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Problems and prospects of cotton industry in Dhaniakhali block of Hooghly district

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Abstract

Dhaniakhali block, with its non-municipal headquarter at Dhaniakhali, is one of the eighteen blocks of Hooghly district of West Bengal. It is highly famous for its cotton handloom products. It is very difficult to find out the exact time span of origin of the industry in this block, but it is clear that it has very old and strong culture heritage. A large number of people belonging to specific weaver caste known as 'Tantubay' in Bengal, live in Dhaniakhali and its surrounding villages. They are efficiently conducting the mechanism of this heritage craft. The weavers are presently engaged under different co-operative societies from where they collect raw materials for weaving and deposit the finished products to the co-operative societies in exchange of wages. These handloom products are distributed in local markets, all over India and abroad. Through this paper, an attempt has been made to bring in light several aspects related with the growth of the industry. At the same time this paper tries to highlight the problems and related with the industry.

Introduction

In modern Indian Economy, the handicraft cottage industry holds an important position. If we trace out the historical records of handloom industry, we find that the cloths produced for centuries in India were superior and popular enough. The handloom industry was an important part of rural economy in Pre-British period. However this industry faced several changes due to opening up of sea trade route and expansion of export trade in seventeenth and eighteenth century. The colonial rulers almost disrupted the integrated process of spinning of yarn and weaving of cloth. India became chief source of raw material for textile industry of Britain. Consequently hand spinning of yarn

almost disappeared. The imported mill spun and products entered into India market (Niranjana and Vinaya, 2001: pp 3-6)

Thus commercial operation of East India Company laid to ruthless disruption of handloom industry in India. In writings of O'Malley in old Hooghly District Gazetteers published in 1912, it is very obvious. He wrote, "The number of persone engaged in cotton weaving decreased by about 33 per cent in 20 years, and those who clung to their old handicraft had for most part to supplement their earnings from other sources, such as agriculture service, etc". But this industry got a ray of hope during the Swedish movement which took place as a protest against the decision of partition of Bengal in 1905 (West Bengal District Gazetteers, Hooghly, 1972: p 312).However, the handloom industry was survived by rural entrepreneurship and because of the indigenous pattern of its products which was not accessible to machine made products.

Historical perspective of handloom industry in dhaniakhali

In different villages of Dhaniakhali block like Somaspur, Harpur, Brindabanpur, Dhaniakhali, Aia, Mamudpur, Ghanarajpur, Konan, Talbona, Boso, Mahamaya, Mirzanagaretc, a large number of people belonging to specific weaver caste (Tantubay in Bengal), conduct the mechanism of this craft. But due to lack of pertinent records, it is very difficult to find out the exact time span of origin of this industry in this handloom manufacturing centre. During the years before Second World War, cloths using both silk and cotton yarn were manufactured in Dhaniakhali. The products were sold abroad in some quantities to the far-off countries by means of European firms like Walker Gouard, Shaw Wallace etc. Abinas Chandra Dutta of Dhaniakhali. Served as middleman between local artisans and Calcutta firm. The weavers used to conduct the mechanism of weaving on the basis of bani system. The average earning of one weaver was rupees thirty a month. (West Bengal District Gazetteers, Hooghly, 1972:p 287). This profession was a purely caste based profession. A large number of illiterate people were engaged in this profession following their ancestors.

Table-I
The production and sale of saree (in rupees') in Dhaniakhali union

Year	Production(in rupees')	Sale(in rupees')
1999-2000	7685247	7580290
2000-2001	8112408	8439819
2001-2002	10106466	8419303
2202-2003	9181175	8939068
2003-2004	9316906	9120663
2004-2005	8933792	8578900
2005-2006	8883713	9178025

