

AN EVALUATIVE STUDY ON SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS OF WOMEN WORKERS IN POWERLOOM SECTOR OF NADIA DISTRICT IN WEST BENGAL

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ABSTRACT

The Indian constitution is one of the most progressive in the world and guarantees equal rights for men and women. Despite the advances women have made in many societies, women's concerns are still given second priority almost everywhere. Their contribution is not given due credit. District Nadia has a sufficient number of women workers working in unorganized powerloom sector. In this sector, male workers are engaged in weaving of cloth through power – operated machines and it is a laborious job quite unsuitable for female workers. The ancillary works like sizing of bobbins, wondering etc. are generally done by the female workers. These women workers are living below the minimum accepted standards without adequate shelter and toilet facilities. During their work, they face a lot of problems, they are exploited, are unaware about their rights. The government should try to improve various infrastructures and communication facilities like transport, power, market, education, health, etc. to enable the female workers as well as the industrialists of the decentralized powerloom sector.

Keyword: *Women, workers, powerloom sector, female, weaving, industry.*

INTRODUCTION:

Almost 400 million people (more than 85 percent of the working population in India) work in unorganized sector and of these at least 120 million are women. The female work participation rate in Punjab has increased nearly four and half times i.e. from 4.4 in 1991 to 18.7 percent (main worker 11.9 percent, marginal worker 6.8 percent) in 2001, and rural female work participation is 2.25 times that of urban female work participation. Women working in the informal sector are not included in the official statistics and their work is undocumented and considered as disguised wage work, unskilled, low paying and does not provide benefits to the worker. India was one of the first countries in the world to give women the right to vote. The Indian constitution is one of the most progressive in the world and guarantees equal rights for men and women. Despite the advances women have

made in many societies, women's concerns are still given second priority almost everywhere. They continue to face discrimination and marginalization both subtle and blatant and do not share equally in the fruits of development. Their contribution is not given due credit. These women workers are living below the minimum accepted standards without adequate shelter and toilet facilities. District Nadia has a sufficient number of women workers working in unorganized powerloom sector. During their work, they face a lot of problems, they are exploited, are unaware about their rights. To have a fairly representative sampling, 200 women workers were randomly selected from Nadia District working at different places like Ranaghat, Santipur, Fulia, Nabadwip, Krishnagar, Birnagar, etc.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

There is no authentic and huge number of literatures about this area but some literature are there, which are helpful for the study and research purposes, some such references are Book India 2006 a reference annual compiled and edited by research, reference and training division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Govt. of India. West Bengal Human Development Report, Development and Planning Dept; Govt. of India, first published in may 2004, India Year Book 2004, Institute of Applied Manpower Research, Textile Souvenir-1981-82, Textile Souvenir-1984, 1986, Yojana-Dhanadhanye- June & July-2007, Tex Vision-2008, The Kolkata Gazette-2008, Govt. of West Bengal, Encyclopedia of Textile, "Tantu O Rang"- A book of Textile Technology – basu, T.N., Majumder, Dipak, "The issue of small versus large in the Indian Textile Industry", Govt. of West Bengal: Report of the Power loom Enquiry committee- 1967, Schemes and Initiatives for the Development of the Textile Industry, Govt. of India, West Bengal Economy- present, past and future-basu, kalipada, etc.

METHODOLOGY AND SOURCES OF DATA:

Most of the data which have been used in the present study are primary and some are, of course, secondary. The economic parameters have been analyzed with the help of the statistical tools like mean, median, mode, standard deviation (SD), etc. as the situation demands. Primary data are collected through convenient sample survey. One basic limitation of the study is the lack of availability of sufficient data. I have tried my level best to make the data as current and accurate as possible.

Objectives: The following are the objectives of the study:

- i. To portray the nature of women employment of small scale powerloom industries in West Bengal;
- ii. To evaluate the socio economic condition of the female workers of this sector;

- iii. To suggest some line of actions that may be necessary for an overall improvement of the workers engaged in this sector, and
- iv. Making concluding remarks.

