

Socio Economic Conditions of Handloom Weavers – A Study of Himachal Pradesh

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Abstract: Handloom weaving is an ancient industry. The handloom industry in India is the flag bearer of ancient Indian history, offering work to 14% poor (second just to farming) & contributing to around 11% share in total textile exports each year. The handloom industry in India has become exceptionally well known due to the availability of different designs of fabrics and the manufacture of garments and dresses, which fills in as the job of millions of weavers utilized in the handloom fragment in India. However, with motorization this delightful hand woven art on looms is at jaws of death. The state of Himachal Pradesh in India consists of around 13500 handloom weavers. In this paper, the socio and economic conditions of the handloom weavers have been presented. The data has been collected from 200 respondents through questionnaires. The data has been analyzed using simple bar diagram on the basis of age, area, religion, caste, educational qualification, type and size of the family, type of occupation, house, ration card, land owned, assets owned, loan status, monthly weaving, purchase of raw material and types of loom. This paper studies the challenges faced by handloom weavers of Himachal Pradesh by giving a complete picture of the handloom industries value chain and influence of tourism and cooperative societies for sustaining growth of handloom demands, particularly districts flooded by national and international tourists. The results reflect that for handloom industry to be sustainable the handloom weavers' market has to be expanded and organized. Handloom sector plays an important role in state economy.

Keywords: Socio and Economic Conditions, hand loom weavers, Cooperative Societies, tourism, state of Himachal Pradesh, Kullu, Manali district.

1. Introduction

The Handloom sector of India is one of the oldest and most wide spread. Till the 19th century, before industrial revolution evolved in the world, production of cloth for human need was done on Handloom only. Hand spinning and weaving, which was developed thousands of years ago, is still progressing, as craft and cottage industry. Since India owns a rich cultural heritage & handloom weaving is a household industry and the biggest cottage and labour intensive sector. It is playing a very important role in the country's economy besides forming part of rich heritage and showcasing the exemplary artistry work of Handlooms of India. Indian Handloom weaving is largely in a decentralized sector and weavers are mainly from the weaker and vulnerable section of the society, who are not only weaving for their own needs at household level, but are also contributing to the volumes in the textile sector. The Handloom sector represents the rich traditional, historical & cultural diversity that distinguishes India from the rest of the world. It is one of the important sectors in the country that provides low cost, sustainable livelihood opportunities to millions of people, supplementing incomes in seasons of distress, checking migration & preserving traditional economic relationships. There are numerical records to show that Handloom fabrics of India had established a position of repute in international market and significant share in Indian Textile production. Handloom industry in India, which is one of the major life lines of rural industry this sector occupies a very important role in Indian economy. It had been providing direct and indirect employment to millions as either fulltime or part time and as such one of the largest economic activity provider, hence effective government intervention by way of financial assistance and implementation of various development and welfare schemes, this sector had been able to withstand competition from the power loom and mill sectors.

2. Significance Of Handlooms In Himachal Pradesh

Himachal Pradesh, with its hilly terrain and a very limited scope of industrialization and as a result traditional handloom weaving are the main occupation after agriculture and horticulture. Sheep and goat rearing is another occupation of many villages in Himachal Pradesh and hence residents engage themselves in wool weaving by default, as wool produce is easily available all over the state and due to cool climatic conditions of the state has a big local market for woven woolen products. Consequently various sheep and wool development programs are also being executed by the state government and as result the total wool production of the state is on a positive trend. Because of poor accessibility of roads in the most of interior places, especially during winters, when most of the parts are covered with snow and the natives of the state in most districts are confined to be indoors. Since no economic activity can be carried out in outfields in open areas, handloom weaving, a natural craft, which existed in the life of Himachal since ages, has developed with time. The necessity of warm clothing needs of the family, transformed handlooms, slowly to a substitute of secondary income and means of economic survival. Extremely cold weather of Himachal Pradesh necessitated wool weaving to an extent that every household in Himachal Pradesh owns a loom. Since Himachal Pradesh has a substantial population living in rural areas & due to lack of industrialization and non availability of other economic opportunities, handloom weaving at homes is one of the Prominent Activities.

3. Need Of The Study:

The handloom industry has facing many problems such as scarcity of raw materials, marketing, finance and the most important being competition, with powerlooms. In view of this, there is an imperative need to undertaking a comprehensive study of the "Socio economic condition of handloom weavers in Himachal Pradesh.

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

Table 1.1

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

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

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

Table 1.2

District	Number of Handloom Household	Total Workers (All Ages)	Total Looms
Kangra	929	4510	1025
Kinnaur	261	291	272
Kullu	3869	6357	2929
Mandi	1871	2220	1279
Shimla	76	80	45
Total	7006	13458	5550

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

As evident above, the number of workers in the handloom sector of Himachal Pradesh dropped to 13,458 (Handloom Census of India, 2009-10) and had marginally improved to around 13,578 in the latest Handloom census of 2019-20. There is a sharp decline in employment in the sector in the past two decades and the number of handloom is also declining very fast along with production. In many districts handloom is almost non-existent today. Despite the fact that there lies a great demand for the handloom products particularly from Himachal both in the domestic and international market, the situation instead of improving is worsening. Again, Himachal being a very popular tourist destination, the backward and forward market linkage is also equally strong. Keeping the favorable conditions in mind, it is not yet known the reasons for the poor state of the affairs of the handloom sector.

4. Review of Literature

Srinivasa Rao (2017)¹ in his study has justified the reasons for existence of handlooms in India, that it is the socio economic conditions of our country that is conducive for its existence due to high employment potential in this sector.

Chouhan, & Roy (2017)², studied about the socio-economic profile of Handloom weavers and concluded that industry is dominated by the male workers. Besides, they have low level of educational level and are thus forced for financial constraint & drop off in wages.

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

Bari et al, (2015)⁴, explained about the status of the handloom industries in India & attributed the study to draw the conclusion that lack in education and absence of other source of income for weavers, and high price of yarn and low realization on final products has discouraged handloom weavers to continue in weaving..

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

Objectives Of The Study:

1. To study the handloom products of Himachal Pradesh.
2. To study the socio-economic condition of handloom weavers in various districts of HP

5. Research Methodology

The present research study has chosen both the quantitative research for its data collection, interpretation and analysis.

Data Collection Methods and Strategy

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

Collection of Primary Data

Target Population	Handloom Weavers of Himachal Pradesh
Sampling Unit	Weavers from Selected Clusters of HP
Sampling Method	Quota Sampling
Data Collection Method	Structured Questionnaire

6. Sampling Methods

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

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

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

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

The Handloom Woolen Products Made in HIMACHAL PRADESH are:

PATTU

Pattu is a women's traditional outer garment worn in Himachal Pradesh. It is a woven woolen fabric used for everyday wear mostly in plains and checks with simple borders. The lengths range from 2.5 to 3.0m and width of Pattu varies from 1.33m to 1.5m. Earlier Pattus were woven in natural colours of black and white but as weaving skills developed in Kinnaur and Kullu of Himachal Pradesh, presently they are combination of squares, rectangles and chequered patterns. Also Pattus were earlier made with red border called KHUSTI, running along the vertical edge. Now in modern times, to reduce the labour involved and for economics of production cost, Khusti, is produced separately and then stitched at the selvedge, thus maintaining the same visual appearance. The Pattu is draped around the body and secured below the shoulders on the front side with a silver pins or broaches called BUMNI, which is a long silver chain. A muffler is tied around waist to hold the Pattu in place and is called GACHCHI. Ladies wear plain or check pattus in daily use and pattus having black background and red border, flowers and stars are the popular ones for wearing in festivals and functions. Pattu woven with red khusti and decorated with flowers and stars are generally worn by newly wed brides.



