ROLE OF HANDLOOM IN CULTURAL CONTINUITY: EXPLORING ETHNIC IDENTITY AND ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY

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INTRODUCTION:

The handloom industry in India is more than just an economic endeavor; it represents a dynamic tapestry of cultural heritage, identity, and community resilience (Perugu, 2022). Handloom weaving, as a traditional craft, has long been an essential aspect of India's social and cultural fabric, allowing ethnic groups to convey their distinct identities and artistic legacy (Guru et al., 2022). This industry embodies the expertise, customs, and principles of various cultural groups, aiding in the transfer of cultural knowledge across generations (Mishra & Mohapatra, 2020). As per the Handloom Census 2019, around 3.5 million handloom workers are involved in this valued tradition, with many coming from disadvantaged communities. However, in an ever-changing modern world, the handloom industry confronts various obstacles that jeopardize its sustainability and the associated cultural practices (Mishra et al., 2022).

The rise of mechanized fabrics has intensified competition, resulting in a decrease in demand for handmade products. According to the Ministry of Textiles Report (2023) the handloom sector contributes approximately 15% to India's total textile production, but it has been steadily losing market share to cheaper, mass-produced alternatives. Moreover, over 30% of handloom weavers report inadequate earnings to support their families, highlighting the economic vulnerability of these communities (Venugopal, 2023). As globalization shapes consumer preferences, traditional weaving skills and patterns are at risk of disappearing. Efforts such as the National Handloom Development Programme aim to support weavers, but these programs are often hindered by bureaucratic inefficiencies and a lack of awareness among artisans (Sarkar & Mukhopadhyay, 2019). Addressing these issues is crucial for reviving the handloom sector, which serves as a vital link between cultural continuity and economic survival for ethnic communities. Furthermore, the economic impact of the handloom sector cannot be overstated. Many ethnic communities rely on handloom weaving as their primary source of livelihood, providing essential income and economic stability (V.K. & Sindhu, 2023). This sector faces contemporary challenges,

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including competition from mechanized textiles, fluctuating market demands, and limited access to resources and training (Costa et al., 2020).

This study seeks to examine the handloom sector's dual role in preserving cultural identity and supporting economic stability within ethnic communities. Specifically, the research will investigate how traditional weaving practices contribute to the transmission of cultural values and heritage across generations, thereby fostering a sense of belonging and pride among artisans. This focus is essential for understanding the broader significance of these practices in maintaining India's diverse cultural landscape and strengthening community identity. Additionally, this study aims to analyses the economic impact of the handloom sector on the livelihoods of ethnic communities, with a particular emphasis on its role as a source of income and economic resilience amidst contemporary challenges. By exploring these cultural and economic dimensions, the findings of this research will provide insights into how traditional crafts like handloom weaving sustain ethnic identities and contribute to economic stability. These insights will support policy discussions and inspire further action to preserve India's cultural heritage and enhance the socio-economic well-being of its artisan communities, highlighting the sector's critical role in linking cultural continuity with economic survival.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The literature on the handloom industry underscores its vital role in preserving cultural continuity and supporting economic sustainability among ethnic communities. According to Nunoo et al. (2021) historically, handloom weaving has passed down intricate designs and techniques across generations, embedding ethnic identity within the fabrics produced. The sector's economic contributions remain significant, despite challenges from mechanised textiles and market limitations, as it sustains livelihoods for a large portion of India's artisan communities (Bhowmik & Baidya, 2024). According to Annaldewar et al. (2021) the emphasis on sustainability, utilising eco-friendly materials, and aligning with contemporary values highlights the sector's adaptability in modern times. Policy initiatives further support the sector, fostering cultural preservation and ensuring the socio-economic survival of ethnic communities dependent on handloom weaving.

