

# Livelihood Sustainability of Handloom Weavers of Odisha: A Case Study in Subarnapur District

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## Abstract

The study tries to examine that how far the livelihood of handloom weavers is sustainable and also examined the challenges prevalent in the handloom sector in Odisha. Subarnapur district is an essential center of the handloom industry and has been chosen as the study area. The study is based on primary data of 60 households. The district has 6 blocks, of which the Sonapur block has been selected through multistage sampling. The 60 handloom weaver's data are collected through random cum convenience sampling. The descriptive statistics, ratio, percentage, average, and frequency are used here to outline the results. The study found that there are more marginal weavers in the Subarnapur district whose expenditures are more than their income; therefore, the socioeconomic condition of handloom weavers in the Subarnapur district is low. From this study of 60 household's survey this study found that the average income of the handloom weaver in Subarnapur district is 15248.33 which are very low if we compare the World Bank report on the income of a household; that's why more than 50 percent of weavers are not satisfied with the wage determination system. They mainly used traditional looms and worked under master weavers. The study itself suggest that the government should provide financial support, subsidies and provides inputs cheaply to the weavers for promoting advance method of weaving such as power loom and tent loom along with the training to the weavers about the modern way of weaving for better productivity and make it sustainable as a livelihood for the Subarnapur district handloom weavers.

**Keywords:** Handloom weavers (J40), Socio- economic conditions(Z00), sustainability (Q00), Loom, Livelihood

## 1. Introduction

The handloom sector is one of the largest economic activity sectors after agriculture, providing direct and indirect employment to more than 4 million weavers and allied workers in India (Development Commissioner for Handloom, 2019). The handloom industry is primarily consisted of indoor workers who are domestically confined their selves for the work. Handloom is now the source of livelihood to several millions of artisans and their families all over the world (Mishra et. al. 2021). According to the latest Handloom Census (2019-20) there are 25.46 lakh handlooms in the nation, which employ 31.45 lakh weavers and other related workers. Livelihood is defined as adequate stocks and flows of cash to meet basic needs (Chambers, 1989). However, this definition does not describe how adequate stocks and flows of cash come about. Chambers and Conway (1992) describe livelihood as the capabilities, assets activities required for a means of living. However, these definitions are associated the sustainability concepts. A livelihood is sustainable when it enables people to cope with and recover from shocks and

stresses. The livelihood framework is a complex archaeology of ideas and practices bridging perspectives across different fields of rural development (Scoones, 2013). The handloom industry holds a special place in our economy and has significantly boosted India's GDP. Thus it plays an important role in the rural economic development in particular and in general as whole of the economic growth. Odisha is one of the developing states of India where there are more rural residents as compare to urban. The rural people of Odisha are more dependent on agriculture. after agriculture, the handloom sector plays an important role in providing livelihood to the more than 39 % of total population who have chosen their livelihood as weavings. The artistic design of handloom products, popularly known as Sambalpuri, is the traditional occupation of the weavers' community (Bhulia, Kuli, and Kusta) of West Odisha. The western Odisha handloom weavers are famous for the iikat design which is used in the Sambalpuri saree. Sambalpuri handlooms are made from the fabric knitted on a handloom. Odisha Ikat Fabrics are popular all over the world. Bargarh, Sonepur, Bolangir, Sambalpur, Boudh, and Jharsuguda are the districts where the weavers of Sambalpuri handloom reside (Crill, 1998). Among these areas, Subarnapur district is one of the handloom weaver's cluster where the handloom weavers locally resided more than 34000 of total population.

Subarnapur district is especially known for its BANDHA designs of handloom weavers. The handloom clusters of the Subarnapur district are the Birmaharajpur, Ulunda, Binka, and Sonepur blocks. Handloom weavers play an important role in the development and gaining attention of the outside Odisha people for the Subarnapur handwork. This study mainly focuses on the socio-economic conditions of weavers and the problems and prospects of handloom weaving as a livelihood.

## **2. Motivation of the study**

The handloom weaving sector in Odisha, particularly in the Subarnapur district, represents a significant cultural and economic heritage. Despite its historical importance and contribution to the local economy, the livelihood sustainability of handloom weavers faces critical challenges. This study will also be underlying issues and challenges associated with handloom weaving in the Sonepur block of the Subarnapur district. So it is important to examine whether the livelihood of handloom weavers is sustainable or not for the future generation of my locality.