Shawls of Himachal Pradesh

The most popular and the widely accepted and sold item of Himachal woolen products is Kullu Shawls. Although, shawl is considered to be the relatively recent introduction to age old tradition of Himachal Pradesh weaving industry, still it is has become one of the most flourishing industries in the hills. Himachal population has adopted shawl production as either a primary occupation or as secondary to supplement t their income from farming. The Himachali Shawl is a light woolen fabric made from mill spun or hand spun yarn and measures generally 1m X 2m & is normally draped around and over the shoulders and chest. Common fibres used in the production of Himachal shawls are, merino wool, pashmina wool, local sheep wool, Angora wool and mixture of all these. At times Yak hairs are also added to create variety. All of these yarns are used either in natural wool color or are mill

dyed. Presently, most of the Himachal shawls are produced from woolen yarns, called Raffals. These shawls are either plain or in patterns.

1. **Kinnauri shawls:** These shawls are famous for their intricacy and unique due to their fineness in weaving. The geometrical designs which are used elaborately in these shawls are having a strong central Asian influence. The motifs used are generally with religious significance and special symbols. To produce patterns, on white/ black/grey and brown backgrounds colours used are red, orange, pink blue, green and yellow. These five colors represent five elements wiz white stands for water; yellow denotes earth red for fire green for air and blue for sky. Most of the times Kinnauri shawls have patterns on borders on all the four edges which increases the labour involved and make them more expensive than Kullu shawls.

Technical	Specifications						of	Kinnauri	Shawl:	
Yarn									Used:	
Warp-	2/	44's,	to	2/	64's	Woolen	Worsted	, Hand Spun-	Woolen	Worsted
Weft-	2/	44's	to	2/	64's	Woolen	Worsted	, Hand Spun-	Pashmina,	Angora, etc.
Patterning-	2/	32's		Woolen	Worsted	/	Acrylic.		2-3	ply.
Size -				2Mt.			x			1Mt.
Weave -	2/2	Twill	(base)	&	Weft	rib	in			patterning.
Weight -	Shawl woven with 2/ 48's count the weighs from 360to 390gms.									



2. **Kullu Shawls:** They are known for the unique process and production technique that gives them significant value addition. Traditional Kullu shawls are produced with geometrical designs and three borders at the end. Besides geometrical designs, floral designs, which run all over or on the corners, are also produced. Basically Kullu shawls are believed to be derivative of Kinnauri shawls in which intricate d Kinnauri designs have been enlarged and simplified with passage of time which results into man hours of production. The simplification of introducing designs in Kullu shawls has ultimately given a unique feature to Himachal shawls which has ultimately revolutionized the handloom production of the state of Himachal Pradesh. Each design may have up to 8 colours. Traditionally, mostly bright colours like red, yellow, magenta pink, green, orange , blue , white and black were used to develop patterns, while black or brown were used for background, but now with change of times, bright colours have given way to pastel shades. Pricing of shawls varies and depends on designs and labour involved, and pashmina being the costliest.

Technical Yarn	Specifications	of	Kullu	Shawl: Used:
Warp-	2/ 44's,	to	2/ 64's	Woolen
Weft-	2/ 44's to	2/ 64's	Woolen	Worsted
Patterning-	2/ 32's	Woolen	Worsted	Hand Spun- Pashmina, Angora, etc.
Size -		2Mt.		Acrylic. 2-3 ply. 1Mt.
Weave -	2/2	Twill (base)	& Weft	rib in patterning.

Weight – Kullu Shawls woven in 2/ 48's count weighs from 360to 390gms.



The extra weft woven Kullu shawl
 Due to limitations in geometrical designs, Kullu shawls have been modified by imparting extra weft for patterning. It is simplified, less time consuming, cheaper in cost and commercially viable.



LOI / CHADDAR

Loi or Chaddar is gent’s shawls and is generally bigger in size as compared to ladies’ shawls. The size varies from 1.15 m to 1.40 m in length to 2.30 to 2.80 m in length. Generally it is a lightly woven woolen fabric in plain or with narrow border at the ends. It is mostly made in brown, grey or white shades and again pashmina being the costliest.



PATTI: it is a local short width tweed fabric made for coats and jackets and often used for trousers. Normally it is a heavy twill fabric generally hand woven, 45 to 51 cms in width and from hand spun sheep wool which is used in two folds in natural white or black/brown. Most of the times Patti is produced in plain or stripes and checks. Due to the heavy construction it is used during snow, rain and wind.



DHORU/ DOHAR: It is a blanket woven from coarser wool spun yarn and in a thick yardage. It is made from local wool in checks and stripes. Mill spurn yarns which are dyed in various colors are generally used for the ground fabric and vast range of acrylic colours are used for producing patterns along the borders. These shawls are prepared from angora, pashmina and hand spun wool.

MUFFLER

Muffler is woolen product woven with pashmina, merino or angora wool having yarns of different colours. They are worn around neck. Weaving is similar to shawls, but they are woven on smaller looms. Gents' mufflers are produced in sizes of 0.3 m wide and around 1.7 m in length while ladies mufflers are longer in length.

NUMDHA

NUMDHA or NIMDA is a mattress produced by felting of wool and is not a woven product. It is manufactured by mixing low quality wool and cotton and is made in plain or patterns and at times embroidered to increase its selling price. Normal sizes vary from 1.8 m X 0.9 m to 3.65 m X 3.0 m. Pricing of Numdhas varies on types of wool, colours and designs.

THOBI

Thobi is produced as a cheap floor covering from goat hair. It is generally woven in two portions and later joined at the centre with stitches. It is woven mainly in plains and occasionally in checks but unique feature is the warmth character required in cold climate of Himachal Pradesh. Thobi is mostly produced for self consumption and size varies as per requirement.

WOOLLEN KNITTED SOCKS AND CAPS

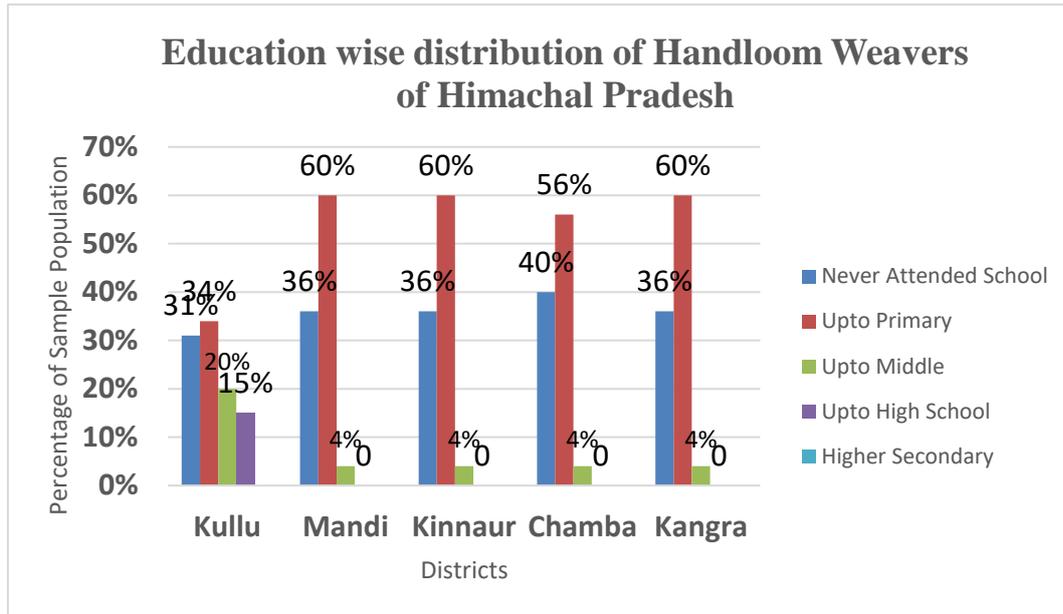
Woolen yarns are also used in knitted goods in winter to produce socks and gloves for extreme colds. The Kullu caps are another famous traditional product of Himachal in which patti fabric with rich motifs in colours are stitched on tweed fabrics to produce unique caps which is popularly worn by males of Himachal Pradesh during winters and functions and festivals.