Historical Evolution of Handloom Industry

The handloom industry has a long and rich history, dating back to ancient civilizations where it played a vital role in cultural preservation and economic development. This historical evolution of the handloom industry is crucial to understanding its significance in maintaining ethnic identity and promoting economic sustainability (Kumar et al., 2021). According to Shaieka (2023) the handloom industry has a rich history dating back centuries, with traditions passed down from generation to generation. The history of handlooms is historically rooted

and has undergone many changes throughout these periods. The modern handloom weaving sector has designed societies in such a way that economic systems are revolutionized. They always wanted to improve the living standards without any harm to the culture. They passed the heritage from one generation to another, leaving no space for discontinuity (Prathap & Naidu, 2015). Handloom is not a static entity; it has been changing along with innovative developments such as the threat of the industrial revolution, the emergence of collaboration culture, cultural diversity, and the introduction of government policies, including changes in weaving styles based on the demands and non-demands of people, as well as the outline of home furnishings for household purposes among the interior states (Mamidipudi et al., 2012). Despite being widespread, the specialization in the art of weaving, the arrangement of looms, and skilled design has a significant impact, adding to the distinctive and personalized aspect of life in comparison to industrial equivalents. The traditional methods and original craftsmanship of handmade textiles indicate a clear difference between the industrial and artistic aspects of the weaving community (Mamidipudi& Bijker, 2018). According to Brahma (2024) the economic sustainability of handloom is intimately connected to its historical development, with the intricate designs and patterns woven into handloom fabrics serving as a reflection of the rich cultural heritage of different regions. The handloom industry has a deeply rooted history that can be traced back to ancient civilizations, playing a critical role in the cultural identity of communities and providing livelihoods for numerous families, thus contributing to the local economy (Gopura & Wickramasinghe, 2024).

Cultural Significance of the Handloom Sector

The handloom sector in India is deeply embedded in the cultural identity of various ethnic communities. Historically, handloom weaving has been a means of preserving cultural traditions and artistic expression. According to Mishra and Mohapatra (2020), handwoven textiles are rich in intricate designs and techniques that reflect the diverse cultural narratives of Indian communities. Regions such as Varanasi, Kanchipuram, and Godda are particularly noted for their specific weaving traditions, showcasing craftsmanship that has been honed over generations (Boruah, 2021). According to Mahanta et al. (2024) this deep-rooted connection between handloom textiles and cultural identity underscores the importance of the sector in maintaining the socio-cultural fabric of India. Handloom textiles often embody local customs, beliefs, and values, acting as a canvas for storytelling that connects the past to the present (Mishra & Mohapatra, 2020).

Economic Contributions and Challenges

Despite its cultural significance, the handloom sector faces formidable challenges in a rapidly modernizing economy (Devbrath & Singh, 2024). The introduction of mechanized textiles during the colonial period significantly impacted the handloom industry, leading to

a decline in traditional weaving practices (Roy, 2020). According to Banik &Longjam (2023) artisans contend with fierce competition from cheaper machine-made alternatives, limited access to modern technology, and inadequate market exposure. Many weavers experience inconsistent income and poor living conditions, which exacerbate their economic vulnerability (Siddhu, 2023). According to the Ministry of Textiles Report (2023) reveals that around 70% of handloom weavers rely on this craft as their primary source of income, highlighting the economic dependency of these communities on the sector. However, the rise in global demand for sustainable and eco-friendly products presents opportunities for revitalization, as consumers increasingly appreciate the cultural significance and uniqueness of handcrafted items (Ministry of Commerce & Industry, 2022).

Sustainability in the Handloom Industry

Sustainability is a key aspect of the handloom sector, encompassing environmental, social, and economic dimensions. Shrivastava (2020) emphasizes that handlooms often utilize natural and organic materials, which are less harmful to the environment compared to mass-produced textiles. This focus on sustainability not only benefits the environment but also resonates with a growing consumer preference for eco-friendly products. Social sustainability also plays a significant role, advocating for fair wages, improved working conditions, and the preservation of traditional weaving skills, which are vital for maintaining local cultures and identities (Polec & Murawska, 2021). The alignment of the handloom sector with contemporary values surrounding sustainability positions it as an essential component of both cultural continuity and economic viability (Balaji & Mani, 2014).

