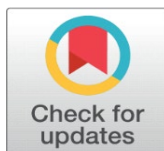


# COVID-19 AND ITS IMPACT ON TRADITIONAL TEXTILE INDUSTRIES AND ARTISAN WEAVING COMMUNITIES

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## ABSTRACT

Varanasi is its textile industry which shows the true colors of unity among different communities. The Varanasi is known for its “BANARASI SILK” all across the globe, and remains intact in terms of fashion and culture. Evidently most of the weaving work is done by the Muslim communities in all over the place but it is majorly sold by the Hindus for the different purposes such as business and marriages and numerous rituals and daily life purposes. The study of Sarai Mohana village in order to study the impacts of the covid19 on the traditional weaving industry was the most appropriate way because it is the “village of weavers” and hence the best of cause-and-effect relationship can be derived from here and it can provide us with best possible results of the study. The paper tries to represent the different sections of the weaving community, both handloom and power looms and allied workers. The women of the weaving community are an important voice considering they are the backbone though invisible and often unrecognized as they face discrimination on wage grounds and social status as far as weaving work is concerned and during the lockdown they were the worst sufferers financially as well as socially.

**Keywords:** Banarasi Silk, Traditional, Discrimination

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The old city of Varanasi is located on the confluence of river VARUNA and ASSI. It had been the center of human civilization since the most ancient beyond known to man. It is also known as “Kashi” which holds a religious spiritual and cultural value to the place and hence other factors such as the local lifestyle and practices adds more variation and sense of importance to the place. It has a significant Hindu population and mix of Muslims and other religious faiths. More over Varanasi offers a composite culture and justifies the Indian belief of “UNITY IN DIVERSITY”.

The most striking feature of Varanasi is its textile industry which shows the true colors of unity among different communities. The Varanasi is known for its “BANARASI SILK” all across the globe, and remains intact in terms of fashion and culture. Evidently most of the weaving work is done by the Muslim communities in all over the place but it is majorly sold by the Hindus for the different purposes such as business and marriages and numerous rituals and daily life purposes. The banarasi silk is the unifying agent for both the communities and hence the amalgamation and cooperation

in work has led the banarasi silk to win the geographical indication tag. The banarasi silk is the identity of the Kashi and hence becomes more important in the terms of economy and livelihood aspects of people. The study of Sarai Mohana village in order to study the impacts of the covid19 on the traditional weaving industry was the most appropriate way because it is the “village of weavers” and hence the best of cause-and-effect relationship can be derived from here and it can provide us with best possible results of the study. The covid 19 has poorly effected the lower income groups and the weavers are no exception, the study becomes even more important as it is not only the employment and economy that got affected but the culture of centuries is on stake and hence a study becomes non-negotiable and equally important for the rescue from the crisis.

## 1.1. OBJECTIVES

Keeping the above facts in mind the present paper aims at analyzing the

- To study the economic and social impacts of covid-19 in different aspects of same field.
- Highlight the negative consequences and analyzing the steps taken by the government for the cause
- Studying the suggestions and predicting ways of upliftment.

## 2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This is a fact-finding study hence the questionnaire is designed in such a way that it covers the socio-economic status of the weaving communities and impacts of the pandemic as the decisive factor in shaping up of the contemporary scenario.

The mobile phones were also used as the method to record the information in terms of photographs, and google forms for utmost ease. The nature of sampling is purposive as well as random which is based on the design of the study.

## 3. ANALYSIS OF ECONOMIC CONDITIONS IN STUDY AREA

**Caste of the respondent:** The caste of the respondent is generally enquired to study the variation in the social status within the society and hence it was found that 56% the major portion consists of the OBCs and another major percentage was scheduled caste involved in the weaving industry actively.

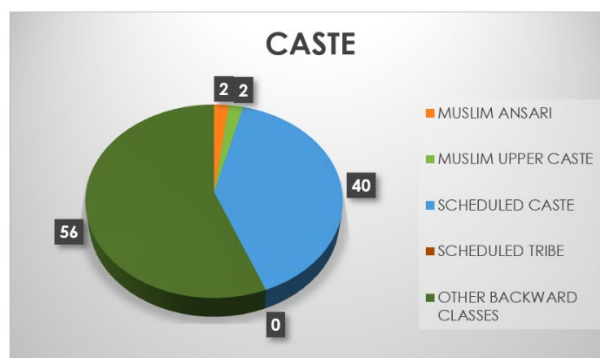


CHART- 4 SOURCE: FIELD SURVEY 2023

**Education Qualification:** The education qualification plays an important role in shapening of the society. It is so disappointing that majorly 62% of the respondents were illiterate which puts the whole system in a great question about the overall development of the people in the study area. The rest major proportion 24% people could sign their names and read and write in hindi or urdu. Most of the women respondents were completely illiterate and male respondents who could sign their names and write were very frequent as compared to the women in the study area. This should be the major area of the development because no other development like employment or subsidy would flourish without providing the people with basic literacy level and skill development.