Data Analysis and Interpretation

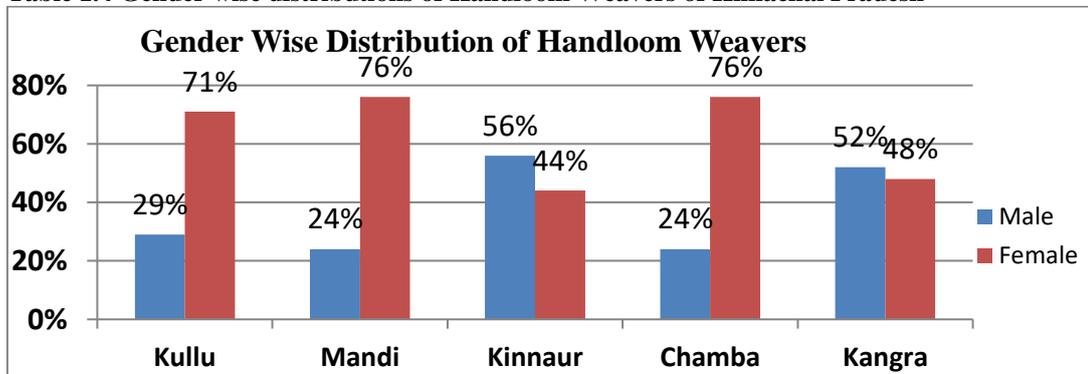
Microsoft Excel Software is used for data analysis and interpretation.

Table 1.3 Education wise distribution of Handloom Weavers of Himachal Pradesh



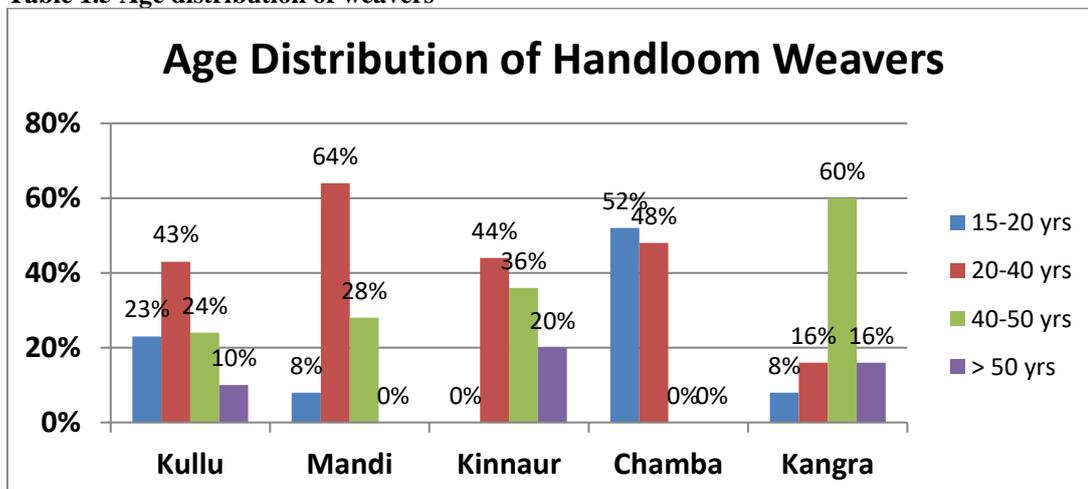
Above data indicates that most weavers are having primary education, almost whole of Himachal, while Kullu has more number of educated weavers, as compared to other parts.

Table 1.4 Gender wise distributions of Handloom Weavers of Himachal Pradesh



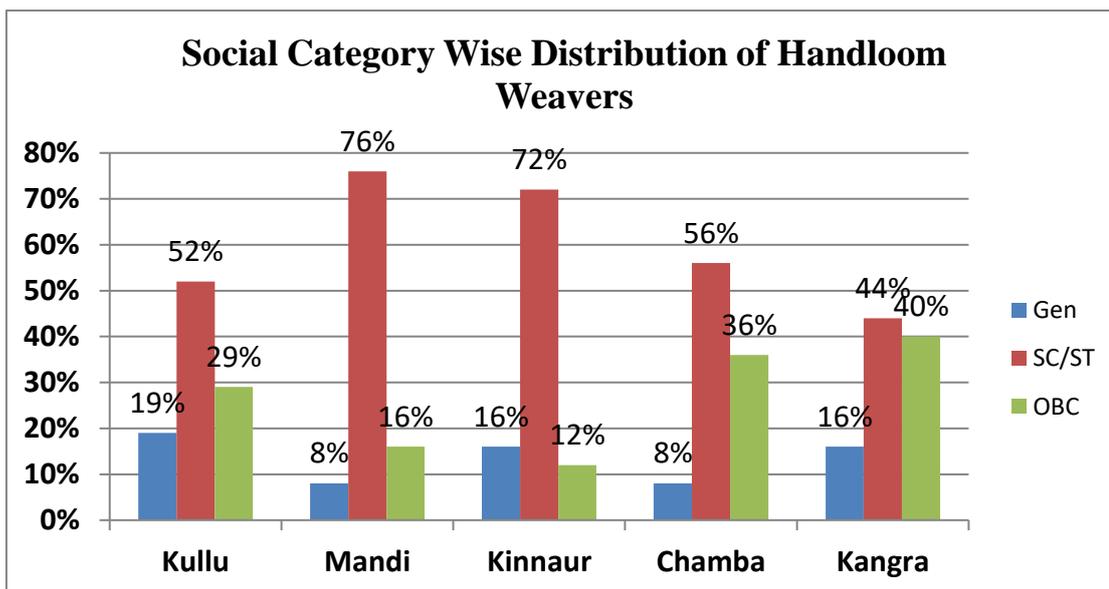
Above data truly presents that whole Himachal handloom weaving is mainly dominated by women weavers, and is more prominent in Kullu, Mandi and Chamba, while the profession is almost equally occupied by both men and women in Kangra.