Policy Initiatives and Future Directions

According to Mishra, & Mohapatra. (2017) the importance of supporting the handloom sector, the Indian government has implemented various policies and initiatives aimed at promoting sustainability and improving the livelihoods of weavers. Programs such as the National Handloom Development Program (NHDP) and the Handloom Weavers' Comprehensive Welfare Scheme provide essential financial assistance, skill development, and market access to artisans (Ministry of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises, 2015). Collaborations between government bodies, non-governmental organizations, and the private sector have further facilitated market linkages and enhanced the visibility of handloom products (Tarai, 2020). These initiatives are crucial for improving the socio-economic conditions of weavers while ensuring the preservation of India's rich cultural heritage through its handloom sector.

This literature review highlights the dual role of the handloom industry in fostering cultural continuity and economic survival. By addressing the cultural significance, economic contributions, sustainability aspects, and policy initiatives related to the handloom sector,

it becomes evident that integrated strategies are necessary to support the sector and sustain ethnic identities in contemporary society. As the handloom industry navigates the challenges of modernization, the emphasis on cultural preservation and economic viability remains essential for the future of India's artisan communities.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

- a. To investigate the role of the handloom sector in preserving cultural identity and continuity among ethnic communities, focusing on how traditional weaving practices contribute to the transmission of cultural values and heritage across generations.
- b. To analyse the economic impact of the handloom sector on the livelihoods of ethnic communities, examining how it serves as a vital source of income and economic stability amidst contemporary challenges.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a quantitative research methodology to examine the relationship between handloom weaving's cultural continuity and the economic survival of ethnic communities in the Godda, Sahebganj and Ranchi districts of Jharkhand. Data were collected from 130 handloom workers through a structured questionnaire assessing cultural identity, economic challenges, and income satisfaction. Additionally, secondary data were gathered from existing literature, government reports, and census data to provide context and support for the primary data findings. The collected data were analysed using SPSS, descriptive statistics, chi-square tests, and correlation analysis were performed to examine relationships between cultural and economic factors and to test the hypothesis that handloom weaving has a significant impact on both cultural continuity and economic survival. Ethical considerations, including informed consent and confidentiality, were maintained throughout the research process. This methodology aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of how the handloom sector contributes to ethnic identity and economic resilience within the studied communities.

HYPOTHESIS OF THE STUDY

Null Hypothesis (H0): There is no significant relationship between handloom weaving's cultural continuity and the economic survival of ethnic communities.

Alternative Hypothesis (H1): There is a significant relationship between handloom weaving's cultural continuity and the economic survival of ethnic communities.

RESULTS

In this section the result is analysed and discussed the role of handloom weaving on cultural and economic aspects of ethnic communities in Jharkhand. The focus is on how the sector contributes to preserving cultural identity and ensuring financial sustainability. Data was collected through a structured questionnaire from 130 handloom weavers in the

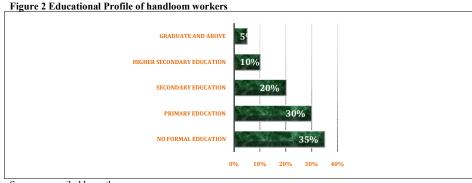
Godda, Saheb Ganj, and Ranchi districts, providing quantitative insights. The findings cover cultural elements, such as traditional weaving techniques and participation in cultural events, as well as economic factors, including income stability, satisfaction, and challenges like market access and competition from machine-made products. Results are presented in tabular and graphical formats to improve clarity. The goal of the paper is to give a detailed overview of the current cultural and economic state of the handloom sector, with the aim of informing policies and strategies to support ethnic communities through handloom weaving.

3%
33%
■ Male
■ Female
■ Transgender

Figure 1 Gender distribution among handloom workers

Source: compiled by author

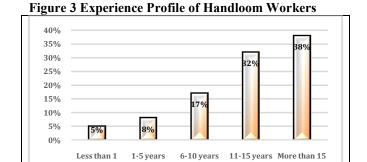
The figure 1 reveals that 64% of the participants are female, highlighting their significant role in the Jharkhand handloom weaving industry. The remaining 33% are male, indicating lesser involvement. A minor proportion (3%) identify as transgender, indicating inclusivity. Handloom weaving is both an economic and culturally meaningful occupation, particularly for women in the region.