## **3. The Review of Literature**

Here examined previous studies related to socioeconomic conditions, employment availability, marketing, and sustainability of the handloom sector as an income source for the future generation and the issues and challenges related to the handloom weavers, etc. viewed from different angles.

**Behera and Bag (2020)** Study explores the sociocultural importance and the problems and prospects of the handloom weaving community in an anthropological perspective. **Sahoo et. al (2020)** found that handloom weavers are mainly facing the problems in procurement of required raw materials like yarn, dyes and chemicals at the right time and in appropriate quantities, poor governmental support, lack of credit availability, non-availability of market, lack of training and skill development programs, deprived of benefits from the different governmental scheme in their study. **Chatterjee and Jain (2020)** found that weaver households in the areas looked at had low living standards and quality of life. Their study also reflected that the handloom weavers of Kota Doria live in deplorable social and economic conditions and that different government programs have been unable to help them make more money. **Patra (2021)** studied the profitability of handloom products of Maniabandha and Mahammadpur of the

Cuttack district of Odisha and other handloom products of Odisha. Her study is based on both primary and secondary data. Her study concluded that the handloom products of Maniabandha and Mahammadpur of the district of Odisha have their unique profitability influence on the earnings of weavers. **Das (2021)** observed that the handloom industry employs a large number of people associated with weaving. In the Sambalpuri handloom industry, different artisans are associated with weaving, namely, designer, tier, dyer, and weavers. Each artisan specializes in different skills. In applying the binary choice model, it is found that if the number of family members is more, then the weavers' families prefer to work with a master weaver or businessman. **Sahoo (2022)** In this paper, the different implemented schemes for weavers in the state of Odisha is highlighted. As per the results, the scheme Solar Light is the most successful one followed by the Raw Material scheme of the Govt. of Odisha. The schemes which are at the bottom as per the ranks are loom-shed, exposure visit and training, respectively. **Das, & Paltasingh (2023)** the study has revealed that weavers in Odisha confront a range of challenges, including poor marketing tactics, administrative failure, a lack of technological competence, inadequate infrastructure, the unavailability of power looms, a lack of government support, etc. their paper addressed various livelihood challenges confronted by the weavers in western Odisha. **Amit and Rama (2023)** study of socio-economic status of the workers employed in the handloom industry in the Uttar Pradesh. In their study found that the socio-economic conditions of the handloom workers have improved in the fourth census as comparison to third census, but even at the present time it is not the above the level of livelihood. **Rakesh Meher et.al (2024)** Their study is being conducted in ten villages of the Subarnapur district of Odisha to investigate the impact of Covid-19 and the lockdown on the livelihood of the Sambalpuri saree community. The study found that as there are no cooperative societies, weavers are reliant on master weavers, who pay meager wages and find it difficult to feed their families and attend to medical emergencies. **Chinnu and sheeba (2021)** conducted a study on the weavers are weak due to financial constraints, health problem, and poor in economic conditions. This paper aims to measure the socio economic condition of handloom weavers in Vellore District. **Chellappan (1984)** study highlighted the importance of clothing among the three necessities of human life. His work also revealed on the structure, organization and wage conditions and suggestions to improve the Handloom industry. **Kethan and Khizerulla (2022)** study is concentrated in Rayalaseem and Costal Region of Andhra Pradesh on issues and challenges on production of handloom sector. The studies revealed that customers are willing to buy handloom and handcrafted products but they do not have this knowledge whether they are spending money on the original or the imitated product. **Mumu (2021)** conducted to assess the calorie intake level, determine the factors influencing calorie intake and identify the problems faced by the handloom weaver households in a selected area of Bangladesh. **Sreenivas and Suman (2016)** study broadly examines the Socio-economic conditions of handloom weaver in Karimnagar district from 2005-2015. Their study is based on primary data as well as secondary data. In their study they have given suitable suggestions to develop the handloom industry. **Pratap and Naidu (2015)** studied on Socio-Economic Conditions of the Hand Loom Weavers Vontimitta Mandal in Kadapa District of Andhra Pradesh. Their study was based on primary data with the help of convenience random sampling to collect the data from Kadapa. Their study revealed most of the handloom weavers are willing to live in a joint family system. The income and living standards of the handloom weavers are very poor.

#### **4. Research Gap**

While previous studies have analyzed handloom weaving across different regions, there is limited research focusing specifically on the Subarnapur district's unique challenges. Thus, the present study explores about sustainable livelihood of handloom weaver and problems related to the livelihood of handloom weavers of Subarnapur districts to make addition on the existing study of handloom weavers.