Table 1.5 Age distribution of weavers



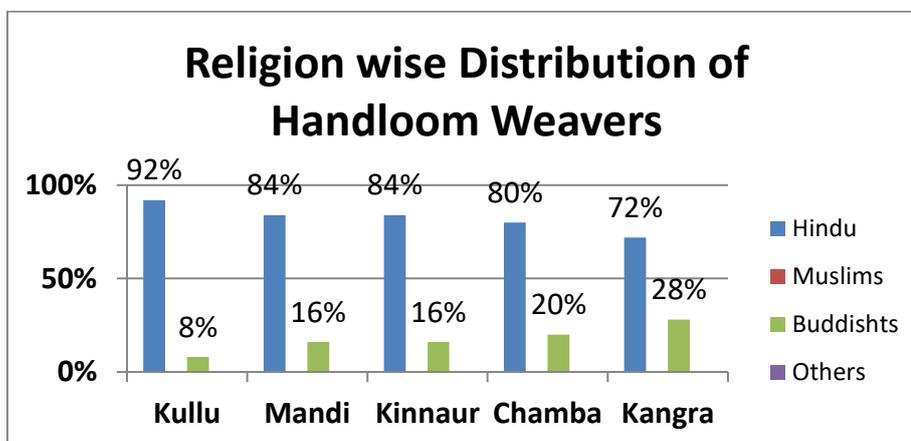
Most of the weavers are from age groups 20-40, in almost all districts, except Kangra, where weavers are from aged above 40 years. The study shows that there is a decrease in population of young weavers, probably; they are inclined to other professions, for better returns and stabilities in income level

Table 1.6 Category Distribution of handloom weavers



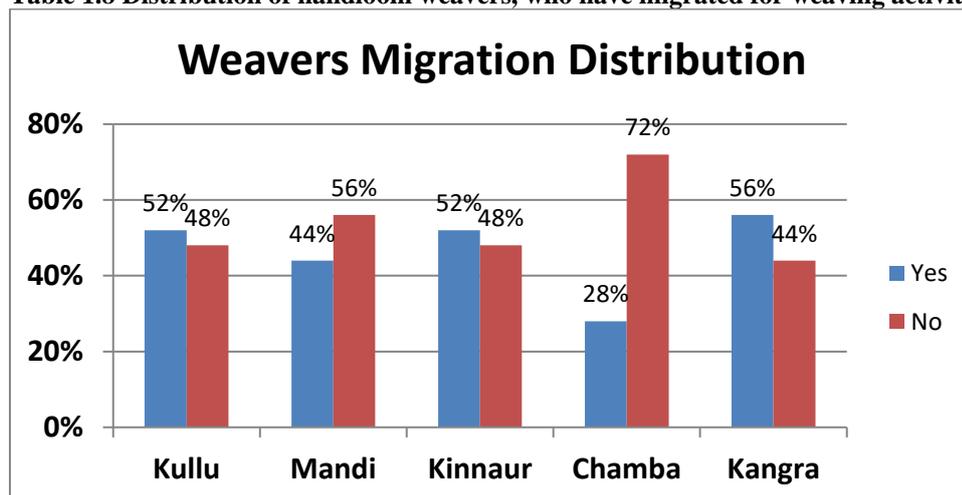
The above study shows that handloom weaving is mainly dominated by weaker section of the society and is more prominent in Mandi & Kinnaur, while in Kullu and Kangra, the profession is adopted by good no of general category weavers, although less in numbers.

Table 1.7 Religion wise distributions of handloom weavers



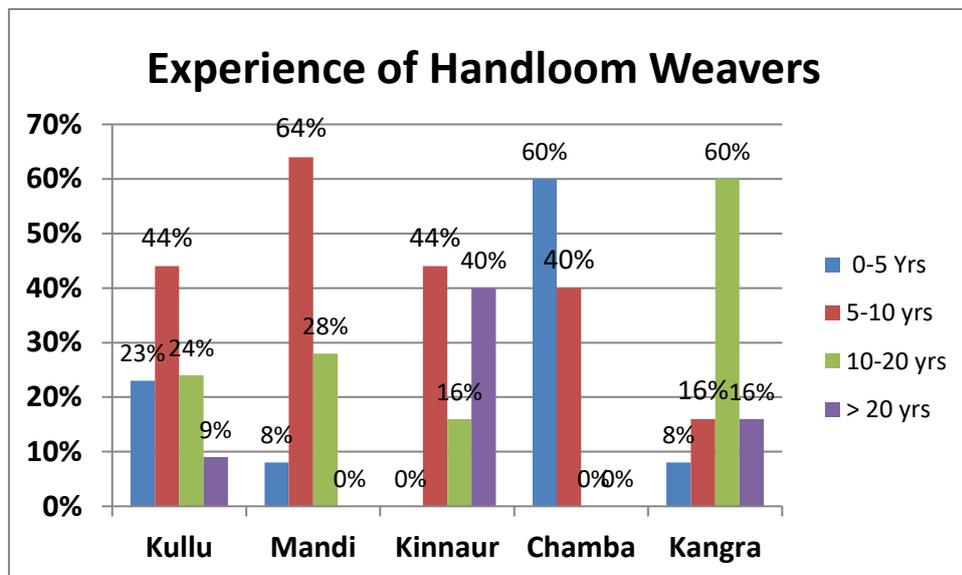
The handloom weavers’ community in Himachal Pradesh is mainly dominated by Hindu weavers in whole of Himachal, and only other community involved in weaving is Buddhists, which are more in Kangra district.

Table 1.8 Distribution of handloom weavers, who have migrated for weaving activity



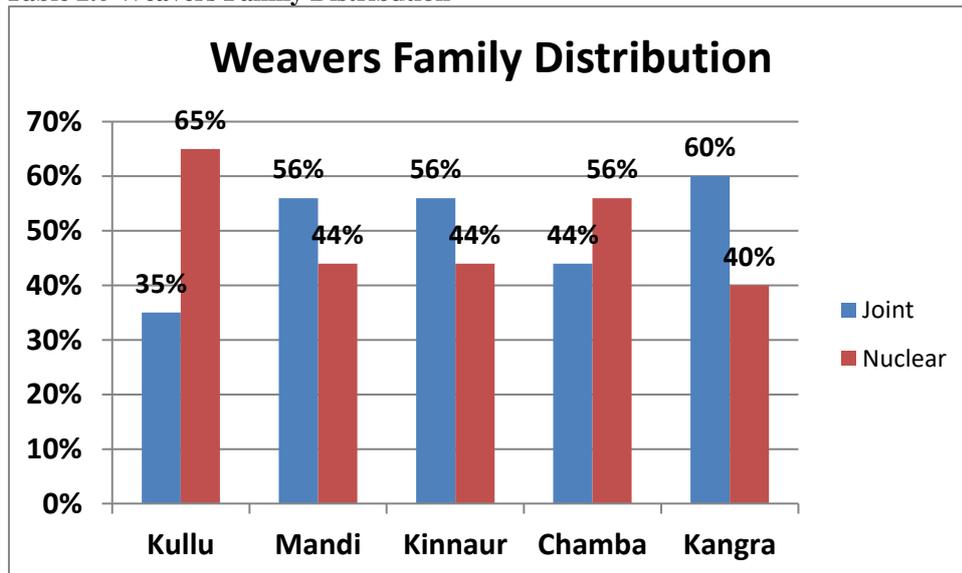
The study shows that most of the handloom weavers have migrated to make their living, while it is lowest in Chamba and prominent hubs of weaver’s clusters are dominated by migrated weavers from other places of their living.