**Status of looms before lockdown:** The study majorly concerned the impacts of the pandemic so the emphasis was given on the ownership of the looms before lockdown and after lockdown and here it is very much visible that 90% of

the weavers only work in the looms but they have no ownership. Only 7% of the weavers had their own establishments. Hence the preconception of the weaver community as a marginalized community stands true according to the intensive study of the area.

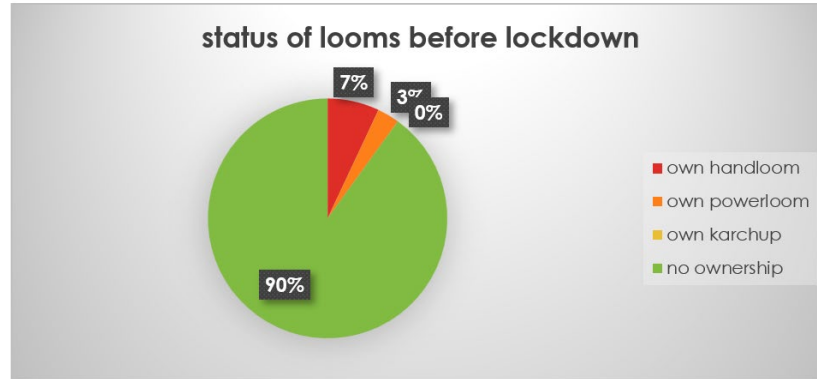


CHART-8 SOURCE: FIELD SURVEY 2023

**Status of looms after lockdown:** The analysis shows the slight decline in the ownership as it fell considerably and a very few people or houses could bear the brunt of pandemic. The already backward weaver community became more economically vulnerable.

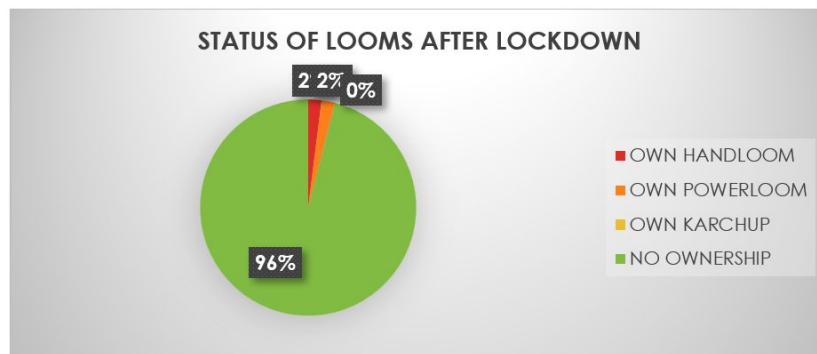


CHART-9 SOURCE: FIELD SURVEY 2023

#### 4. STATUS OF HANDLOOM BEFORE LOCKDOWN

Handloom is a very craft demanding sector and during the study it was found that 90% of the handloom houses were running before the lockdown which is how the village earns the title of “weaver’s village”. A few were shut down due to different other causes and 8% respondents had no idea of the status of handloom.

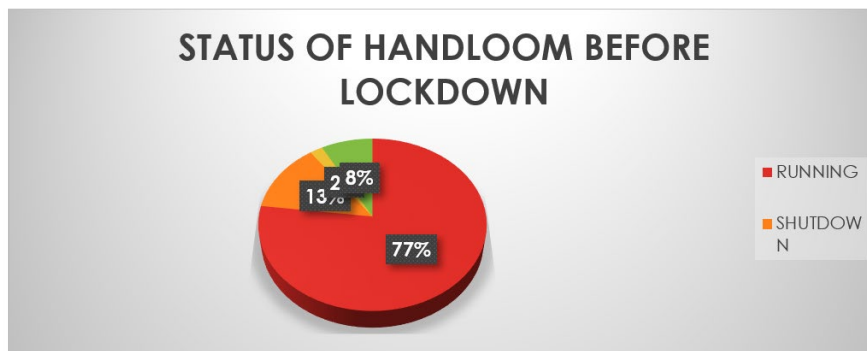


CHART- 10 SOURCE: FIELD SURVEY 2023

**Status of handloom after lockdown:** The status of handloom is quite alarming in the recognizable rate as 33% of them saw a sharp decline due to long term lockdown. The survival was quite a task during that and hence people moved to other jobs with ease and immediate payment norms like daily wage labor and vegetable vendors. 8% of the looms were sold out and got merged to the bigger establishments who survived the lockdown.