Sampling pattern:

The small scale powerlooms in West Bengal are seen mainly in 11 districts. Of these, Nadia got the first position in terms of number of powerlooms as well as number of women workers engaged in this sector. I have visited entire Nadia District and surveyed at random 200 women workers. This data are collected through convenient sample survey.

Women worker and powerloom sector:

From the close study, it can be easily estimated that the women working in unorganized powerloom sector are living a life far below from satisfaction. The low earning of these women cannot meet with their daily needs. They do marry, bear children, and get old but under these phases of life, they live the same life. They live under unhygienic environment which results dangerous diseases. They work more than men as they have to play a dual role working both in and outside the home. They have no medical facilities even at the critical moment of giving but to children. A few of them are assisted by other members of family in household work otherwise they have to work solely.

Most of the female workers in powerloom sector are primarily women who have migrated from rural areas for economic gain. The influx of women workers to the cities for non-farm employment has saturated the existing sectors and is one of the main reasons for her extreme exploitation. Hardships of city life, absence of basic amenities and exploitation of these women by employers have added to their misery. Most of them do not have year round employment. They suffer vital disadvantages compared to men in their search for employment opportunities, lower real wages, increased uncertainties and irregularities of employment. There are legal provisions to protect their rights. Such working conditions are a hurdle in their overall development leading to under performance and not allowing them to raise their productive capacity in that very profession also. In powerloom sector, male workers are engaged in weaving of cloth through power – operated machines and it is a laborious job quite unsuitable for female workers. The ancillary works like sizing of bobbins, wondering etc. are generally done by the female workers. Socio-economic status is evaluated as a combination of variables including income, wealth, place of residence, level of education and occupation. Sociologists often use socio-economic

status as a means of predicting behaviour. It is way of looking at how individuals or families fit into society using economic and social measures that have been shown to impact individual's health and well being.

The term "socio-economic" is combination of two words- social and economic. Social condition of a person means culture, society where a person is living and his interaction with the society. "Economic" refers to financial status of a person. So basically socio-economic condition of an individual refers to his society, culture, environment, his interaction in society and his financial status.

The study concentrates on the socio-economic conditions of the women workers engaged in 200 powerloom industries in Nadia district of West Bengal. Ten areas have been selected for the study. Locations of powerloom industries are: Ranaghat, Nabadwip, Swarup Gang, Santipur, Amtala, Bhatjangla, Chakdaha, Habibpur, Fulia and Haringhata. Total sampled powerloom industries taken for study are:

Location	Total sampled powerloom industries
Ranaghat	30
Nabadwip	25
Swarup Gang	15
Santipur	10
Amtala	08
Bhatjangla	12
Chakdaha	10
Habibpur	16
Fulia	14
Haringhata	10
Total	150

There is no authentic record of the total number of women workers engaged in powerloom sectors in Nadia district. But in our observation of the study, there are approximately 5100 women workers are engaged in this sector of Nadia district. Out of these most of them are Winder about 85% and 10% workers are Weaver, 2% are Drawer, 1% are Reacher, 1% are Checker and 1% are Supervisor.

Age distribution of the female workers in powerloom sector:

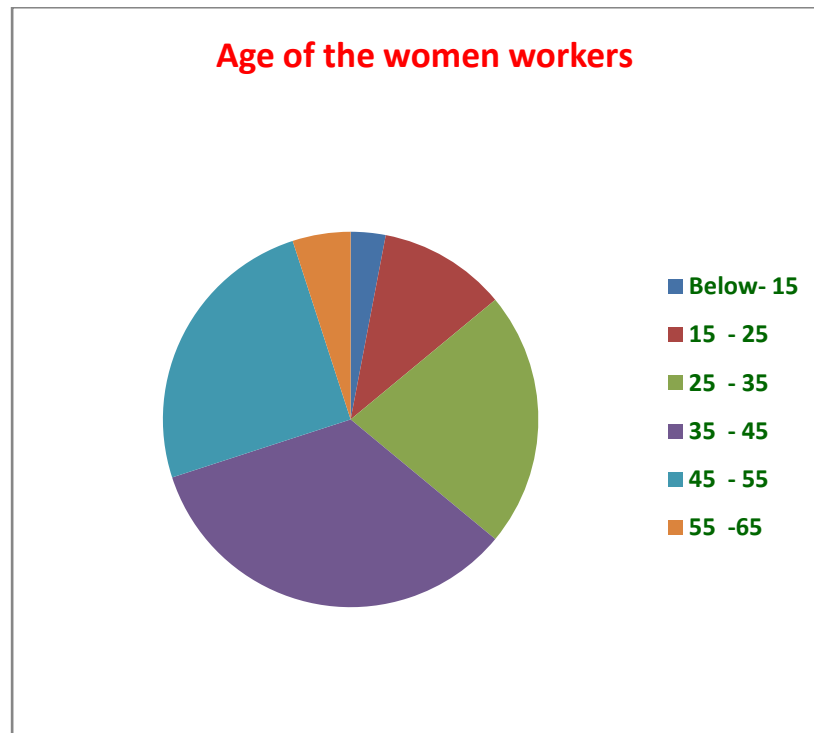
The workers engaged in Small Scale Power Loom Industry in Nadia district can be grouped according to their ages as shown in the following table:

Table-1 Age distribution of women workers:

Sl. No.	Age (in year)	No. Of workers	Percentage
1	Below- 15	6	3
2	15 - 25	22	11
3	25 - 35	44	22
4	35 - 45	68	34
5	45 - 55	50	25
6	55 -65	10	5
To tal		200	100

Source: Field Investigation

From Table-1, it is found that, the age of female workers are in the range of minimum 15 years and maximum to the age of 65 years. Here, out of 200 workers, 68 workers (34 %) are lying in the age group of 35-45 years and 50 workers (25 %), the second large, are lying in the group of 45-55 years. Again, 6 (3%) and 10 (5%) workers are in the group of below 15 and 55-65 years respectively.



Marital status:

Table- 2: Classification of female workers according to Marital Status:

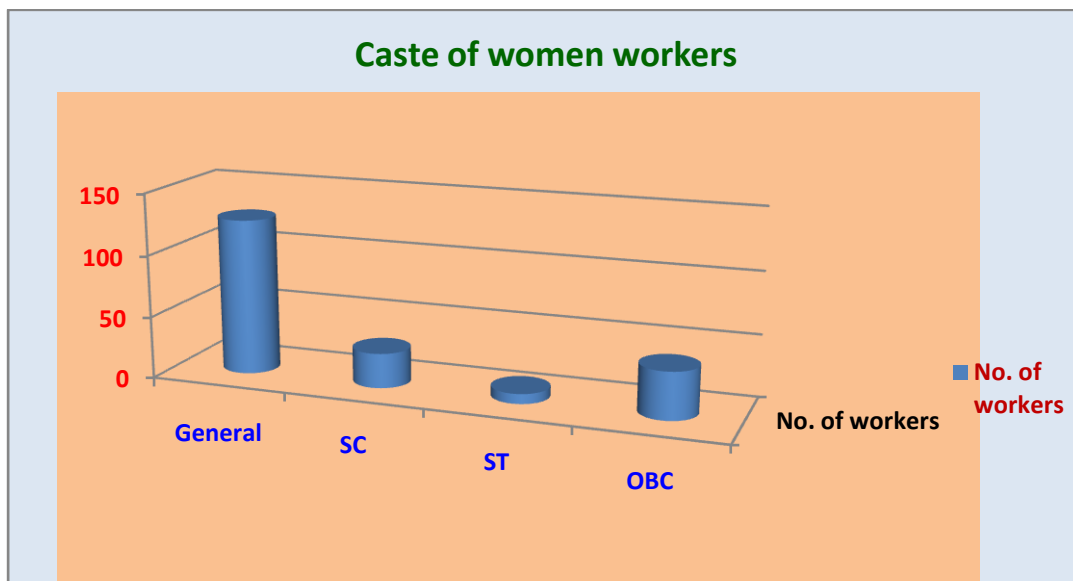
Sl. No.	Marital Status	No. of workers	Percentage
1	Married	132	66
2	Unmarried	26	13
3	Widow	42	21
Total		200	100.00