2006-2007	8870895	9388634
2007-2008	10198998	9557325
2008-2009	10345000	9620140

Source: Dhaniakhali union

Diagram-I

The production and sale of saree in different year of Dhaniakhali union

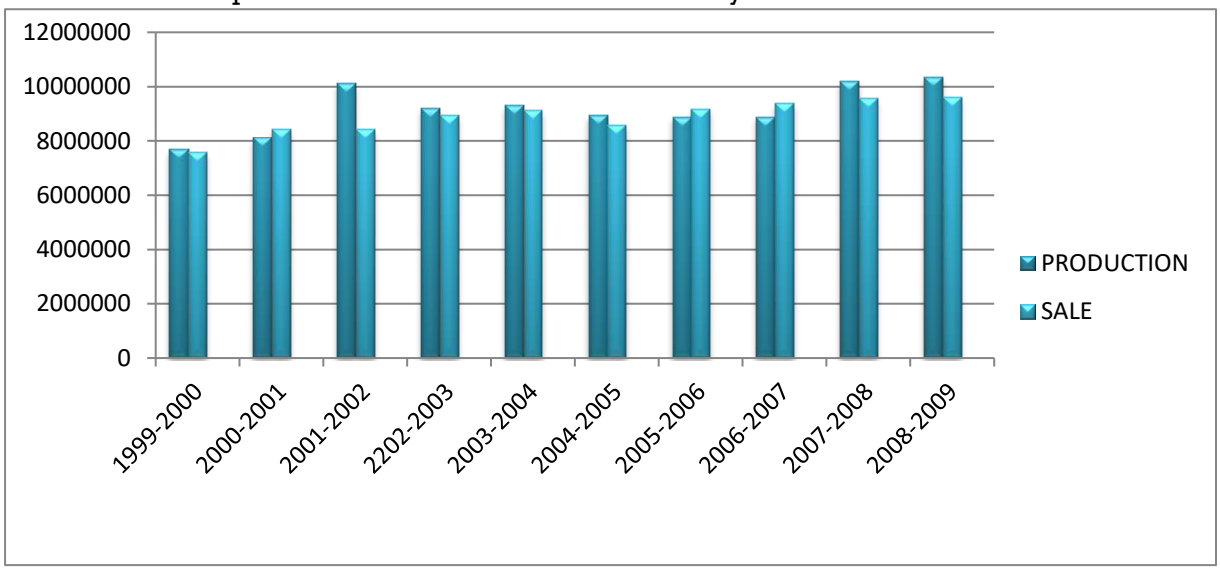


Table-II

The production and sale of saree (in rupees') in Somaspur union

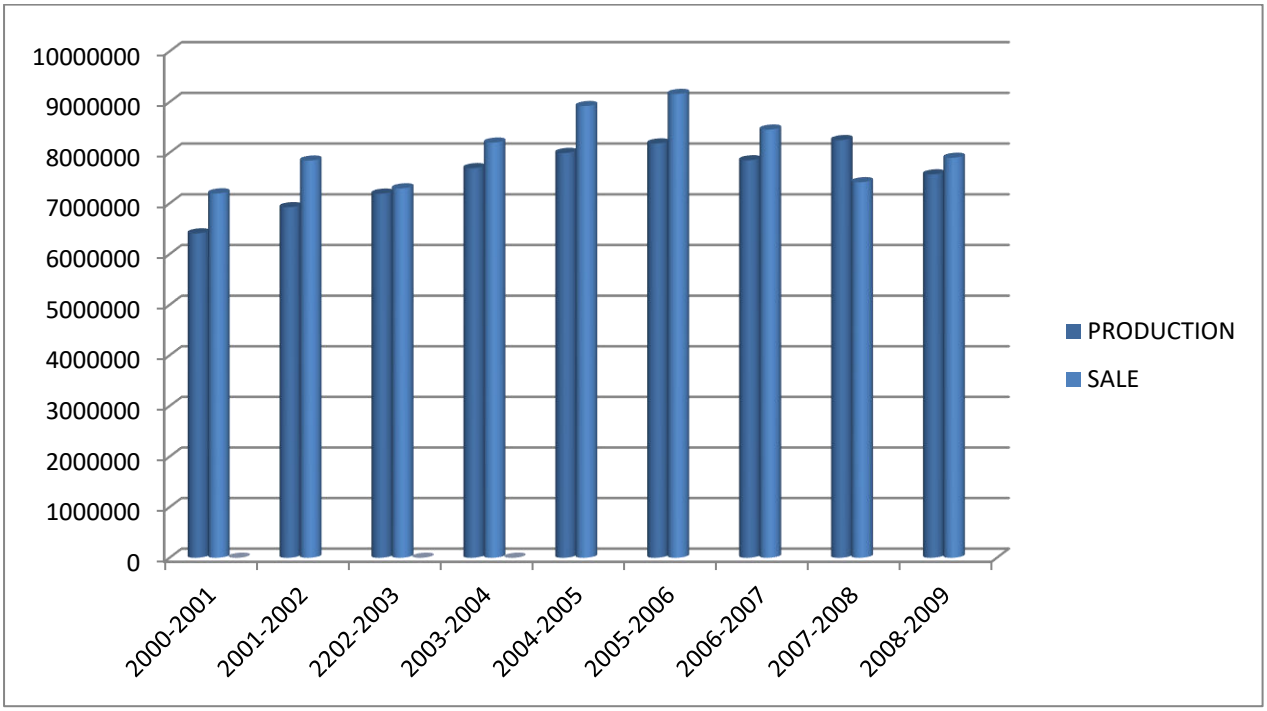
Year	Production(in rupees')	Sale(in rupees')
2000-2001	6409200	7197567
2001-2002	6926000	7845059
2202-2003	7192384	7296930
2003-2004	7695545	8199136
2004-2005	7995545	8920438