Table 1.9 Experience of Handloom Weavers



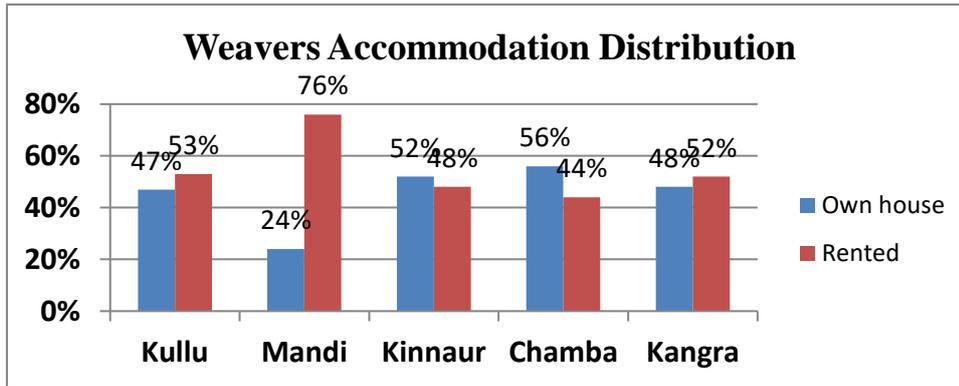
The above study indicates that young population is less inclined in handloom weaving, which is more prominent in Kinnaur, while mainly handloom weaving is dominated by group of people who are mostly with 5-10 years of handloom weaving. Kangra has mostly weavers with around 20 years of experience, probably, they have taken handloom weaving as the main profession and have not tried other livelihood activities.

Table 2.0 Weavers Family Distribution



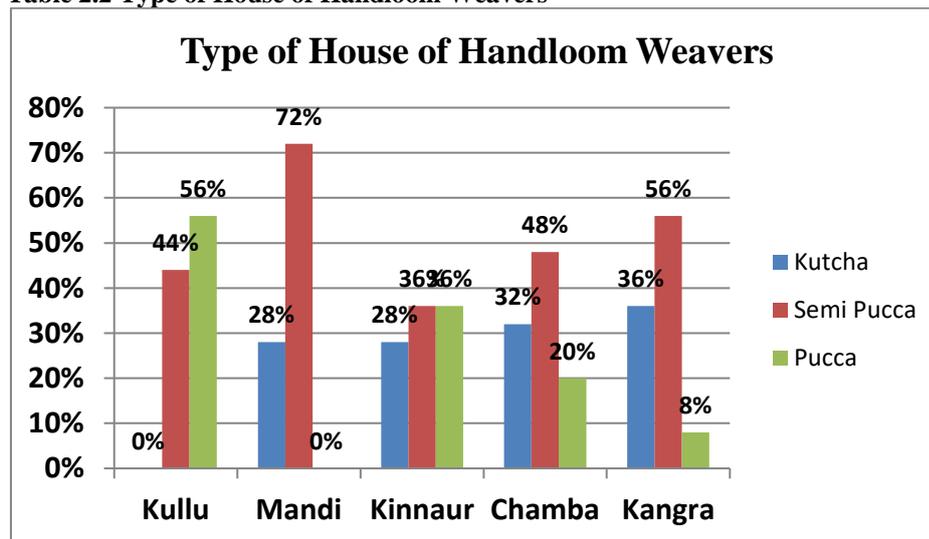
The handloom weaver’s community, is almost equally distributed in joint family and nuclear set up of family with more inclined to joint family. It is mostly nuclear in districts, where migrated population has taken up handloom as weaving profession, mainly in handloom capital of Kullu district.

Table 2.1 Weavers Accommodation Distribution



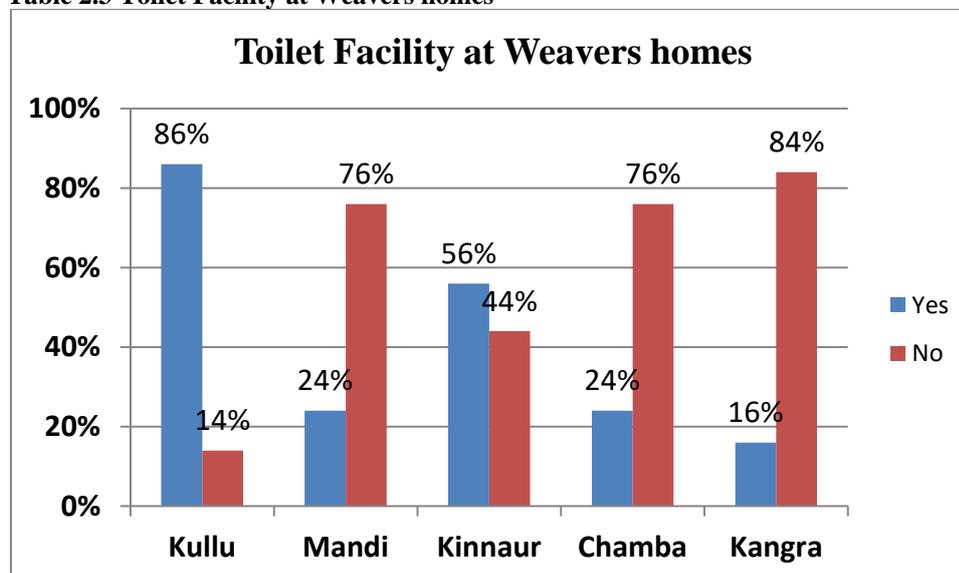
The study clearly indicates that most of the handloom weavers in Mandi have rented accommodation, while in most districts, they are almost equally distributed in own house and rented accommodations.

Table 2.2 Type of House of Handloom Weavers



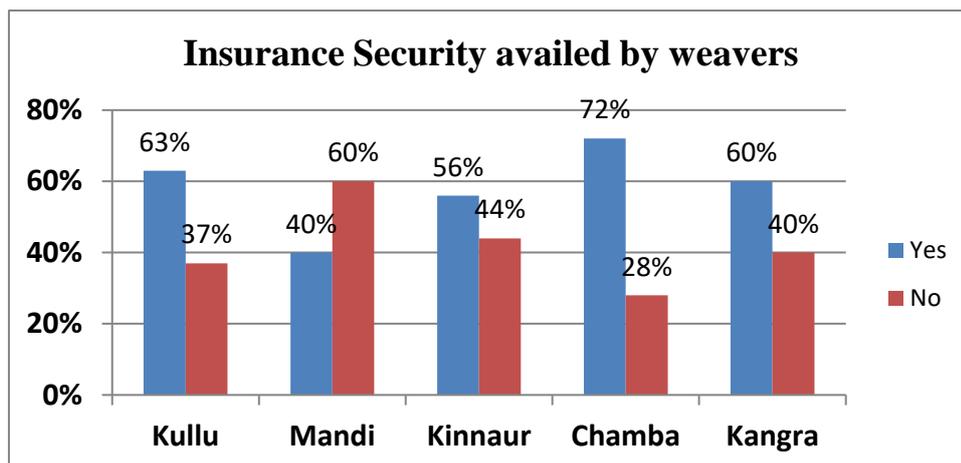
The above study indicates that handloom weavers in Kullu reside mostly in Pucca houses, while in Mandi, and Kangra, they are dominated in semi pucca houses. Accommodation in Kinnaur is almost equally distributed in three types for them.