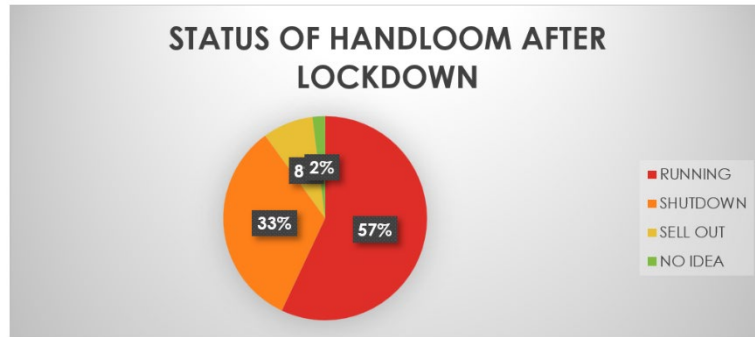


CHART-11 SOURCE: FIELD SURVEY 2023

**Status of power loom before lockdown:** There are a very few power loom establishments in sarai mohana village because customers majorly like the hand woven sarees which are of high value and craft. Almost all the power looms were working in study area before the lockdown and it used to produce many sarees on reasonable prices according to the machine work.

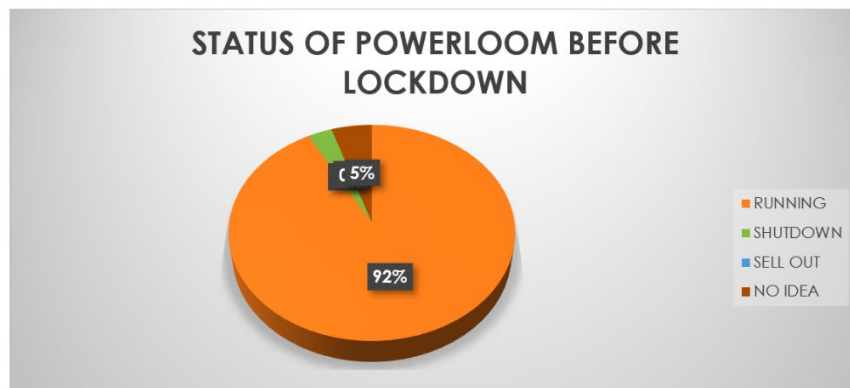


CHART- 12 SOURCE: FIELD SURVEY 2023

**Status of power loom after lockdown:** Most of the power loom was still working even after the lockdown and a few were sold and merged with the bigger ones. Hence there is no major shift in this process considering the demand of the jobs were quite high and even after lockdown the power loom sectors were still blooming.