2005-2006	8182000	9159518
2006-2007	7850585	8456801
2007-2008	8249000	7418830
2008-2009	7573392	7900392

Source: Samaspur union

Diagram-II

The production and sale of saree in different year of Somaspur union



Problems of the industry

Cotton handloom industry of Dhaniakhali has several problems regarding its production, marketing etc. The major problems of this industry are as follows:

- In the "Brand Name" of Dhaniakhali Handloom low quality products of other handloom centres are marketed by a group of greedy merchants. This is hampering the cotton handloom industry of Dhaniakhali in two ways.

Firstly, it is affecting the reputation of this handloom centre. Secondly, it is creating competition for this centre.

- The next generation of the weavers is not interested to accept weaving as a profession. From the door-to-door survey of thirty weavers and their families, the author has found nineteen persons of next generation of the weavers who are engaged into different profession. Among them, only three have accepted weaving as their profession while five persons work in retail shop, four are small businessmen, two persons work in private sector, three are engaged in government service and two are private tutor. The relationship between number of working loom and cloth production is always positive which has been found in the analysis part of production performance of the industry. If numbers of weaver decrease then working in looms and production will also decrease. This phenomenon is challenging the existence of the industry.
- From the production performance of the societies, it is clear that they have no self sufficiency in respect of capital. They are dependent on government loan for their production. Their production status is almost in stagnant state.
- Cooperative societies are indifferent in enlarging their marketing sphere. They are mainly dependent on retail sale. They have no sale outlet in big cities or other places. They join the government expo, melas, and exhibitions as they gain some benefit from these. They have no activity to boost up the marketing scope. For example the GurapTantubaySamabay Samity limited has joined Suri Chaitra mela and Tant BastraPradarshani mela only, in 2008. Hugh stock piles are found in the stores of the societies.
- The system of pricing of government organizations is not appropriate. They do not pay the money timely after purchasing the products from cooperative societies. For example in 1996-1997, government organizations were failed to pay the money to GurapTantubaySamabay Samity Limited. It resulted in economic crises of the society. At that time the number of weavers which was 200 in 1996-97 decreased to 120 in 1997-98. Because the society was unable to provide raw materials, wages to them.
- Government as well the societies are indifferent to control the parallel economic activities going on with the low quality products of other places in the "brand name" of Dhaniakhali handloom.
- There is no innovation of designs of the handloom products. They are practicing the traditional designs from the beginning. These societies have no CAD trained designers. They provide the designs from their own perception.
- Increasing raw material cost is another burning problem. The data, given by Soma spur Union Cooperative Weavers Society Limited, show that before 8/12/2009 the cost of yarn per mora for 100 count, 80 count 60 count and 40 count were rupees 31.00,31.00, 27.50 and 33.75 respectively. These became rupees 32.00, 32.00 and 36.50 respectively from 8/12/2009.

  Besides there are problems like lack of consciousness among the weavers regarding the demand of the customers, lack of modernization of the industry, competition with power loom industry, lack of government incentives etc.

Prospects of the industry

The handloom industry of Dhaniakhali has large prospects, if it overcomes its present problems. For that following measures should be adopted.

- Government as well as cooperative societies' strong control is required to control the parallel economic activities of the greedy merchants running with the low quality products of other

handloom centres in the 'brand name' of Dhaniakhali handloom. They should make customer aware of these activities through advertisement.

- Societies should implement proper plan, policies for the weavers so that next generation of the weavers is attracted to accept weaving as profession.
- Innovation of designs by CAD trained designers is required. This industrial centre is suffering severely from poor designs.
- Introduction of new types of dressing materials, except sarees, is also prescribed.
- Eradication of the communication gap regarding to marketing mechanism of the industry is an immediate need. The apex bodies of government as well as the cooperative societies should try to enlarge the marketing sphere.
- Huge production and marketing development are needed for the innovation and renovation of the industry. For these, active roles of societies, weavers and government and proper planning are necessary.

Conclusion

Cotton handloom has its own demand because of the beautiful designs, quality, fine texture, exact size, and attractive fret works of its products. These qualities of handloom products are not accessed in the power loom mechanism. The handloom products of Dhaniakhali have large demand as well as marketing scope because of its widespread name and fame and strong culture heritage. We hope that this handloom centre will be able to elevate its present stagnant condition by overcoming its present problems and will revive its past glory.

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