Source: compiled by author

The figure 2, which displays the educational background of the handloom weavers in this study, reveals that a substantial portion, 35%, lack formal education, indicating limited access to educational resources. Approximately 30% have received primary education,

while 20% completed secondary education. Only 10% of the respondents have achieved higher secondary education, and a mere 5% hold qualifications at the graduate level or above. This distribution highlights the educational challenges within the handloom weaving community, which may impact their ability to access and benefit from modern business practices, technologies, and support systems.



Source: compiled by author

The data presented in figure 3 illustrates the distribution of years of experience among handloom weavers, revealing that 5% of respondents are newcomers with less than 1 year of experience, while 8% have 1-5 years, indicating a smaller group in the early phases of their careers. A further 17% have accrued 6-10 years, showcasing a workforce with developed expertise. The most significant segments are those with longerterm experience: 32% of weavers have been involved for 11-15 years, and 38% possess more than 15 years of experience. This highlights that the handloom sector relies heavily on seasoned artisans, with 70% of respondents having over a decade of experience, demonstrating the deeprooted commitment to traditional weaving and its importance as both a cultural and economic cornerstone in their communities.

Table 1: Result of Chi-Square Analysis of the Relationship Between Handloom Weaving, Cultural Continuity, and Economic Survival

Chi-Square Tests					
	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)		
Pearson Chi-Square	36.436 ^a	4	.000		
Likelihood Ratio	50.168	4	.000		
Linear-by-Linear Association	24.218	1	.000		
N of Valid Cases	130				

a. 6 cells (60.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .69.

Source: compiled by author

Table 1 demonstrates a significant association between handloom weaving's role in cultural continuity and its contribution to the economic survival of ethnic communities. The Pearson Chi-Square value (36.436) with a p-value of .000 (p < 0.05) supports rejecting the null hypothesis, indicating that handloom weaving has a substantial impact on both cultural and economic resilience within the communities studied. The test results indicate that handloom weaving serves as both an economic resource and a method for preserving cultural identity, thereby reinforcing its significance within the socio-economic framework of the community.

Table 2: Result of Correlation Between Income Satisfaction and Cultural Importance of Handloom Weaving Among Ethnic Communities

Correlations				
		How Satisfied Are You with Your Income from Handloom Weaving?	Importance of Handloom Weaving in Preserving Cultural Identity	
How Satisfied Are	Pearson	1	.842	
You with Your	Correlation			
Income from	Sig. (2-		.000	
Handloom	tailed)			
Weaving?	N	130	130	
Importance of	Pearson	.842 ^{**}	1	
Handloom	Correlation			
Weaving in	Sig. (2-	.000		
Preserving	tailed)			
Cultural Identity	N	130	130	

^{**.} Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: compiled by author

Table 2 shows a strong positive correlation (r = 0.842, p < 0.01) between income satisfaction from handloom weaving and the perceived cultural importance of handloom weaving among the community. This suggests that as economic satisfaction increases, so does the appreciation of handloom weaving's role in preserving cultural identity, reinforcing its dual importance for economic stability and cultural continuity.

DISCUSSION

Economic Impact and Livelihoods

The handloom industry plays a vital role in supporting the economic well-being of ethnic groups in Jharkhand's Godda, Sahebganj, and Ranchi districts, serving as the primary source of income and financial security for numerous families. Our research revealed that 70% of participants rely on handloom weaving for their livelihood, highlighting the industry's significance in providing sustenance in areas with limited employment prospects.

The data also shows a connection between satisfaction with income and the cultural importance given to handloom weaving. This demonstrates how financial security encourages artisans to continue preserving traditional practices. Additionally, the industry's accessibility to people with varying levels of education and high participation of women highlights its role in promoting economic empowerment, particularly for women.

