



Women Weavers and their Economic Empowerment: A Study of the Chanderi Handloom Sector

Dimple Patidar, Dr. Sudheesh B.

Rabindranath Tagore University Bhopal

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ABSTRACT

The study seeks to understand the actual living and economic conditions of women weavers in the Chanderi handloom industry. While the sector provides employment to many, these women work long hours for very low wages. The study revealed that the extent to which government training and schemes like the 'National Handloom Development Program' are bringing about changes in their economic status. The entire study utilizes secondary data and records derived from past textile report. The findings indicate that while these schemes provide training, women continue to earn very little due to a lack of direct access to larger markets. To truly empower them economically, the management needs to alter its approach to market integration and eliminate local middlemen within the Chanderi cluster.

Keywords: Women Weavers, Chanderi Handloom, Working Conditions, Government Schemes, Women Economic Empowerment Secondary Data.

Introduction

The Heritage of Chanderi and the Purpose of this Study.

Chanderi, a small town in Madhya Pradesh, is famous for its exquisitely soft, hand-woven saris. The women who work on the looms are the true guardians of this ancient heritage. From preparing the warp threads and winding the yarn onto bobbins to spending hours weaving on the handlooms, they perform all the difficult tasks. But sadly, they haven't received any significant economic benefits for their hard work. The aim of this study is to shed light on the actual problems of female weavers who work from home. It also seeks to determine whether training programs are genuinely increasing the monthly earnings of these female weavers or if their impact is limited merely to government records. This research paper attempts to highlight the situation of female weavers in Chanderi by using secondary data.

Historical Background and the Beautiful Art of Chanderi. First, we must understand the beautiful background of a very old town. The name of this town is Chanderi, and it is located in the Ashok Nagar district of Madhya Pradesh, India. If you enter this town, you can hear a rhythmic sound of wooden looms from almost every house. This place is world-famous for its very special, lightweight, and shining fabric called Chanderi silk and cotton. This weaving art is not something new. It has a very long history of hundreds of years, passing down from grandfather to father and then to the children. Long ago, royal kings, Mughal emperors, and queens loved to wear Chanderi clothes because they looked very rich and premium. Today, it is an essential part of India's cultural heritage. According to reports from the Ministry of Textiles (2024) thousands of families still completely depend on these handlooms to earn their daily bread. When a customer buys a costly Chanderi sari from a luxury showroom in a big city, they see the beautiful Zari work and translucent texture. But we need to look behind the curtain. We must think about who is making this beautiful cloth with so much patience and hard work. The answer is the local artisan community of Chanderi, who work continuously inside their small houses to keep this ancient tradition alive for the world.

The Real Backbone: The Untold Story of Female Weavers When people talk about weaving, they often think it is done only by men. But the real ground reality is very different. The true guardians and the real backbone of this whole Chanderi handloom industry are the women. In almost every home-based weaving unit, female family members do the most difficult, painful, and time-consuming work. Their daily routine starts very early in the morning before any other family member wakes up, and it continues till late at night. A woman weaver does many multi-tasking jobs. Before the actual weaving starts on the loom, there is a huge process of preparation. Women do the winding of silk and cotton yarn onto small bobbins very carefully so that the fragile threads do not break. They prepare the warp threads and setup the complete layout on the wooden frame. After finishing all these household chores and preparation work, they sit on the handlooms for continuous six to eight hours. They weave thread by thread to create traditional motifs like flowers and birds. According to global reports by organizations like UNIDO (2008) this continuous sitting and staring at thin threads causes major health problems, like severe back pain, weak eyesight, and joint problems. They destroy their physical health just to save this ancient Indian art form.

The Financial Struggle and Exploitation by Middlemen.

Now, we have to look at the worst part of their life story. Even though these home-based women weavers do the most critical and heavy tasks, they do not receive any good money. Their hard work is very big, but their income is very small. They do not get any true economic empowerment. The real profit of this beautiful fabric is not reaching the pockets of these women. Instead, it is taken away by local middlemen, master weavers (whom locals call Mahajan's), and big city traders. Because these women work from inside their small mud houses, they do not have direct contact with the big fashion markets or wealthy customers in cities like Mumbai or Delhi. They lack market literacy and digital knowledge. Therefore, they are forced to give their finished saris to the local Mahajan's at very cheap rates because they need immediate cash to buy daily food for their children. The master weavers sell the same sari in the urban market for thousands of rupees, but the poor woman who actually made it gets only a few hundred rupees as daily wage. This massive economic gap keeps these female weavers trapped in continuous poverty for generations, making it impossible for them to become financially independent.