#### **5. Research Objectives**

The broad objective of the study is to examine the handloom as a sustainable livelihood in Subarnapur districts. Based on the broad objective, the following sub- objectives have been covered;

- 1- To study socio- economic condition of handloom weaver in Subarnapur district.
- 2- To examine the Sustainability of handloom as a livelihood in Subarnapur districts.
- 3- To examine the issue and problem of handloom weavers in the Subarnapur district.

#### **6. Data and Methodology**

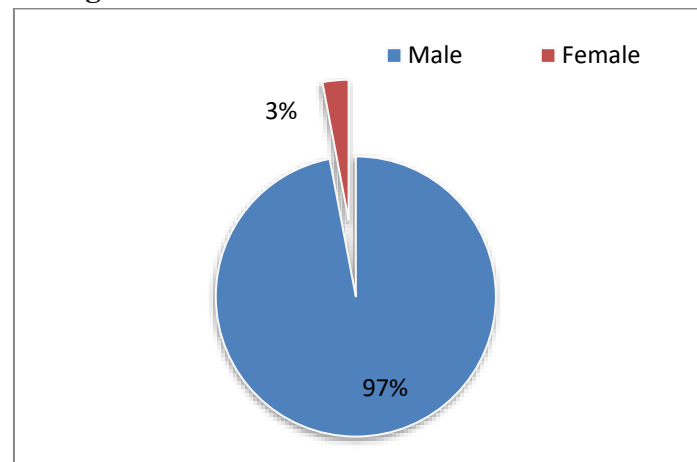
This methodology ensures a focused and systematic approach to understanding the livelihood sustainability and challenges faced by handloom weavers in Odisha. The research is conducted in the Subarnapur district, Odisha, a prominent center of the handloom industry. Among the district's six blocks, Sonapur block has been selected as the study area using multistage sampling. This study is based on primary data. The sample size is 60 households of handloom weavers are included in the study. The Sampling Technique uses a combination of random sampling and convenience sampling to ensure representation while accommodating practical constraints. Information is gathered directly from the selected households through structured interviews or questionnaires on socioeconomic conditions, challenges faced by weavers, and the sustainability of their livelihoods. Descriptive statistics are employed to analyze and interpret the data using Ratio Analysis, Percentage Calculations, Averages, and Frequency Distribution. The study is descriptive, which will describe the livelihood sustainability of handloom weavers in the Subarnapur district, Odisha.

#### **7. Result and Discussion**

This section of the article has covered the result of the ground study, which is done on 60 weaver families of Subarnapur district. The study has discussed the ground report of important variables which are truly reflecting the weaver families' socio-economic conditions, their livelihood as handloom whether it is sustainable or not and the lastly it discuss the problems which are concerning to the handloom activities or production side. That's why the main aim of the article is to study the sustainability of weaver's community livelihood in Subarnapur district of Odisha.

In this study gender composition tries to show the role of male and female from family managing to the decision taking.

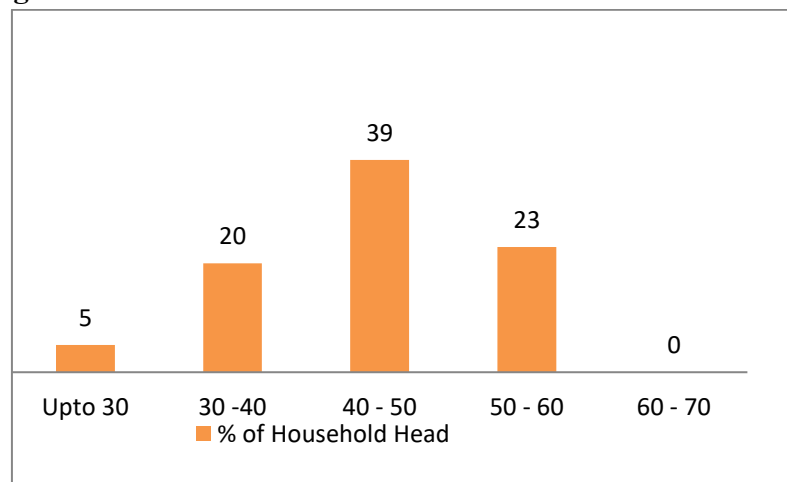
**Figure-1 Distribution on the Basis of Gender**



*Source: Primary Survey*

Figure 1 reflects that most of the household heads are male and only a small portion of household heads are household heads we got from the primary study. As per result, male household heads are 97% of the total sample, and only 3% percentage household heads are female of handloom weaver families in the Subarnapur district. But females play a vital role in the weaving process, which is not shown in the observation. So the government should work in the handloom sector to empower the women via financial support, providing loom to make them financially independent and various programs to acknowledge their hidden role in the handloom sector.