Table 2.3 Toilet Facility at Weavers homes



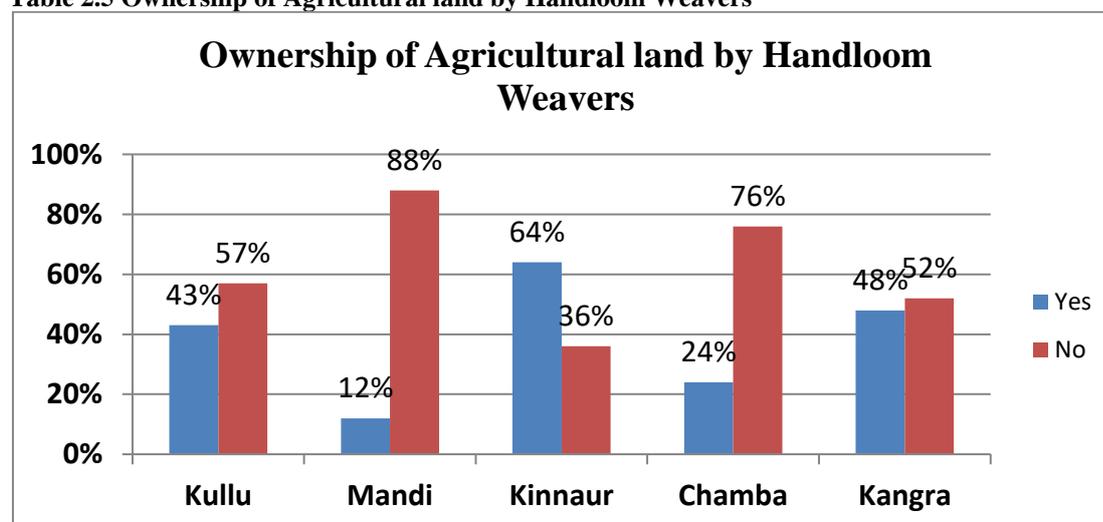
Mostly handloom weavers in Kullu district have toilet facility in their houses, while Mandi, Kangra and Chamba have very poor score in providing toilets at weaver’s homes.

Table 2.4 Insurance Security availed by weavers



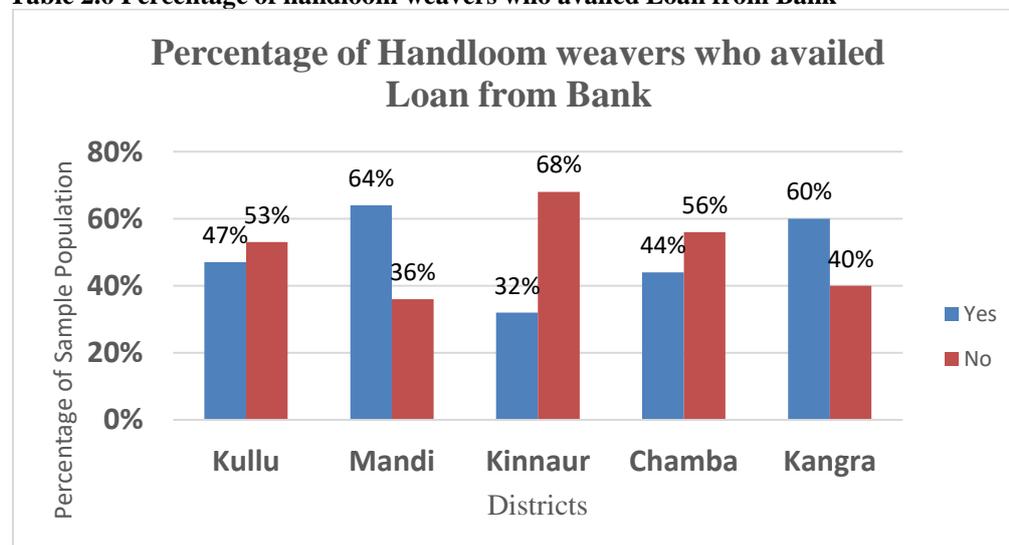
Most of the handloom weavers in almost all districts have some insurance or medical insurance, while district Mandi has more number of non insured weavers.

Table 2.5 Ownership of Agricultural land by Handloom Weavers



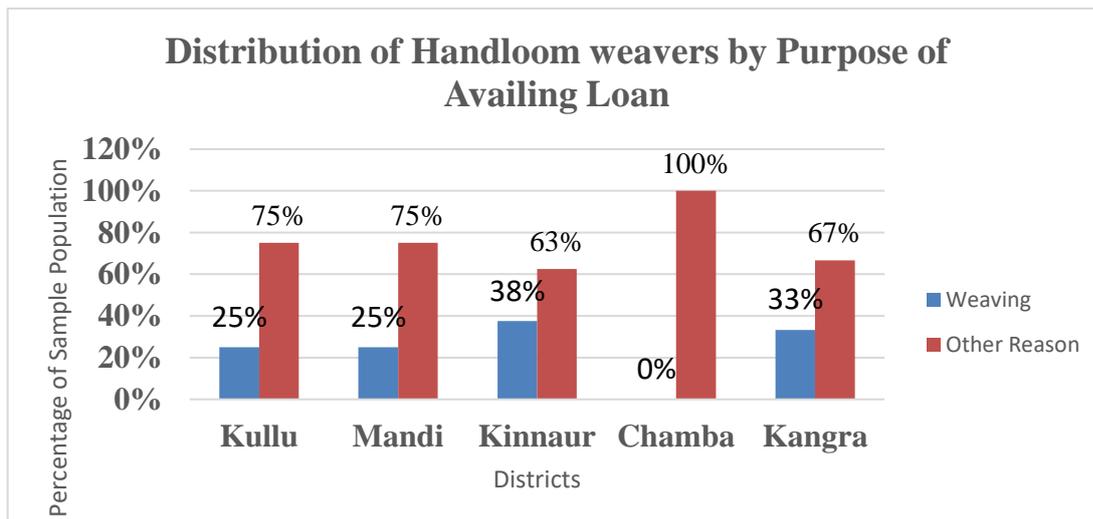
Ownership of agricultural land with handloom weavers is very low in Mandi and Chamba district, while Kinnaur has maximum number of handloom weavers who own their own land.

Table 2.6 Percentage of handloom weavers who availed Loan from Bank



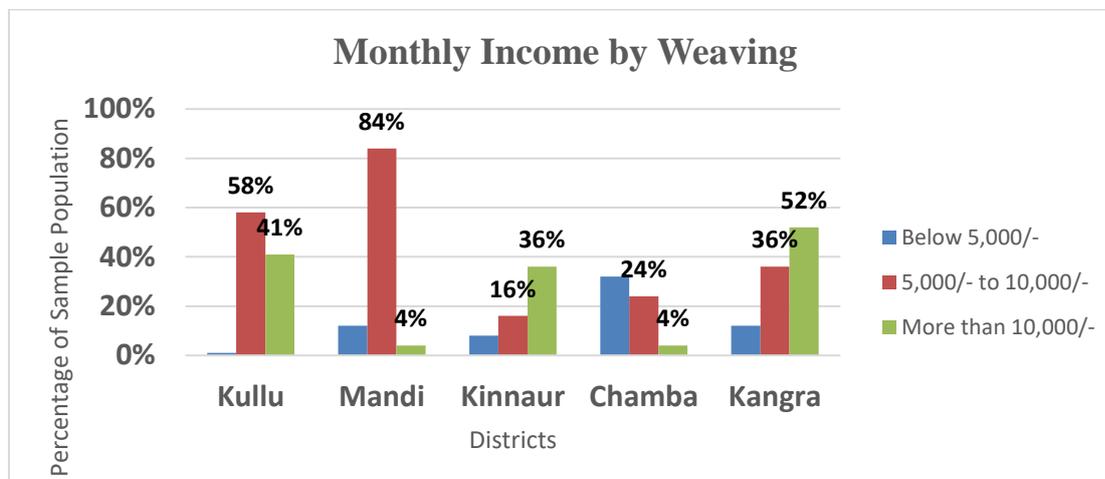
Handloom weavers who have availed loan from banks is maximum in Mandi and Kangra, while Kinnaur has less number of such weavers as shown above.