Government Intervention versus Ground Reality.

The central government of India and the state government of Madhya Pradesh are aware of these bad conditions. To fix this issue, they have introduced many welfare schemes, credit facilities, and specialized training programs like the Skill Upgradation Training Program. According to high-level official records and progress reports, government departments spend a lot of money to give modern design training to these women weavers so that their monthly earnings can increase. But here, a big question mark arises for our research. Are these training programs genuinely helping the women weavers in their real, daily life? Or is the positive impact limited only to paper records and official files to show that everything is perfect? In reality, when we look closely, many home-based female weavers say that they successfully attended the training and got a certificate, but their monthly income and standard of living are exactly the same as before. There is a very huge gap between what the official files claim and what is actually happening inside the dark weaving rooms of Chanderi. The training programs often fail because there is no direct market linkage or financial help after the training ends.

The Need and Importance of This Present Study. This research paper is written because we want to bring out the real facts and voice of these silent women workers. We cannot just trust the official data blindly and assume that every female artisan is economically empowered. We need to see the real picture. Therefore, this study attempts to evaluate the actual situation of these home-based female weavers by analyzing authentic secondary data collected from previous research and government statistics. This study is highly important because if we do not fix the financial problems of these women right now, they will stop doing this traditional work. The younger generation will leave the handloom sector and move to cities for other menial jobs, and then our beautiful, ancient Chanderi heritage will die forever. This research highlights their actual day-to-day problems and examines the real impact of training schemes so that policymakers can make better, honest plans to give these women weavers the true financial respect and money they rightly deserve.

Literature Review

Raju (2014) a study conducted about handloom clusters in central India region. He noticed that women working more than 8 hours daily on loom but their salary is not equal to male weavers. The house workspace lighting is very dim and setup is bad. Women are facing such problems that even after working hard they are not able to move forward

Nair and Rao (2017) revealed that banking knowledge is very less inside rural women weavers. They cannot open bank account alone or take benefit of Mudra loans easily. The main advantages are taken by master weavers who guide all things.

Dhillon (2022) a study examines about Madhya Pradesh handloom and their workers. He found that women weavers have big talent but traditional designs are shifting. Women get regular eye problem and back and shoulder pain because sitting place is old fashion loom and painful.

Task (2025) a study highlights records on rural artisan empowerment. Also finds economical condition of women weavers. The paper showed that when money goes directly to women weavers' bank accounts, family health spending becomes better. But reaching the facility to real poor weavers is still very slow.

Mewafarosh et al. (2026) a study conducted about the socio-economic empowerment of women in the handloom sector revealed that in traditional weaving clusters like Chanderi, women are at the core of the work, yet their work is systematically overlooked. After reviewing the past, their findings revealed that women primarily perform pre-weaving tasks—such as yarn winding, warping, and sizing—which are culturally categorized as "unpaid family labor" rather than economically independent employment restricting their direct access to income and institutional credit

Srinivas and Kumar (2016) a study was conducted on market exclusion faced by producers at the Bottom of the Pyramid (BoP), specifically examining the case of market development for weavers in the Chanderi cluster in India. Researchers explored how institutional and digital interventions—particularly through the 'Chanderiyan' project of the 'Digital Empowerment Foundation (2018)'. They help bridge the socio-spatial gap between women weavers and urban consumer markets. The study revealed that connecting women to digital design networks and self-help groups (SHGs) successfully reduces their dependence on local master weavers, enabling them to secure fair prices and achieve genuine economic self-reliance.

Panda and Bhuwania (2025) a study checked the results of state training camps in handloom sectors. They argued that 60% women learned new yarn dyeing skills but due to high price of raw materials, they are unable to open free self-shop.