**Figure- 2 Distribution of Households heads on the basis of age**



*Source: Primary Survey*

Age is an important factor in determining the productivity of a weaver and working time. The age group below 14 and above 64 are considered a dependent population. The above figure (Figure-2) distributed the households on different age groups with class interval. The study reflected the primary survey result on the age group of handloom weavers in the Subarnapur district per the primary survey; the age group between 40 to 50 captured 39% percent of household heads of weaver's family in Subarnapur district which is a maximum percentage. The age within 30 only has 5% percent of household head of weaver

family in the Subarnapur district which is minimum percentage. If we look at the overall observation, then the average age is 44.55 of a household head as per the primary survey on 60 families.

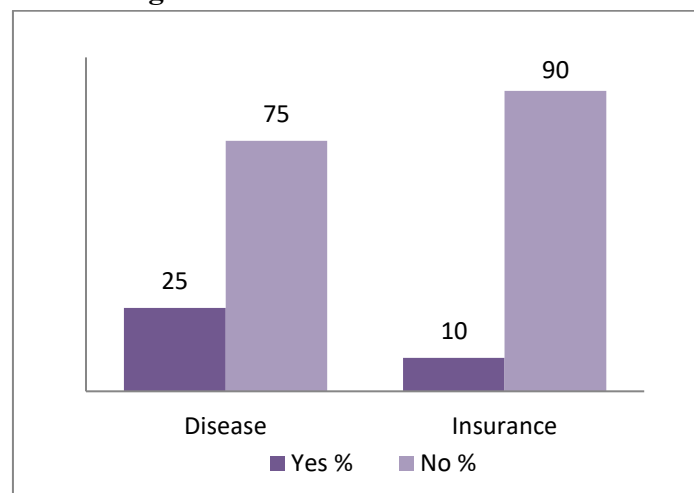
**Table-1. Educational Status of Households**

Sl No.	Educational Level	Percentage of Households
1	Illiterate	15%
2	Primary (1 TO 5 <sup>TH</sup> )	28%
3	Upper primary (6 TO 8)	20%
4	Secondary (9 TO 10)	25%
5	Higher Secondary (11 TO 12)	5%
6	Above Higher Secondary	7%

*Source: Primary Survey*

Educational level of an individual also decides the social status of an individual, productivity, income, occupation and etc. The table no - 1 tabulated the primary survey on the weaver's family head educational level and the result found that that 15 % of household head even did not complete their primary education which is a not a positive outcome. Most of the household head just completed their primary education (1 to 5th) which is maximum in the above table that is 28% percent. A very small percentage of people have done higher secondary education, which is 5% percent of the 100% percent.

**Figure- 3 Health Status of Weavers**



*Source: Primary Survey*

Health is also affected the productivity of handloom weavers. So in this health status, we have considered two variables one is disease and another is insurance. The study shows the how many percentage of handloom weavers are suffering from chronic illness and many percentage is not suffering along with the number of household heads that have insurance in or not. The ground report reflected in Figure 3 that 25% percent of household heads is suffering at least any one kind of severe disease and 75% percent is not having a health issue. We look at the insurance side then, there is very few people who have purchased which is only 10% percent, and 90% percent of people do not have any insurance.

The government should provide health security or health insurance to the handloom weavers at a very low cost.

**Table-2 Monthly Income of the Households**

Sl No.	Income Class ( Monthly in Rs)	Percentage of Households
1	Up to 10,000	30 %
2	10,000 -20,000	57 %
3	20,000 -30,000	8 %
4	Above 30,000	6 %

*Source: Primary Survey*

Income is a very much influencing variable of the economic condition of handloom weavers. It determines most of the other economic variables such as consumption, saving, investment, and standard of living of the household. The above table shows the different percentages of households that fall under different income classes. From observation of the above table, it indicates that the maximum percentage of handloom weavers in Subarnapur district comes under the second income class, which is between 10,000 to 20,000 which is 57% percent. The minimum percent of handloom weavers comes under the fourth class or above 30000 income class, which is only 6% percent. From this study of 60 household's survey this study found that the average income of the handloom weaver in Subarnapur district is 15248.33, which is very low if we compare the World Bank report on income of a household.