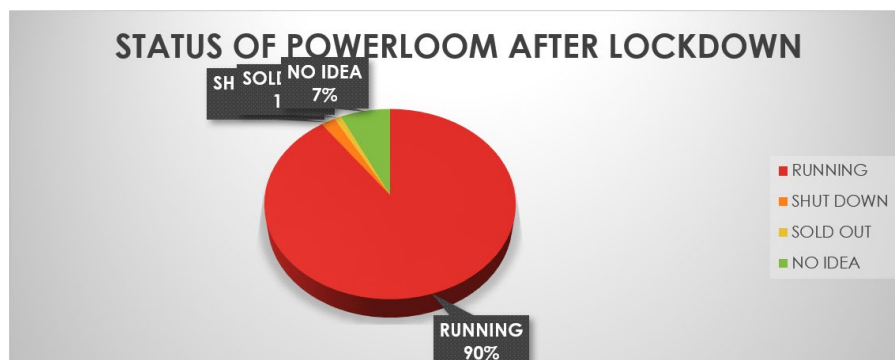


CHART- 13 SOURCE: FIELD SURVEY 2023

## 5. WORK BEFORE LOCKDOWN

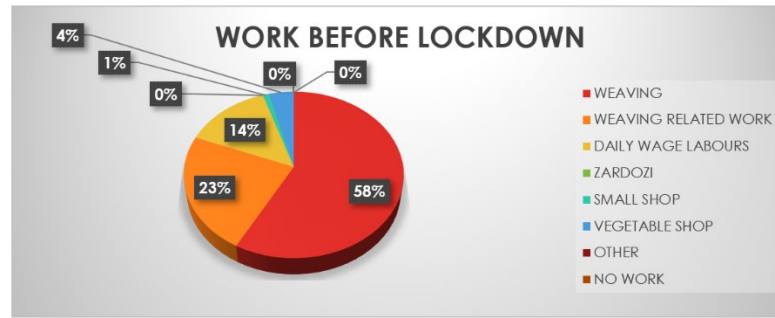


CHART-15 SOURCE: FIELD SURVEY 2023

Most of the respondents were indulged in weaving work before the lockdown and another major of 23% was involved in weaving related work, which justifies its weaver's village title. 14% of the respondents were involved in daily wage work for more immediate source of income. The economic condition seems to be poor as these are not high paid works and they barely could keep the pot boiling.

**Work after lockdown:** The weaving work was severely affected after the lockdown as more people shifted to daily wage work due to sharp decline in demand of the Banarasi sarees and 19% of the people still involved in weaving related work which could be done from their own homes considering the lockdown guidelines. The rest 6% took the chance and established new business of small shops and few opted for vegetable selling.

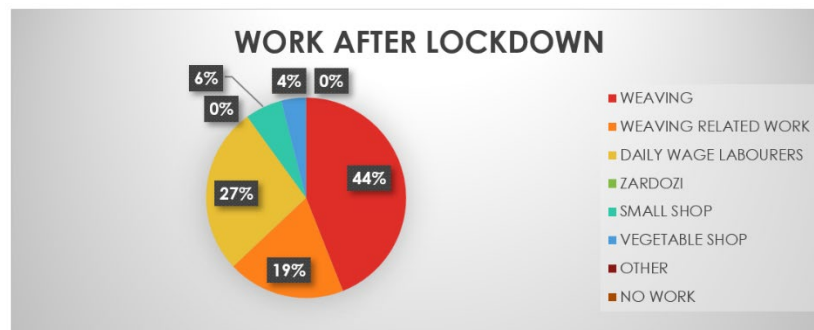


CHART- 16 SOURCE: FIELD SURVEY 2023

**Working hours before lockdown:** The working hours ranged from 6-9 hours before lockdown which is a fairly good amount of time in work and 18% worked for 9-12 hours to meet their needs so over all the working hours were acceptable and it was decided by the weaver himself as he had no fixed hours of work every day but a deadline to meet.

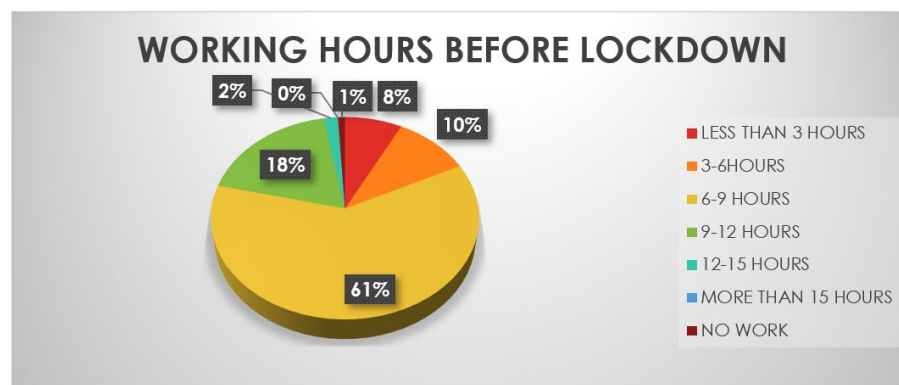


CHART- 17 SOURCE: FIELD SURVEY 2023

**Working hours after lockdown:** The average working hours also changed after the pandemic it shifted from 6-9 hours average to 9-12 hours as respondents started taking more work due to increase in demand and more work was also required to pay off the debts taken due to the lockdown. A few more economically backward section were found working 12-15 hours to make the ends meet.

