

# **Loss of looms and livelihood: Assessing the impact of COVID-19 lockdown on weavers in Chanderi & Maheshwar**

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## **ABSTRACT**

*The COVID-19 imposed lockdown had drastic consequences on the economy, especially on the informal sector in India. Categorized as 'non-essential' commodities, the handicrafts sector in particular was devastated by the COVID-19 lockdown. With their orders and payments stuck and no new orders coming in, the weavers ran out of cash and raw materials. With virtually no sale in the months of summer, they were left to fend for themselves.*

*This research paper aims to assess the impact of COVID-19 lockdown on weavers of Chanderi and Maheshwar handloom clusters and assess the relief measures undertaken by the state authorities.*

**KEYWORDS:** Handicrafts, COVID-19 Lockdown, Informal Sector, Chanderi, Maheshwar, Textile industry

## **INTRODUCTION**

India is the second-largest manufacturer and exporter of textiles in the world after China. India has a share of 5 % of the global trade in textiles and apparel. 'Traditional sectors like handloom, handicrafts and small scale power-loom units are the biggest source of employment for millions of people in rural and semi urban area and also contribute to more than 75% of total textiles production in the country'. This sector is believed to be in perfect alignment with key government initiatives of Make in India, Skill India, Women Empowerment and Rural Youth Employment (Annual Report 2019-20, Ministry of Textiles).

Chanderi is a traditional handloom cluster located in Ashok Nagar district of Madhya Pradesh. It is a historic town with a population of approximately 38,000 people, out of which 60-65% are involved in the production of hand-woven fabrics. The cluster has been producing sarees, safa, dupatta, pagdis since the last 500 years. Mainly three types of fabrics produced by the Chanderi: pure silk (Gossamer silk), silk cotton and Chanderi cotton. Along with this, Chanderi is also known for producing brocades and fine quality of zardozi work.

Situated on the banks of river Narmada, Maheshwar has been a renowned hub of handloom since the 5th century; it gained prominence during the reign of Rani Ahilyabai Holkar (1767-1795). The delicate Maheshwari fabric is woven with silk and cotton yarns. The handicrafts society was on the decline, however, in 1979, Richard Holkar and Sally Holkar, son and daughter-in-law of Maharaja Yeshwant Rao Holkar II, revived the Maheshwari handlooms.



While Madhya Pradesh is known for other handicrafts such as Bagh prints, Batik work and fine zari zardozi work, textiles from Chanderi and Maheshwar are the most renowned.

With the onset of COVID-19 pandemic, most of the orders were cancelled, payments at various levels of the supply chain were pending, inventory was piling up, shipments were on hold or were stuck in transit. There was confusion about area-specific COVID-19 restrictions and a general sense of uncertainty during the phase 1 and phase 2 of the country-wide lockdown.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### The impact of COVID-19 on informal sector

According to International Labour Organization's report, in India, more than 40 crore informal workers may get pushed into deeper poverty due to COVID-19 outbreak. K Chandra Shekar and Kashif Mansoor in their paper titled, '*COVID-19: Lockdown Impact on Informal Sector in India*' argue that the informal sector in India was already under pressure due to demonetization and the rollout of GST. Small businesses that depend on cash flow have suffered and many have lost their jobs. They account for the short and long-run effects of the nation-wide lockdown which will potentially expose the workers in informal sector to hunger, poverty and even starvation.

The authors also throw light on 'aversion behaviour' which are actions people were taking to protect themselves from the virus. Actions such as reduced going out, ban on 'non-essential' shops. These actions translate into lower incomes on both supply and demand side, as the both production and consumer demand experienced decline. This in turn also lead to loss of wages and closure of many businesses.

They predict that, "COVID-19 will allow a new realignment. First, there may be a tendency to use suppliers in more expensive locations (but closer to major markets) by replacing labour with capital. Second, in the medium term, we will see a greater exclusion of productive activities by global value chains from the informal economy."

The paper also throws light on the vulnerabilities of the informal sector – failure of MGNREGA, low capital base and lack of employment protection. These vulnerabilities when intersect with the social identities of informal workers will play a key role in determining the their social, occupational status and their wages.

Discussing about the policy measures, the authors argue that the benefit of tax incentives do not reach the informal workers as they do not pay formal taxes. Often tax redemptions only benefit individuals and businesses, which do not necessarily impact the informal workers. Other measures such as direct money transfers face infrastructural and implementation challenges. Additionally, cash transfers depend on mobile banking and the current digital divide will exclude the most vulnerable groups.