**Table-3 Monthly Average Expenditure Pattern of Households**

Sl No	Particulars	Average expenses of Households ( in Rs)	Percentage of Households
1	Food	6492	100 %
2	Education	2703	55 %
3	Health	1353	100 %
4	Clothing	2685	100 %
5	Electricity	389	100 %
6	Fuel	1541	95 %
7	Loom maintenance	379	100 %
8	Others	1604	100 %

*Source: Primary Survey*

Consumption is inversely related with the saving also and positively with life style of a household. In this study 60 households are being critically examined to know their consumption pattern. Here the below table shows the different items where the household spending in their day to day life is given in average amount and how much percentage people spend on each items which we have taken in the table. As per the above table (Table -3) all the household spend some portion of income in every item except the education and fuel, because some people don't own any vehicle. Above 50% percent of people don't spend on education, either in their family mostly consists of above 22 or there may have left the education due to involve in weaving or support their parent. If we look at the average amount spent on each item of handloom weavers in the Subarnapur district, then the maximum average income spent on

food is 6494. But a family spends a minimum portion of their income in loom maintenance, which is only 379. All the average spending is on a monthly basis.

In India, typically four types of weavers are prevalent these are (i) Independent weavers, (ii) Master weavers, (iii) Cooperative societies' weavers (iv) State Handloom Development Corporation's weavers but However, in the study, only the first three types of weavers are taken into consideration. Table 5 tries to show the concentration of different types of handloom weavers in the Subarnapur district.

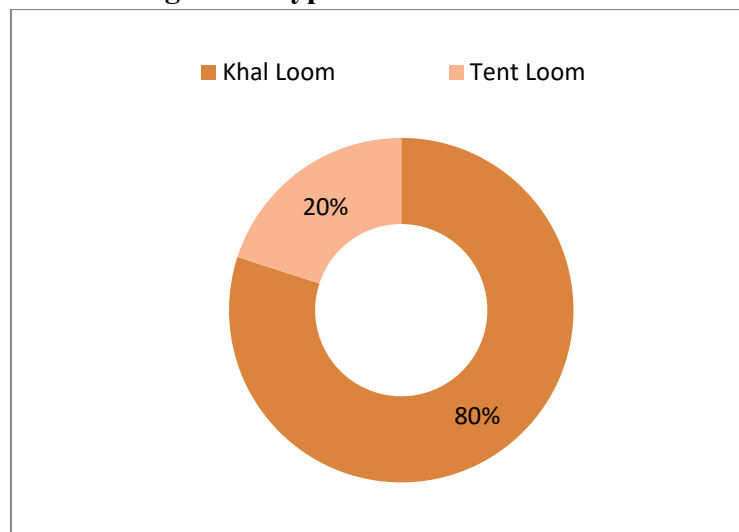
**Table – 4: Distribution based on types of Weavers**

Sl No.	Types of Weavers	Percentage of Households
1	Independent Weavers	7%
2	Working under Master Weavers	93 %
3	Working for Cooperative Society	0 %

*Source: Primary Survey*

From the observation of table 4 the study indicates there is maximum of weavers are working under the master weavers which are 93% percent of the total sample survey in Subarnapur district, and only three percent are independent weavers.

**Figure- 4 Type of Loom Installation**



*Source: Primary Survey*

The type of loom also determines the productivity of handloom weavers. This study only focuses on the two types of loom, which is shown in Figure 4. The above table and figure reflect that most of the handloom weavers are using khal loom (dig loom) in the Subarnapur district. 80% percent of the total observation are using khal loom and only 20% percent of total 60 household observations are using tent loom. The tent loom users is low because marginal weavers are not financially able to incorporate in their production; that's why they are using traditional loom.

Wage is the compensation to the worker or labor for their physical and mental effort. Here the study gives light to the wages given to the handloom weavers in the Subarnapur district. The wages are examined in the basis of per units of produce with the ranges where their wages fall.