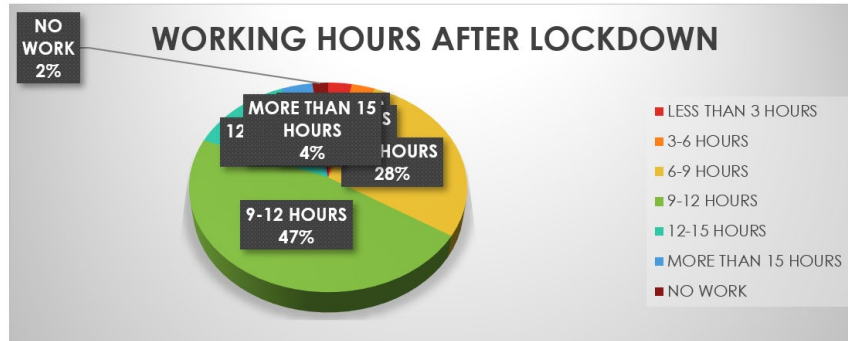


CHART-18 SOURCE: FIELD SURVEY 2023

**Income per month before lockdown:** The weavers used to earn 11000-13000 on average before lockdown and they have at least 2-3 working members in the family so it was sufficient for their survival. And another major 33% earned between 7001-9000 per month and they were able to survive too. There were very few respondents who earned less than 5 thousand rupees.

**Income per month after lockdown:** After lockdown, the average income shifted from 11000-13000 to 5000-7000 which is a sharp decline in the income of already marginalized group of people. The other 19% were earning 7000-9000. The income of the people fell in different stages according to their previous income patterns.

**Condition of women in the weaving industry:** This question was designed to analyze the status and condition of the women in the weaving industry in terms of pay and it was so shocking to find out that according to 93% respondents the women weavers are paid less than their men counterparts. And another 2% agrees on very high level of discrimination in terms of pay. More over women were not employed in the power loom due to the technical understanding of the machineries as revealed by the respondents.

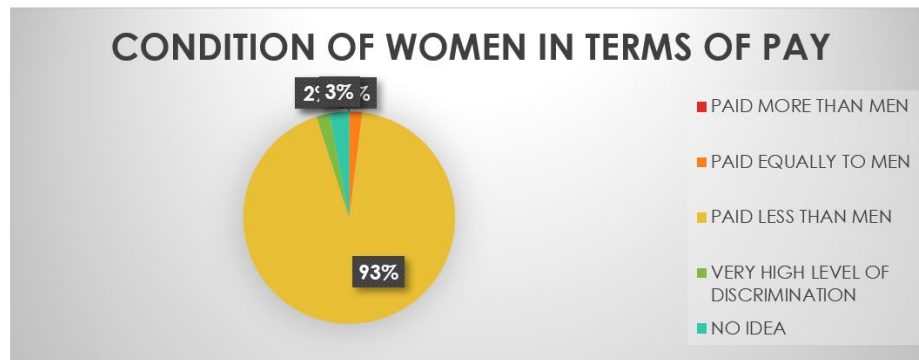


CHART- 21 SOURCE: FIELD SURVEY 2023

**Ways of survival during lockdown-** Nearly half of the respondents relied upon the option of the borrowing money as their means of survival during the lockdown when their livelihoods were threatened. 24% of the respondents relied on the varuna river flowing just in the vicinity of the village and they did fishing as the means of survival. And a few sold their looms as they could not afford to starve for hopeless months 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. 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.



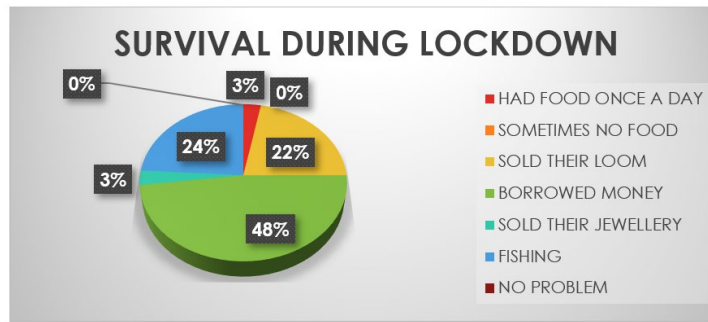


CHART- 22 SOURCE: FIELD SURVEY 2023

Source of debt: The major source of the debt was the grihasta which is basically the master weaver for whom all these allskilled weavers work. They lent money from the grihasta during the pandemic. And a good proportion of them also approached relatives. Bank should be the one getting mentioned here as the major share of systematic debt but the respondents completely denied as most of them do not understand the working of the bank due to illiteracy.

