deadly pandemic. On November 29, 2020, our team came across Imtiaz\*, an *Aari* worker who was forced to run a coffee stand due to absence of *Aari* work. He was one of the people who made a series of serious allegations against the authorities for targeting people from the minority community in different ways.

"I was on my way from Babatpur airport after the Lockdown, when a few uniformed policemen stopped me and asked if I was a Hindu or a Muslim," recalled Imtiaz. "When I said I was Muslim, they asked me to sit in their vehicle to be taken to a quarantine facility. They let me go after an hour and a half, after much pleading. All this while, anyone who identified as Hindu, was allowed to continue their journey," he said.

Imtiaz also alleged that while police personnel often forced Muslim-owned shops to down shutters. "The shops of Hindus are allowed to stay open in this area, but shops of Muslims remain shut," he told our team. He further said, that discrimination was also practiced by the sanitation department in deciding frequency of cleaning neighbourhoods based on religion of inhabitants. "While they ensure Hindu neighbourhoods are cleaned daily *subah-shaam*, Muslim neighbourhoods only get cleaned when some dignitary is expected to visit," alleged Imtiaz.

Imtiaz is an *Aari* worker, an artisan skilled in a craft associated with the weaving industry. "Before the Lockdown, I had so much work that I had to hire people. There were 40-42 people under me in my own factory. While each *Kari-gar* was paid Rs 10,000 to Rs 12,000, I made around Rs 20,000 to Rs 22,000, after all expenses." His former employees are now forced to beg for a living. "Earlier, one could make at least Rs 350 per day, now they struggle to get

even Rs 150 to at least arrange for dal-chawal," he said.

But, after the Lockdown, work came to a grinding halt. Orders stopped coming and savings dried up. The women in his family used to take tuitions and made about Rs 1,500, but even that income source dried up after the Lockdown. He had gone to Mumbai just before the Lockdown and could only return when the first trains started plying. But he met with an accident shortly after returning, and broke an arm and a leg. The medical expenses took a toll on his dwindling finances.

But that didn't hurt as much as his children being forced to drop out of school. "They were studying, but had to give up after appearing for standard ten exams," said Imtiaz between sobs.

"There are elderly women in the family, but despite opening an account and completing all paperwork, they have not received a single rupee in pension," he further informed our team.

Imtiaz is deep in debt and that led him to open a coffee stand around four months before we met him. "I borrowed from friends and family. I owe them around Rs 60,000 to Rs 65,000. But I only make about Rs 300 from this coffee shop every day," he told us.

\*Name changed to protect identity.

This story was first published on [cjp.org.in](https://cjp.org.in) and may be read here:

<https://cjp.org.in/Lockdown-impact-religion-based-discrimination-rampant-in-varanasi/>

## “Those who once greeted me with ‘Salaam’, don’t even talk to me anymore”

During our fact-finding mission in Purvanchal, we came across several instances of unemployed families forced to the brink of starvation. In December 2020, we met Mohammed Shoeb, an elderly gentleman from Revri Talab in Madanpura, who had not eaten a single morsel of food that day.

“Food wasn’t cooked in our kitchen today,” says 65-year-old Mohammed Shoeb, sitting in the very shop he had purchased hoping to expand his business before the Covid-19 pandemic hit. Now the property is a sunken investment, as the *Sarees* that he used to weave, have no takers anymore.

“I still have unsold stock worth Rs 50,000/-, but now I fear I will have to end up selling them at scrap value,” he says utterly dejected. He hadn’t even been able to open the shop, when the Lockdown was announced and his dreams came crashing.

“We had 12 looms,” he recalls his heydays, “but now all are shut. The workers have all taken up other jobs. Some sell vegetables, some are drivers, some work as daily wage labourers.”

While the women of the household don’t work on the looms, they engage in allied activities like ‘*Nari*’ and ‘*Banda*’ that are essential before work begins on the loom. There are 15 people in his family, including six school-going children. They used to go to a private school, but haven’t been able to attend online classes ever since the pandemic struck.

Mohammed Shoeb has an Aadhaar card, a voter ID, a yellow ration card and even a zero-balance Jan-Dhan account, but says he did not receive any assistance from the government. “I did not get a single paisa,” he says, adding, “The free wheat we got twice was of such a poor quality that it was inedible... Not even worth the effort of grinding it!”

Shoeb is also neck-deep in debt. “I have borrowed over Rs 2,50,000, including Rs 75,000 from him,” he says pointing to a man stand-

ing next to him, who, it appears, had come to collect his debt. “I owe money to Mubarak, the shop owner. I owe money to the vegetable vendor,” he says.

The debt has also impacted his relationships with people. “Earlier people would say ‘*Salaam*’, check in on me to see how I was doing. But now that I’m in debt, no one cares enough to even ask how I’m doing,” he says. The sudden economic misfortune has taken a heavy toll on him as is evident in the manner in which an anxious Shoeb repeatedly asks, “How will I repay them? When will I have money?”

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## Filled forms, have Bunkar Card, yet got no help from gov't

During our fact-finding mission in the Purvanchal region of Uttar Pradesh, we came across Riaz Ul Haq, a weaver from the Kareemuddin Pusatti neighbourhood in Ghosi, Mau. When we met him in November 2020, he said that despite having a Bunkar card and filling various forms for help under the weaver assistance scheme, he got nothing.

"This area is inhabited predominantly by Muslim weavers. My entire family, including women, are involved in the business. Women do the work of '*Nari bharna*' or threading the spool along with other allied activities," says Riyazul Haq, who lives with his joint family of ten people. "My family has always lived here. My father Abdul Samad Dalal, and grandfather Inamul Haq used to add '*Satti*' here," he says, tracing his roots.

Haq, a middle-aged-man, is a weaver who owns and operates power looms. Before the pandemic, there was enough work, and he had even hired loom operators from other communities. "But after the Lockdown, work came to a grinding halt. I could not afford to keep workers any more. Those who had little children, were forced to go out and engage in daily wage labour," he says. "Some people who could help their workers gave Rs 1,000 or Rs 500 if they could. But most people are in debt," he says.

Help from government authorities is also not forthcoming. "I got a Bunkar card made by paying Rs 100, and even filled out forms under the weavers' assistance scheme. Yet, I haven't received a single penny," he says. He has a *Jan Dhan* account but the money received in it was also a paltry sum. "I got Rs 500, thrice. They are just fooling us all with their schemes," says an exasperated Haq. The Bunkar and Shilpi cards were introduced as a part of a government scheme to extend economic support to weavers and traditional artisans in the state. However, the implementation of the financial assistance scheme has been sporadic, with many eligible families still deprived of benefits.

It has been difficult to get orders, and the price that their work fetches is also miniscule. "One *Saree* that is 5.5 or 6 meters long, is woven for Rs 30-35. So, if we weave five *Sarees* in a day, depending on availability of electricity, the income is Rs 150 to Rs 175," he shares. "Someone using better quality material could fetch Rs 200 to Rs 250 a day," says Haq. Compare this to his heydays, when one machine could generate income worth Rs 35,000 to Rs 40,000 per month. "It is difficult to find buyers and the government does not buy from us. Even the subsidy of Rs 72 per loom has been stopped. Power supply has become expensive and erratic," he laments.

Other facilities in the neighbourhood are also poor. "There is a government *Madrassa*, and a primary school. But no inter-college or Medical College," he says, adding, "The nearest government hospital is three kilometers away."

The Muslim community has also faced the brunt of the communally polarising reportage of the *Tablighi Jamaat* incident. "The way the media reported it, instilled fear in the hearts of people. Many were so afraid that they were reluctant to step out of their homes," recalls Haq.

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