**Table- 5 Monthly Wage Range of Households**

Sl No.	Wage range	Percentage of Households
1	Within 2000	8 %
2	2001- 3000	55 %
3	3001-4000	20 %
4	4001-5000	12 %
5	Above 5000	5 %

*Source: Primary Survey*

The above table reflected the different ranges of wages along with the percentage of household. As table 5 indicates, the maximum households get between 2 to 3 thousand in per unit of produce; that percentage is 55% of the overall sample. The minimum percentages of people are getting above 5000 in per unit of produce that range captures 5 percent of the 60 households. The average wage of the 60 handloom weavers in the Subarnapur district found from the primary survey is 3600.

**Table-6 Different Problems Faced by Households**

Particulars	Raw material Problem	Workplace Satisfy	Wage Satisfy
Yes	5%	30%	40%
No	95%	70%	60%

*Source: Primary Survey*

Handloom weavers in the Subarnapur district still operate on traditional means of production and work under master weavers. Here in the study, problems regarding working condition, wage and raw materials all these three issues are interpreted and analyzed with the help of a table. The primary survey found that 70 percent of people are not satisfied with the workplace, and only 30 percent are satisfied. As respondent given the reason the working place is too small, the ventilation is not good etc. Then come to wage as per the primary survey the study got to know that only 40 percent of the 60 households are satisfied and 60 percent are not satisfied. Last but not the least the major raw material is yarn used in handloom work. Now a day, the price of yarn is increasing rapidly, so the weavers face problems, but those weavers who are financially stable do not face many problems. The table indicates that 95 percent are not having problems relating to the raw material because they work under master weavers and only 5 percent of weavers are facing the problem of a shortage raw material and increasing their price.

## 8. Findings and Policy Suggestions

The study conducted on 60 households of handloom weavers in the Subarnapur district reveals several significant findings regarding their socioeconomic conditions and demographics. The majority of household heads are male, comprising 97% of the sample, while only 3% are female. Targeted programs are required to encourage and support female participation in handloom weaving as primary earners and provide special incentives for women-led handloom enterprises. The most represented age group among household heads is 40 to 50 years, accounting for 39% of the sample with an average age of 44.55 years for household heads. About 25% of the surveyed households reported chronic illnesses, while only 10% had health insurance, indicating a concerning gap in healthcare coverage among weavers. The

government should implement a comprehensive, low-cost health insurance scheme tailored explicitly for handloom weavers to address the significant gap in healthcare coverage. The average monthly income of handloom weavers is reported at ₹15,248.33, which is considered low when compared to global standards for household income. Only 40% of the surveyed households are satisfied with the remuneration received per unit of saree produced by master weavers. The government must introduce a minimum wage policy for handloom weavers to ensure fair compensation for their work and develop a pricing mechanism that factors in the labor-intensive nature of handloom weaving to improve remuneration per unit of saree produced. Many weavers prefer working under master weavers due to fears of market instability and risks associated with independent work. There is a need to establish a government-backed marketing platform to connect weavers directly with consumers, reducing dependence on master weavers. They predominantly use traditional looms, which are less efficient than modern alternatives. The primary product produced by these weavers is sarees, with 72% producing fewer than five units per month. The government should initiate training programs to upskill weavers in using modern looms and techniques to enhance productivity and income and provide subsidies or low-interest loans for weavers to acquire modern looms and equipment. Additionally, only 30% express satisfaction with their working conditions, citing inadequate space and ventilation issues. The government should provide financial assistance for upgrading weaving workspaces to meet these standards. A vast majority (95%) do not face issues related to raw material shortages since they work under master weavers; however, 5% do report challenges with rising material costs. The key challenges faced by handloom weavers in the Subarnapur district can be addressed by focusing on improving their socioeconomic conditions, enhancing productivity, and ensuring the sustainability of handloom as a livelihood.

## 9. Conclusion

From the overall of this study it is concluded that domestic handloom weavers in Subarnapur district are tightly considering weaving as their primary occupation. The study found that there are more marginal weavers in the Subarnapur district whose expenditure is more than their income therefore, the socio-economic condition of handloom weavers in Subarnapur district is low. The study revealed that more than 50 percent of weavers are not satisfied with the wage determination system, and they mainly use the traditional loom. The findings of the study have been considerably related to the techniques to improve the socio-economic conditions of handloom weaver households, need improvement in the working place, require to provide the handloom weavers financial aid and grant to make them independent weavers, The key challenges faced by handloom weavers in the Subarnapur district can be addressed by focusing on improving their socioeconomic conditions, enhancing productivity, and ensuring the sustainability of handloom as a livelihood.

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