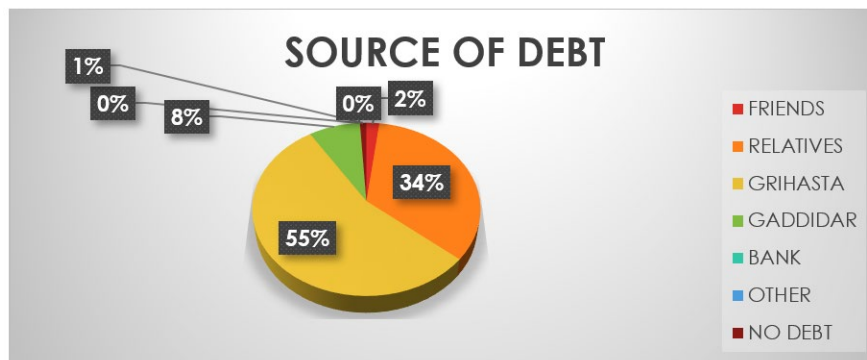


CHART-23 SOURCE: FIELD SURVEY 2023

Reason for incurring debt: The major reason for incurring debt was the daily expenses which could not be met during the lockdown. And another major share of 24% was done solely for procuring the food and medicines evidently shown in the chart.

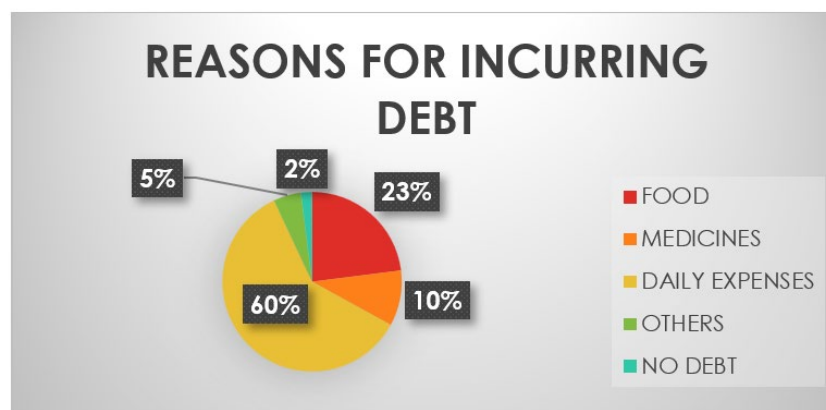


CHART-24 SOURCE: FIELD SURVEY 2023

Government for relief measures- During the survey it was found out that most of the respondents were approaching the government for the relief measures as they had no other ways of survival in lockdown. Some of them approached the local offices for help and other government centers like government ration shops for sustaining their families.

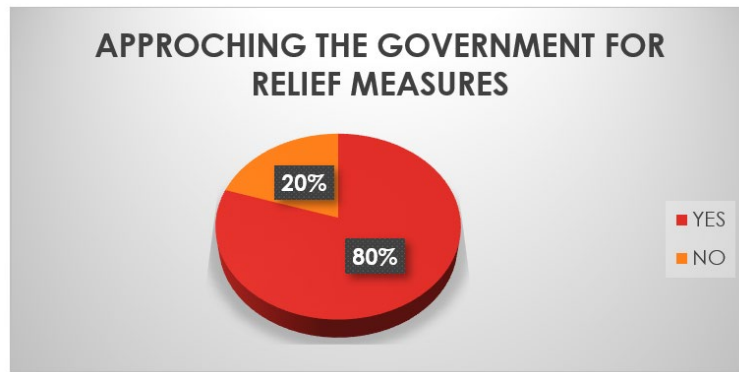


CHART-38 SOURCE: FIELD SURVEY 2023

Help from the government during the lockdown- It was quite a confusing pattern with the respondents 44% of the respondents said they got the monetary help from the government 500 -1500 rupees during the tenure in 2-3 bank accounts of their family members. And nearly 56% received no monetary benefits. It was later found out that most of the bank accounts which received money were registered in the names of women of the family. It was a peculiar and discriminatory pattern.