Despite these positive contributions, the handloom sector is facing economic difficulties such as competition from machine-made products, limited access to modern technology, and challenges in reaching wider markets. To overcome these challenges and improve the economic impact of the sector, it is important to implement strategic interventions. Policies that focus on increasing financial support, providing training opportunities, and expanding market exposure could significantly benefit handloom workers, ensuring their livelihoods while also preserving the cultural heritage embedded within their craft.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the dual significance of the handloom sector in fostering cultural continuity and economic resilience among ethnic communities in Jharkhand, particularly in the districts of Godda, Sahebganj and Ranchi. Statistical analyses, including chi-square and correlation tests, confirm a strong relationship between income satisfaction from handloom weaving and its perceived cultural importance. This indicates that economic stability through traditional weaving enhances the appreciation and preservation of cultural practices, allowing artisans to maintain and pass down their heritage.

The demographic analysis reveals that the handloom sector employs a diverse workforce, with significant female participation, underscoring its accessibility and impact on women's empowerment. The sector's capacity to provide economic independence for women and individuals across varied educational backgrounds makes it an essential resource for livelihoods in rural areas with limited employment opportunities. These findings emphasize that handloom weaving not only supports individual and community welfare but also strengthens social cohesion through shared cultural practices.

To sustain and enhance the handloom sector's role, targeted policy interventions are crucial. Addressing challenges such as competition from mechanized textiles and limited market access through financial support, training, and expanded market linkages will improve both economic viability and cultural preservation. Supporting the handloom industry not only secures economic livelihoods but also preserves India's rich cultural heritage, making it a vital asset in the country's socio-economic landscape.

KEY TAKEAWAYS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

 Cultural Continuity and Economic Stability are Interlinked: The handloom industry serves two important purposes in Jharkhand: preserving cultural traditions and supporting the financial well-being of ethnic groups. Research shows that weavers are more inclined to carry on their traditional practices when they see the economic value in handloom, emphasizing the close link between income satisfaction and cultural significance.

- b. Empowerment Through Accessibility: The art of handloom weaving involves a wide range of workers with varying levels of education and is a significant source of income for women. This highlights the inclusivity of the industry and its impact on empowering women through economic empowerment and the preservation of cultural traditions.
- c. Sustaining the Sector in a Modern Economy: The traditional handloom industry plays a crucial role in preserving cultural heritage and supporting the economy during modern challenges. Yet, it faces potential decline due to competition from modern machinery and lack of technological resources. Implementing specific policies to support this sector can enhance its economic and cultural significance.
- d. Need for Strategic Policy Support: The findings highlight the urgent need for strategic policy support specifically aimed at handloom weavers. Key recommendations include providing economic incentives, such as grants, subsidies, and easy access to credit, to alleviate financial constraints faced by artisans.
- e. Community-Based Interventions for Cultural Preservation: Programs driven by the community that focus on promoting handloom weaving among younger generations have the potential to enhance cultural preservation. By combining cultural education with economic rewards, these efforts can motivate young people to appreciate and continue this traditional heritage.
- f. Focus on Women Centric Development: Due to the substantial participation of women in the industry, implementing development initiatives specifically tailored to women, such as cooperative setups or workshops targeted at women, will enhance economic growth and help preserve community culture.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Future studies in the handloom industry could greatly benefit from exploring different aspects. This could include conducting longterm studies to track changes over time, comparing different regions, and evaluating how policy interventions affect the industry's economic and cultural sustainability. By examining consumer views and market patterns, new opportunities to increase demand for handloom products may be discovered. Additionally, a closer look at gender roles in the handloom industry could reveal specific benefits for female weavers and their empowerment. Furthermore, studying young people's attitudes toward handloom weaving can provide insight into cultural preservation and challenges, while examining how technology can modernize the industry without losing its

traditional nature may lead to improved productivity and appeal. These approaches could offer a more comprehensive understanding of the handloom industry's role in cultural preservation and economic resilience, ultimately guiding more effective policies and initiatives.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This research presents specific limitations. The dependence on a purposive sample could constrain the applicability of findings to the broader population of handloom weavers. Furthermore, given that the data was self-reported, it is susceptible to various biases inherent in the participants' responses. Nevertheless, measures were implemented to mitigate these limitations by employing a meticulously crafted questionnaire and a judicious selection of representative districts.

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