Objectives of the Study

The main goals of this research paper are clearly given below:

1. To study the working conditions of women weavers in the handloom sector of Chanderi District in Madhya Pradesh
2. To examine the impact of government schemes and training program on the economic empowerment of women weavers.

Research Methodology

The study used secondary data from Government Records, Reports, Census Data, and research journals. It evaluates the working conditions, health concerns, and economic empowerment of women weavers in Chanderi District in Madhya Pradesh.

Statistical Tools used

The collected data were presented and analyzed with simple Percentage, Distribution.

Results and Discussion

Table 1: Daily Working Hours of Women Weavers on Loom

Sl.NO	Working Hours Range	Percentage of Female Weavers (%)
1	Less than 5 Hours	15%
2	5 to 8 Hours	55%
3	More than 8 Hours	30%
	Total	100

Source: Ministry of Textiles Report 2024

The table shows that the majority of women (55%) work hard at the handloom for 5 to 8 hours daily. 30% of the women work at the loom for more than 8 hours. This indicates that these women weavers put in as much working time as factory workers, while also managing household works and childcare.

Table 2: Monthly Income Level of Chanderi Women Artisans

Sl.No	Income Bracket (INR)	Percentage of Distribution (%)
1	Below 3,000	40%
2	3,000 to 6,000	45%
3	Above 6,000	15%
	Total	100

Source: National Handloom Census (2019)

The data in the table clearly shows that 40% of the women weavers earn less than ₹3,000 per month. 45% earn between ₹3,000 and ₹6,000, while only 15% earn more than ₹6,000. This situation highlights that the cash income of women weavers in the Chanderi cluster is very low and their economic condition is weak.

Table 3: Types of Health Problems Experienced due to Weaving

Sl.No	Health Problem Reported	Percentage of Affected Women (%)
1	Chronic Back and Joint Ache	45%
2	Eye Strain and Vision Blur	35%
3	Regular Headache and Fatigue	20%
	Total	100

Source: Dhillon (2022) Health Survey 2025

The table reveals that 45% of the women suffer from severe back pain due to sitting for long hours at a stretch on low-slung wooden looms. Additionally, 35% of the women experience eye-related issues caused by the need to count the extremely fine threads of Chanderi sarees. Work-related health problems are highly prevalent among them, yet there are no provisions for medical insurance or claims.

Table 4: Awareness Status of Women Weavers About Government Schemes

Sl. No	Awareness Level	Percentage (%)
1	Fully Aware with Details	20%
2	Only Heard Name but No Detail	50%
3	Completely Unaware	30%
	Total	100

Source: TASK (2025)

In the given table.4 revealed that around 20% of women weavers are fully informed about government schemes offering financial assistance. While 50% are aware of the names of the schemes, they do not know how to fill out the application forms. This demonstrates that government advertisements are not reaching women directly in their homes, resulting in a significant gap in accessing the benefits of these schemes.

Table 5: Impact of Government Skill Training on Income Improvement

Sl.No	Income Change Level	Percentage of Trainees (%)
1	High Financial Increase	12%
2	Moderate Earning Change	48%
3	No Change in Income	40%
	Total	100%

Source: Handloom Impact Analysis

In the above given table.5 revealed that the after completing the government training program, only 12% of the women saw significant benefits. There was only a marginal change in the situation of 48% of the women. Meanwhile, 40% saw no change in their income because the task of selling the goods is still handled by master traders. Therefore, simply teaching design skills is not enough to empower these women; providing them with direct access to market portals is also crucial.

Conclusion:

An examination of the information and facts presented above leads to the conclusion that women weavers form the backbone of the Chanderi handloom sector, yet their own economic position is very precarious. They work long hours, face numerous serious health issues, and earn very little cash income each month. Master weavers and local traders reap most of the profits from the Chanderi saree trade. While government welfare schemes look good on paper, there is no mechanism to connect with women weavers at the grassroots level.

Recommendations:

- Special free medical camps should be organized to prevent back and shoulder pain as well as eye-related issues, and new, comfortable ergonomic looms should be distributed.
- Mudra loan approval steps must be made very loose and simple, and bank officers should visit weaver homes directly to deliver cash credit.

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