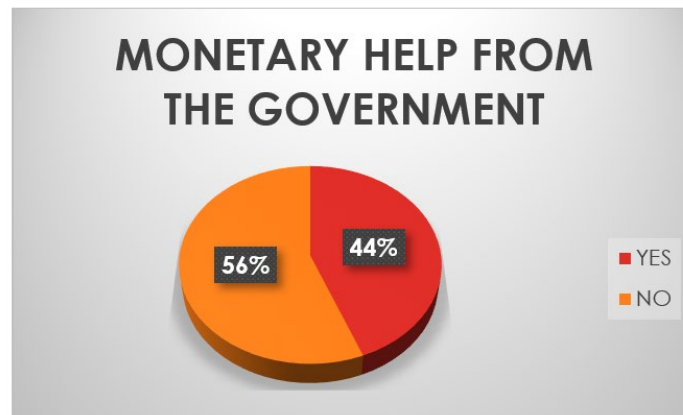


CHART-39 SOURCE: FIELD SURVEY 2023

Employer pay you without work during the pandemic crisis- The lockdown phase was truly a challenge for the lower income groups as they have the policy of “working everyday- eating everyday’. 50% of the weavers received payment in a partial manner even during the pandemic which was given by the grihastha and gaddidar majorly. And nearly 30% received no assistance from anywhere.

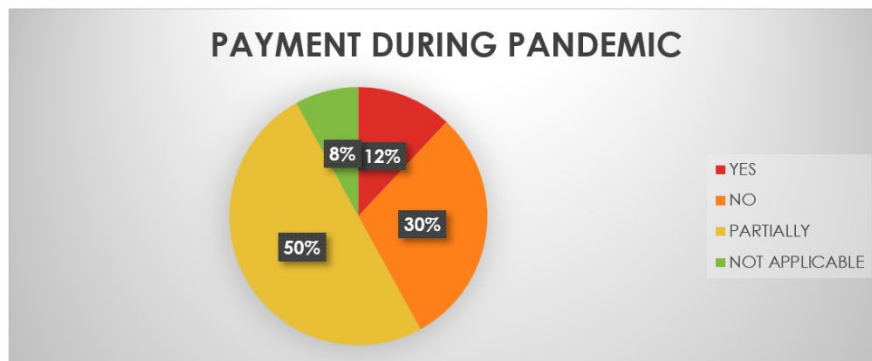


CHART-41 SOURCE: FIELD SURVEY 2023

Financial condition after lockdown- People were devastated when asked about their financial status after lockdown but 70% of them said it is better than what it was during the pandemic period. They had to starve at times to make the ends meet and now the least they have is three times of meal and their children healthy and studying. 8% of the people



called it equally bad as they had a lot of debt on them. More over respondents were trying to put their lives together even after the pandemic shook them financially and emotionally.

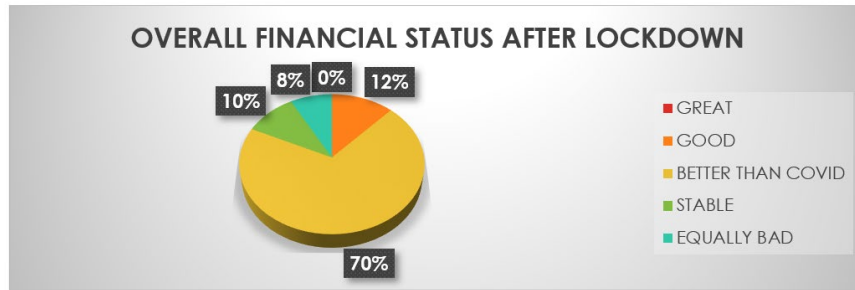


CHART-42 SOURCE: FIELD SURVEY 2023

Suggestions regarding the betterment of the weaving industries- The suggestions of the one working in the field is important for the policy making and hence 52% of the respondents voted for more work opportunities so that they can grow the business and culture all on the international scale and it can be done with the cutoff of mediators in the selling or buying. The power loom sector in the village is very limited and the reason that they put forward is that they are not able to get the electricity subsidy. The 23% of the respondents voted for skill development practices should be initiated in the village on a mass scale so that more practice and work can be fetched.