Table 2.7 Purpose of availing loan by Handloom weavers



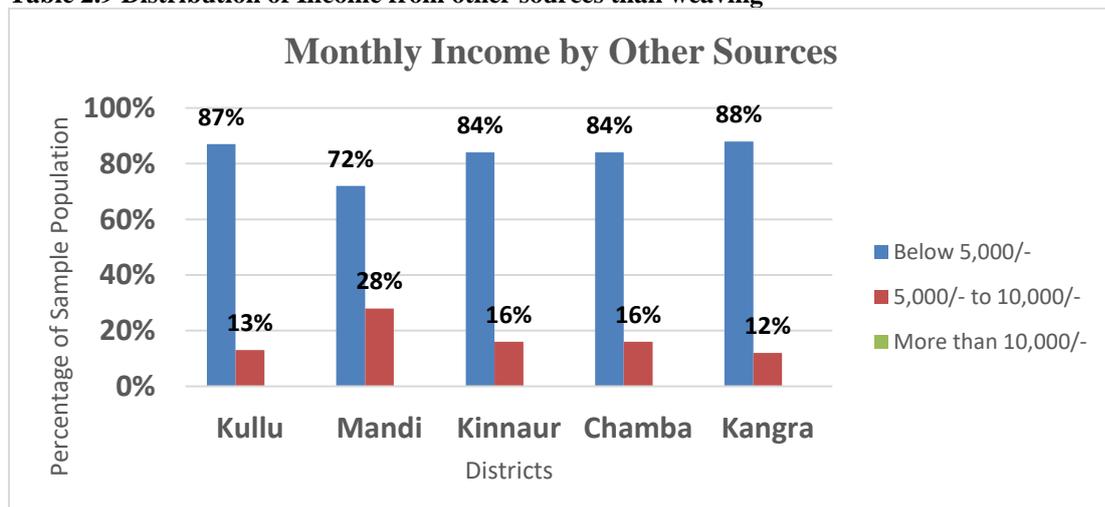
Mostly handloom weavers have availed banking loan for reasons other than for weaving activity, which is almost uniform in all districts.

Table 2.8 Distribution of Income by handloom weaving



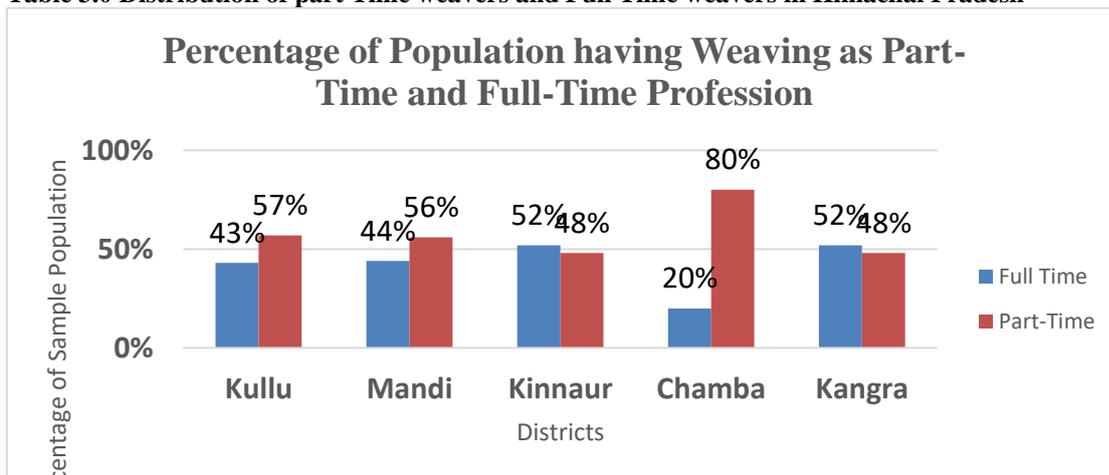
The above study reveals that handloom weavers earning more than Rs 10000/- is mostly located in Kullu, and Kangra, and followed by Kinnaur. Maximum number of weavers are earning in the range of Rs 5000-Rs 10000/-, which is lower in case of district Chamba, where weavers earning more than Rs 5000/- is also difficult.

Table 2.9 Distribution of Income from other sources than weaving



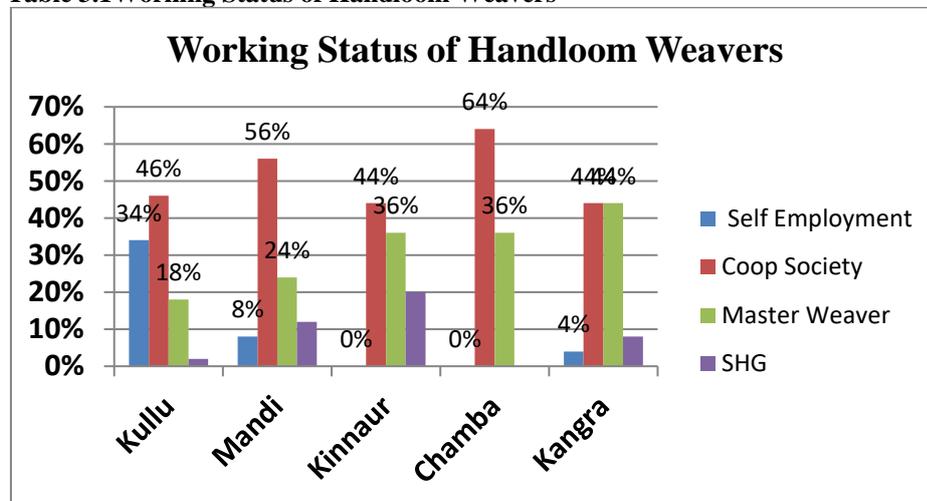
The study on handloom weavers of Himachal Pradesh shows that handloom weavers are not able to earn more than Rs 5000/- from non weaving activity and only marginal number of weavers can earn Rs 5000 –Rs 10000/- per month from non weaving activity.