The authors also suggest a three-pronged approach to integrating the informal sector in economic policies. '*The first is to provide support to stimulate the productive development of micro-enterprises by facilitating their access to the market and productive resources. The second concerns the social well-being of workers in the informal sector and the third approach deals with the regulatory framework.*'



In their paper titled, '*Job and Wage Losses in Informal Sector due to the COVID-19 Lockdown Measures in India*', Xavier Estupinan and Mohit Sharma estimate the job and wage losses of workers in informal sector due to COVID-19 imposed lockdown. According to them, the worker is considered to be at risk of a job loss (or most affected by lockdown measures) if he/she is working in a non-essential industry and unable to work from home.

They found that 44% (approx.) of the formal workers in comparison to only 15% (approx.) of informal workers can work from home. They also estimated that 104 million and 69.4 million informally employed workers were at risk of job loss in Lockdown 1.0 and Lockdown 2.0 respectively. They conclude that the total wage loss, for all workers, in the period between 24th March 2020 and 3rd May 2020 (at 2017-18 prices) is Rs. 864.48 billion. The wage loss of formal workers is 53.26 billion and for informal workers is 811.22 billion. In proportional terms, informal workers suffered more losses than formal workers i.e. 22.62% of the wages were lost for Informal workers in comparison to 3.66% of the wages were lost for the formal workers.

The authors suggest that the social security framework needs to be strengthened as informal workers are more vulnerable to economic, food and health shocks. They term effective minimum wage policy as a key strategy for developing countries like India.

#### Textile and apparel industry

In his article titled – 'Textile and Clothing Industry Severely Hit by COVID-19', Tanveer Ahmad Khan argues that the pandemic has impacted both demand and supply of the textile and apparel sector of India. He elaborates that the buyers from the markets of the US & EU had either cancelled their orders or put them on hold because the consumers were in a lockdown, shopping malls were closed and access to online shopping was restricted.

The author predicts that "the retail prices will see a jump because sanitization and social distancing are going to add to the costs of the products, which will be ultimately transferred to the consumers. This will make the deficient demand a perennial phenomenon for the industry" (Khan, 2020).

Khan also sheds light on India's dependency on imports from China and how it impacted the supply of raw materials during the start of the pandemic and later during the stand-off with China in mid-2020. He argues that government reforms and relief measures were necessary however they won't be enough. He believes that technology upgradation, export promotion and tax incentives can help the sector reach a higher potential which can help India fight poverty and unemployment.



## KEY FINDINGS

### Demographics of the weavers

In Chanderi, Kolis (or Koris), a Scheduled caste and the Ansaris (a Muslim OBC community) make up for the majority of the textile weavers. In Maheshwar, the Gandas, Pankas, Mahars and Maharas. Koshtis, Kolis, Karis, Julahas, and Dhobis are all weaving castes, who rank low in the social hierarchy of both Hindus and Muslims.<sup>1</sup>

In both these towns, more than half the population is involved in weaving or activities associated with it. For generations, families have been involved in the business of weaving. The weavers have handlooms in their homes depending on the number of family members and both men and women are involved in the process of weaving, the business largely remains male-dominated as men hold more bargaining power and market connections.

### Business Processes

In Chanderi, more 6000 handlooms are functional and they create a business of approximately 100 crores a year. In Maheshwar, more than 3000 looms operate and it is said that before COVID-19, almost 1000 sarees were produced on a regular day.

In both the handloom clusters, a hierarchy prevails in the weaving community – the master weavers (seth) and the weavers who weave the sarees on demand. Master weaver/trader/seth is a mid-level entrepreneur who has 50-100 weavers working for him, he provides with raw materials, design, colour schemes and the dyed yarns. The weaver then weaves the sari on demand and gives it to the master weaver who pays the weaver according to the piece and the design. There are no daily wages, the payment is made to the weaver only on the completion of the final product. Master weavers dominate almost 80% of the weaving business in the weaving community, rest 20% is accounted for orders by State departments, NGOs, private firms and weavers in Self-help groups.

Weavers typically earn 20-30% of the wholesale price of a sari. Both Chanderi and Maheshwari saris range from Rs. 2000 to Rs. 50,000 depending on the intricacy of the work. The demand usually comes from Tier-1 and Tier 2 cities where malls, showrooms and shops sell the Chanderi saris to the customers.