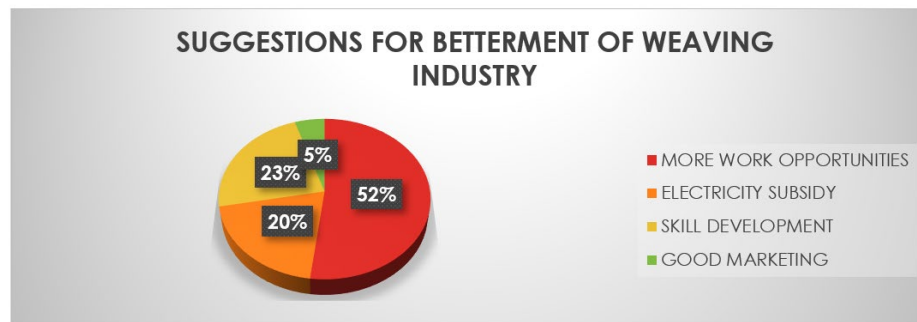


CHART- 43 SOURCE: FIELD SURVEY 2023

## 6. OTHER SUGGESTIONS

- **FAIR WAGES TO ALL:** the higher in the hierarchy such as corporates and gaddidars control the whole system and hence even after working for 12-15 hours the menial pays are received by the artisans. The women are paid less in the process without any reason and they are not even employed in the power looms due to lack of knowledge and training also it being a male dominated sector.
- **INSURANCE:** steps must be taken to provide insurance to all the weavers so that they can fetch it when in need such that times like lockdown or a general downfall of the business. 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. During 2009-10, the Government of India launched a Health Insurance Scheme for handloom weavers in collaboration with the ICICI Lombard. It was discontinued after a few years. Therefore, there is a need for an effective insurance scheme for the weaver households so that their future can be secured and the work of art flourishes sideways.
- **FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE:** There are various subsidies listed for the weavers which does not really reaches the targeted population 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 in such a way that every educated or uneducated weaver can take benefit of it.

- **HYGINE AND SANITATION:** Many neighborhood where weaver families live suffer from poor hygiene, often due to poor sanitation facilities. It is important to provide them with basic amenities. Weavers therefore urge that the municipal agencies can take care of it so that their families can stay in a healthy and clean environment, provisions should be made to create basic amenities on health and hygiene, drinking water, lights, drains, etc., in such areas in order to ease their daily lives.
- **STRICT ENFORCEMENT OF HANDLOOM RESERVATION ACT:** The Handlooms (Reservation of Articles for Production) Act, 1985 was authorized to protect handlooms from power looms and the mechanized 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 Centre and State Governments/UTs are regularly inspecting Power looms and Mills to shut out violation of the provisions of the Act. But several unethical producers often get away with selling power loom products posing as handlooms and ruining their status. The Act must therefore be implemented more uncompromisingly.

## 7. RESULTS

After carefully analyzing the data and all the other spheres of investigation it can be said that the impact of Covid-19 pandemic was a worst kind of hit the textile industry could ever imagine till date, at the same time the weavers bore the brunt of the imbroglio ranging from the denial of basics in livelihood aspects and the down fall of business. The weaving community faced more downfalls due to the absence of requisite government policies to protect the welfare of the skill based community and the help did not reach at the required hour and hence the losses were unbearable. The economic and social conditions of the weavers were not in and around to just fine. They survived the hit on their monthly income which collapsed the other aspects of survival. The primary data collected during the survey revealed that a major percentage of the village is suffering from the curse of illiteracy and ignorance towards the betterment and their inability to eradicate the wrongs and injustice done to them. In Uttar Pradesh, 1.31 lakh hand loom households are engaged in weaving and allied activities, of which 66.7 per cent are located in rural areas and the remaining 33.3 percent in urban areas. It concluded that the majority of households, i.e. 66.7 per cent, prefer to live in rural areas (4th All India Handloom Census 2019-20). But after the surge of Covid- 19 most of the weavers working in the rural areas came back to the villages due to unemployment and deprivation from the basic needs such as food, shelter and health downfalls. The pandemic led to the reverse migration patterns from urban to rural areas which used to be the other way.

## 8. CONCLUSION

This report throws light on 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. The paper tries to represent the different sections of the weaving community, both handloom and power looms and allied workers. The women of the weaving community are an important voice considering they are the backbone though invisible and often unrecognized as they face discrimination on wage grounds and social status as far as weaving work is concerned and during the lockdown they were the worst sufferers financially as well as socially. In short, this report attempted to capture the voices of the weaving community as a whole. 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 re-known Businesses and Corporation houses who used to trade in exotic Banarasi silk that has meant pleasure and profit for masses, have shown no sense of involvement or responsibility to the backbone of this exotica and profit. And very much speculated the grass root issues that India, central and state governments, corporations and businesses, have the issues of the weavers and artisanal weaving industry intersect with many other issues of the agrarian sector and industrial sector. All the various strands need to be dis-entangled but the investigations on the ground have yielded valuable insights of the weaving community and textile industry due to pandemic. The steps must be taken in order to ease the issues concerning to the weaving community. The policies and programs issued by the government must be checked after implementation and periodic survey for their betterment must be carried out to gauge the recovery after the pandemic.

## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

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