Source: Field Investigation.

It is found from Table-2 that 66% of the sample respondents are married and 13 % are unmarried. Again some widows (21%) are engaged in this industry for maintenance their cost of living. It is observed that the respondents, in general, have got married at their very young age and this has to a great extent compelled them to fall back upon this industry as the last resort for living with their spouse and children.

Table- 3: Classification of female workers according to caste:

Caste	No. of workers	Percentage
General	126	63
SC	28	14
ST	8	4
OBC	38	19
Total	200	100



It is found that out of 200 sample respondents, 126 workers (63%) are of General Caste, 28 workers (14 %) are from Scheduled Caste, 8 workers (4%) are from Scheduled Tribe and 38 workers (19%) are from Other Backward Caste Communities respectively.

Table 5: Distribution of workers by literacy:

Sl. No.	Literacy	No. of workers	Percentage (%)
1	Illiteracy	30	15
2	Up to Class Four	62	31
3	Class Five To Eight	56	28
4	Class Nine To Ten	38	19
5	Above Class Ten	14	7
Total		200	100

Source: Field Investigation

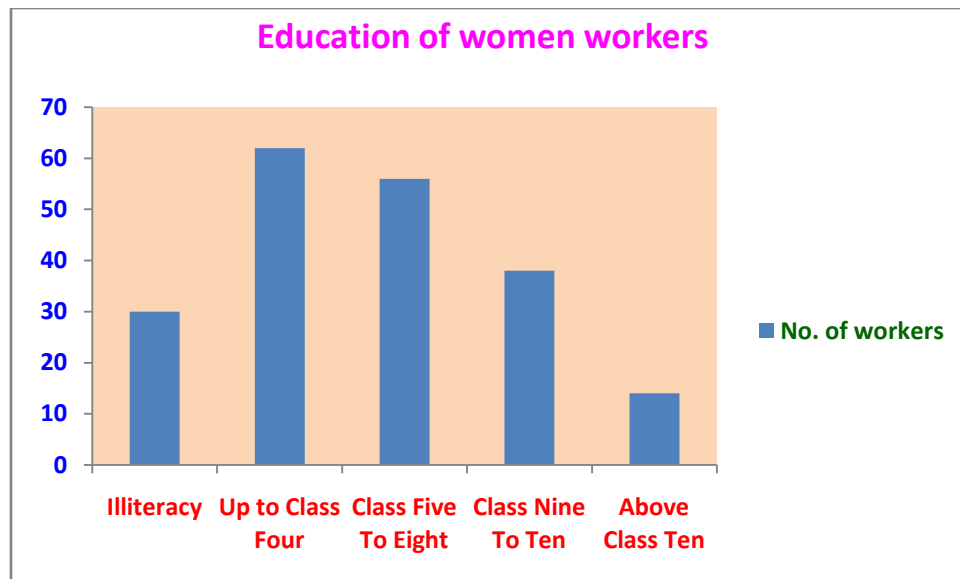


Table 5 shows that the illiteracy rate of the female workers engaged in powerloom sector is very low. Only 15 % workers among the total respondents of 200, have no schooling or formal education at any time of their life. Through the meticulous investigation, it has been observed that only 10 % of these illiterate workers (3 workers) have come under the Adult Education Programme of the Government and the rest totally ignored to achieve this programme. We are pleased to note that, 85% of the sample respondents are literate though 31% workers have Primary level of education and 28% workers have Junior High level of education. It is also found that 19% workers have Secondary level of education and only 7% have above Secondary level of education.