Table 3.0 Distribution of part Time weavers and Full Time weavers in Himachal Pradesh



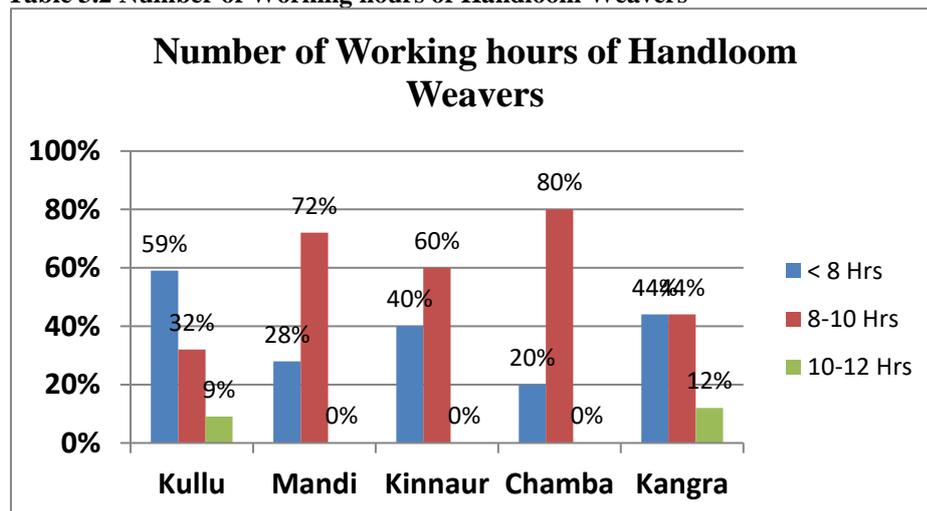
District Chamba dominates with part time weavers, while it is almost equally distributed for part time and full time weavers in other districts. District Kangra and Kinnaur has more full time weavers.

Table 3.1 Working Status of Handloom Weavers



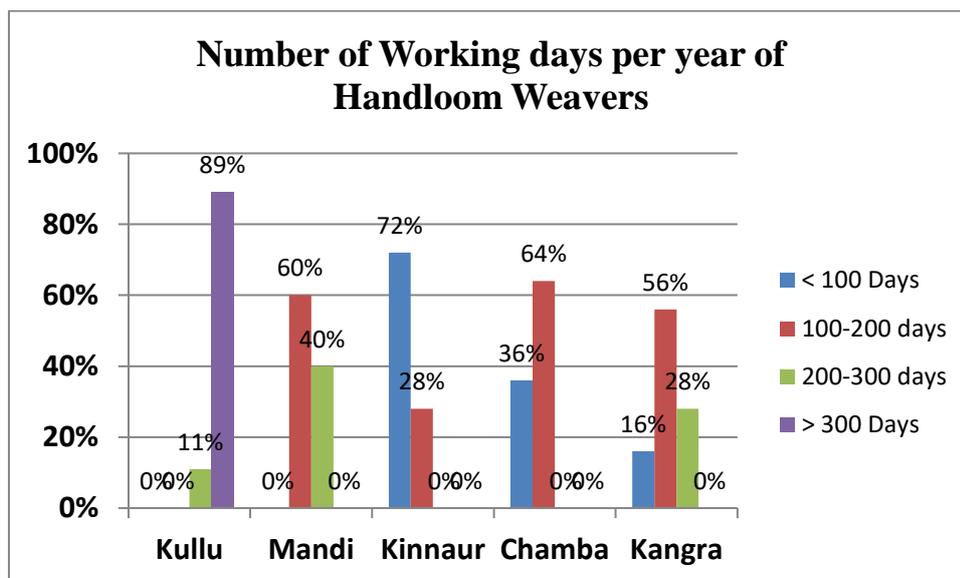
The present study reveals that most of the handloom weavers are inclined towards coop societies in Himachal Pradesh, but number of independent weaver’s increases in Kullu as compared to other parts of Himachal Pradesh.

Table 3.2 Number of Working hours of Handloom Weavers



The above study clearly reveals that handloom weavers mostly weave for less than 8 hours in Kullu district, while are engaged in weaving for more than 8 to 10 hours in Mandi, Kinnaur and Chamba.

Table 3.3 Number of Working days per year of Handloom Weavers



The study of Himachal weavers reveals that handloom weavers get most of the work in Kullu for more than 300 days. While in other districts, they get work for around 200 days, and is much lower for most of the weavers in Kinnaur.

7. Findings

1. The majority of the respondents in the age group of 20-40 years, young generation are less hesitant to pursue weaving as career, because of low profits & low wages.
2. Handloom weavers in Himachal are mostly migrated population for making their livelihoods. They are mostly concentrated around Kullu, popularly known as handloom capital of Himachal Pradesh.
3. Handloom weavers in Himachal mostly include Hindus, & Buddhists.
4. Most of the handloom weaving activity at present in Himachal Pradesh is occupied by female weavers, and is more prominent in Kullu, Mandi and Chamba, while it equally occupied by both men and women in Kangra. Handloom weaving mostly performed by SC / ST persons while general category people are also involved in Kullu and Kinnaur districts.
5. The majority of respondents are educated till primary and have very poor educational background, while some educated class are also engaged in handloom weaving in Kullu district.
6. The non studying children and even the school going children are involving pre weaving and post weaving process.
7. Respondents are staying in both the joint and nuclear families, the majority of respondents are leaving the nuclear family, because of migration, & urbanization.
8. Mostl of the respondents in Kullu district have toilet facility in their houses, while Mandi, Kangra and Chamba far behind.
9. Most of the respondents are occupied by in handloom weaving, as they have no other earning skill.
10. Most of the respondents are living in the rcc(building), in Kullu districts , while they stay in semi pucca shed of tiles, etc in other parts of Himachal Pradesh, because handloom weavers are financially and economically very poor background.
11. The majority of respondents do not own any land. The state of affairs is better in Kullu, while worst in Kinnaur. That reflects that respondents are economically with very poor background.
12. Respondents are taking loan from bank, financial institutions, micro finance and others, but mostly for non weaving activities.
13. The majority of respondents are earning 5,000 – 10,000 per month, in Kullu and Mandi districts, while it is less than 5000 for others .This reflects the poor standard living and weak financial status of the handloom weavers.
14. The handloom weavers are categorized into four types i.e., self employed weaver, co-operative society weaver, under master weaver & under SHG's. The majority of respondents are co-operative society weavers.
15. The majority of respondents are working for less 8 hours per day in Kullu, while they work gor 8-10 hours in other parts of Himachal Pradesh. Weavers of Kullu get work for more than 300 days in a year as compared to other parts of Himachal.

16. The majority of respondents are weaving experience 30-40 years. This reflects young generations are taking other higher earning job opportunities.

17. The handloom weaver's community is almost equally distributed in joint family and nuclear set up of family with most of them belonging to joint family.

18. Respondents have taken handloom weaving as part time and full time livelihood earning activity. In Chamba, weavers are mostly part time due to less penetration of market of handloom goods.

19. Most of the respondents are socially secured by any insurance or medical insurance, while the numbers are less in case of district Mandi.

8. Suggestions:

1. Government of India and state government shall strictly implement the handloom reservation act 1985. By placing the reserved items of handloom, cannot copy the handloom reserved items by mills and powerlooms and implement the GI act for Kullu and Kinnauri shawls

2. Most of the children's of handloom weavers are not studying because of poor financial position of family, for which government intervention is required.

3. The majority of the respondents who are living in semi pucca and kutcha houses and having no toilet facilities must be supported and financed by proper implementing already existing government schemes for handloom weavers.

4. Government must find ways to increase the income level of handloom weavers by promoting their products.

5. Weavers should be given space in prominent tourist locations for direct selling of their produce.

6. Wool being primary raw material for most of the weavers, small wool yarn processing centers need to be established.

7. Publicity is one of the essential factors, which influence the sale of the products. Therefore government should provide special publicity drive to promote handloom products through promotion of societies.

8. The Government should organize more awareness towards Handloom mark, to create unique brand image for genuine Handloom Products.

9. To bring superior quality in handloom products, the focus should be on pre and post loom process development. Innovative and faster weaving processes to increase efficiency of weavers would make handloom more competitive and profitable.

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