Table-6: total monthly earnings of female workers.

Monthly Earnings (Rs.)	No. of Workers	Percentage (%)
2500-3500	34	17
3500-4500	130	65
4500-5500	20	10
5500-6500	10	5
6500-7500	6	3
Total	200	100

Source: Field Investigation.

From the Table-6 it is observed that 65% of the total responded workers are earned in the range of Rs.3500 to Rs. 4500 per month, 17% workers earned Rs. 2500 to Rs. 3500 per month, 10% workers earned Rs. 4500 to Rs. 5500 per month and 5% workers earned Rs. 5500 to Rs.6500 per month and only 3% women workers earned Rs.6500 to Rs.7500 per month. The overall Mean monthly income of the total 200 workers is Rs.4120 per month. Thus the annual total average income is Rs.49440, which is too meager to maintain equilibrium in their socio- economic lives.

Family Size:

By a close investigation into the marital status of the women workers engaged in the powerloom sector, it has been observed that 13 % of the women workers are unmarried and 10 % workers are living either a solitary life or have a family with their mother or father or living with both mother and father, or with mother and single brother, or with mother and sister. The remaining 3 % women workers are living with their incapable parents and minor brothers or sisters.

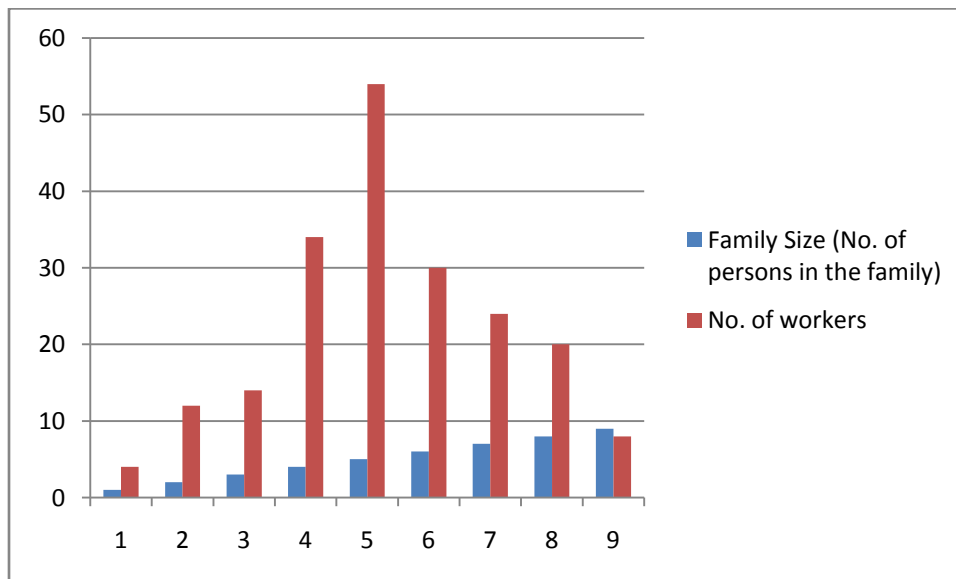
Table 7: Family Size of the women workers:

Family Size (No. of persons in the family)	No. of workers	Percentage (%)
1	4	2%
2	12	6%
3	14	7%
4	34	17%
5	54	27%
6	30	15%
7	24	12%
8	20	10%
9	8	4%
Total	200	100.00

Source: Field Investigation

Table 7 shows that 27 % of the sample respondents have the family size of 5 members, 17 % respondents have the family size of 4 members and 15 % have a family of 6 members. Again, it is observed that 68 % workers have a family size of more than 4 members. It has also been found that out of the 132 married women workers, only 18 women workers i.e. 9 % of total sample respondents (200 women workers) have been living in joint families and the rest 114 married women workers (57 % of 200 workers) belong to nuclear families. It is also observed that only 16 % workers have been able to keep their family size within the standard limit. The average size of each working family of the small scale powerloom industry in West Bengal is approximately six.

Family Size of workers engaged in small scale powerloom industry in West Bengal can be expressed with the help of following Bar Diagram:



Family Planning:

Table 8: Adoption of Family Planning Measures:

Sl. No.	Family Planning Measures	No. of workers	Percentage (%)
1	Adopted	42	31.82%
2	Not adopted	90	68.18%
Total		132	100.00

Source: Field Investigation.

Table: 8 shows that out of a total of 132 married women workers of the powerloom sector, only 31.82 % women workers have adopted family planning measures and the rest 68.18 % women workers have not adopted any kind

of such planning measures. Table 4.9 showing distribution of workers by literacy status reveals that 26 % workers have attained academic qualification above class eight. From the thorough investigation, it has been found that out of those 26 % workers only 17 % workers (9 workers) have adopted family planning measures and the remaining workers have remained outside the purview of such programme.

It is a matter of great regret that though India is the first country to adopt an official family planning policy for checking and controlling the growth of population, a great problem of our country, most of the respondents have remained outside the purview of the family planning programme. At the same time, there are some powerloom workers who have no idea about the family planning programme particularly due to their illiteracy.

Children's Education:

At the time of investigation, it has been found that out of the 200 sampled women workers, 160 workers have their spouses and the spouses of 20 workers have died and they became widows. We found that 132 workers have children whose ages are below 15 years. Of these 132 women workers, there are 374 children and Table 9 shows the distribution of children of the women workers engaged in the powerloom sector in Nadia district. It is also observed that only 262 children, out of 374, have been admitted to the schools for general education and 31 % of the admitted school children have dropped out themselves due to various reasons.

Table: 9: Distribution of Workers by the Number of Children:

No. of children (1)	No. of workers (2)	Total no. of children (1x 2)
1	14	14
2	36	72
3	48	144
4	26	104
5	8	40
Total	132	374

From our study, we observed that still 112 children, out of 374, have not been admitted in school for primary education. Again, 47 children out of 112 are below 6 years of age and the rest 65 children, though they have already attained the minimum age of getting admission into schools, have not yet been admitted. The reasons behind this are guardians' unawareness about education and financial inability to bear the educational expenses, though it requires a very small amount for having at least primary education.

Table 10: Distribution of Children on the basis of Schooling:

Schooling	No. of children	Percentage (%)
Schooled	180	48.13%
Dropped out	116	31.01%
Not schooled	78	20.86%
Total	374	100

Source: Field Investigation

MAJOR FINDINGS:

1. Lacks of proper infrastructural facilities are found like sufficient working place within the factory, low voltage and insufficient supply of electricity etc.
2. Maximum powerloom industry suffers for delay supply of raw material, so they can't finish the work within time simultaneously production rate decreases.
3. Due to illiteracy and lacks of proper training quality of production also hamper, as result they can't received appropriate value of their work.
4. No welfare measurement has been taken into account by all most all the power loom factories in West Bengal for providing suitable environment for doing work peacefully. Facilities like First Aid arrangement in the Work Shades, latrines, urinals, drinking water, sanitary arrangement, chief canteen, rest room etc. are not available in the industry.
5. Although schooling rate has increased, found girl child (below 15 years) workers in few families.
6. A large number of powerlooms were operated by the owners themselves and by other family members.
7. Almost all the looms used in this sector are less productive, and consequently, the workers have become victims of meagre earnings as they are paid on piece rate system i.e. on actual production
8. The owners (employers) were used to employing temporary workers for every type of job.
9. The unemployed ladies of the day are not interested in working in this industry because of low wages and lack of job security.
10. Besides, low productivity due to the lack of automatic looms, shortage of finance, tax structures and poor organizational efficiencies of industries as well as the owners were identified as other reasons for decreasing employment in the powerloom industries in West Bengal.
11. Besides, economic conditions and illiteracy of the workers engaged in the powerloom industry in West Bengal have been found to be relevant in this context. There are some common diseases they and their family members suffer from and a major portion of their earnings is spent for their medical treatment. It has thus become very difficult for them to keep pace with the steady spiral of rising prices with their little earnings.

12. We also found that most of the female workers engaged in powerloom industries in West Bengal are illiterate in the sense that they have no idea about the various provisions of the Legislative and Welfare Acts.

13. Many of the female workers engaged in the industry are refugees from Bangladesh and due to their poor economic background they are mostly satisfied by their meagre earnings and they do not want to go in direct confrontation with the management.

Besides, low productivity due to lack of automatic looms, shortage of finances, tax structures and poor organizational efficiencies are identified as other problems.

So we found that there is a lot of problems of the powerloom industry in West Bengal as well as of the female workers engaged in the industry and until and unless these problems are solved, the overall improvement of the industry as well as the women workers' living conditions cannot be achieved.

SUGGESTION:

I. Lack of insufficient space it can be organized in joint venture in which families space are available and to stress on proper supply of electricity in evening because it is leisure time for housewives.

II. The developmental scheme of the small scale powerloom industry in West Bengal, however, would require a wholehearted support from the planning side with proper encouragement from both the state and the central government.

III. Arrange proper short term related training to enhance the quality of production and quick supply.

IV. The country bleaching and dyeing methods should be avoided and peroxide bleaching should be encouraged and tubular mercerizing of fabrics before dyeing should be recommended for high quality outer fabrics.

V. The government should try to improve various infrastructures and communication facilities like transport, power, market, education, health, etc. to enable the workers as well as the industrialists of the decentralized powerloom sector in West Bengal.

VI. The government should try to adopt a scheme of provident fund for the women workers engaged in decentralized powerloom industries in West Bengal in both private and co-operative sectors.

VII. For the successful implementation of various welfare programmes, there should be a close follow-up action and supervision of block and district level officers in order to provide maximum relief to the poor workers.

VII. The government should establish more and more powerloom service centres to impart training on loom and better loom maintenance and to provide the testing facility, develop new designs, etc.

IX. As per the Textile Policy of June, 1985, all the powerlooms must be registered. The government should handle the issue of licenses to the industrialists stringently.

X. The government will have to emphasise on the modernization of looms and provision of technological and other impacts, design support, improvement of finished products of the powerloom industries in West Bengal.

XI. The small scale powerloom industry in West Bengal is categorically to be treated as sick industry and the financial institutions concerned have to take all possible steps to prevent the sickness and rehabilitate the viable sick units. The small scale powerloom units should be provided with suitable guidelines in terms of the Reserve Bank's directions to ensure that the potentially viable sick units receive attention and timely support.

CONCLUSION:

I think that the proper evaluation to take effective measures in the revival of the powerloom industry, both individual and co-operative wing of the decentralized sector, is to be made and for this the overall position of this industry should be surveyed under the guidance of a Review Committee. The survey team consisting of government officials should work jointly in collaboration with the representatives of the Textiles Technologists' Association, powerloom owners, processors and traders. In the light of the materials collected by the survey team, the Review Committee may suggest the probable changes in the control order in the interest of a healthy growth in the powerloom industry in West Bengal. Women workers in unorganized sector lag behind the males in terms of level and quality of employment. Such women, when they have to perform dual of both outside employment in harsh and hostile working conditions and manage their homes, come across problems, which needs a loud hearing. These women are often illiterate, unskilled socially backward and economically weak which often hide their work participation. Poverty, lack of access to education and inadequate health facilities are their major problems. Huge number of female workers is engaged in unorganised powerloom sector in India. But, these women workers working in unorganized sector are generally exploited. They are made to work for long hours and wages paid to them are not according to their work.

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