In both the handloom clusters, raw materials are provided by Yarn dealers. For traders who are into wholesale trading, raw materials are often provided on a monthly credit. For some self-help groups, the credit period is of 3 months and for individual weavers, upfront cash-payment is the norm.

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<sup>1</sup> Dubey, K. C., and H. C. Jain. HANDLOOM SARI INDUSTRY OF MAHESHWAR. Census of India -1961, Manager of Publications Delhi - 8, 1961, [http://lsi.gov.in:8081/jspui/bitstream/123456789/1753/1/48828\\_1961\\_MAH.pdf](http://lsi.gov.in:8081/jspui/bitstream/123456789/1753/1/48828_1961_MAH.pdf).



## COVID-19 Lockdown

According to government records, the cases in Khargone district (Maheshwar) and Ashoknagar (Chanderi) have been under control. Kargone with its close proximity to Indore had relatively higher cases. With almost zero labour migration, Chanderi and Maheshwar did not witness a lot of movement during the lockdown. After selling their garments at exhibitions in Delhi and other metropolitan cities, most of the weavers and traders had come back to their hometowns before the lockdown.

With the onset of the lockdown, the payments at every level stopped and the orders which were in transit were stuck. The orders which were completed still haven't been collected. Aminuddin Ansari, a master weaver from Chanderi shares, "The orders which were completed for the state department (Hastshilp Vikas Nigam) haven't been picked up yet and we haven't even received the payment for it."

The weavers continued weaving as the yarns on the handloom would be wasted if the sari is not completed. However, they had to decrease the production drastically. Ashish Katharya of Gorelalji Traders is a 3<sup>rd</sup> generation wholesale trader of Chanderi Saris. He shares that only well-off master weavers and traders were able to keep the handlooms running. However, they were paid less than amount than the usual as no sales were happening. Katharya paid Rs. 500 per week for each handloom that was functional. The amount was barely enough to pay for food and other essentials but he says even his hands were tied.

Similarly, in Maheshwar, every functional handloom received Rs. 500 on Tuesday, every week. Women's Weave, an NGO founded by Sally Holkar was generous in their contributions and provided Rs. 2000 per week to 350 weavers who work with them.

## Ration

The state authorities were able to provide ration in both Chanderi and Maheshwar using the PDS ration shops. However, the accounts are vastly contrasting. Mohammad Dilshaad, a weaver from a self-help group shares that each adult member of his family received – 3 kg wheat and 2 kg rice from the ration shop per month, while children are entitled to receiving half of what an adult receives. Another weaver, Muzzaffar Ansari shares that all weavers with BPL cards continued to receive ration during this time. However, many news reports show a contrasting account<sup>2</sup>, according to both PARI and PTI, many weavers from Chanderi only received rice during the entire month of April. In Maheshwar, state department officials state that ration was provided to all those who were registered via ration cards or BPL cards.

While a lot of NGOs and independent fashion designers claim to have provided funds during the time of the pandemic. None of the subjects who were interviewed are aware of their contributions. In Chanderi, Dastkar, a Delhi-based NGO got in touch with Mohammed Dilshaad and asked him how they could help him and his community. He suggested that providing food grains and vegetables would benefit the poor weavers. Dastkar's team transferred a fund of Rs. 70,000 in Dilshaad's account in three installments. He used the money to buy food grains, vegetables, tea leaves, sugar, oil and some vegetables, packed them into

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<sup>2</sup> "MP Weavers Hanging by a Chanderi Thread." People's Archive of Rural India, 7 May 2020, <https://ruralindiaonline.org/en/articles/mp-weavers-hanging-by-a-chanderi-thread/>.



small kits and distributed them to the poorest weavers he knew of. He recalls sending the kit to a pregnant woman's family who hadn't eaten for a day.

In Maheshwar, Women's Weave, collaborated with Delhi Crafts Council to provide funds to the weavers in Maheshwar.

Besides NGOs, religious communities and informal groups of people collected funds among themselves to help the poor weavers. Rashtriya Seva Sangh, Seva Bharti, Hindu Sanghatan and Jamaat were able to provide monetary help and food kits to people in the areas where their religious populations were concentrated.

Providing ration was lauded in the first phase of complete lockdown, however when the markets started opening, it was not enough.

### Difficulties in procuring raw materials

In Chanderi, three types of yarns are used – zari, cotton (muslin), silk (resham). With the onset of the lockdown, the procurement of yarns became a problem. In the initial days of phase 1 lockdown, the weavers continued weaving at the same pace as they were not aware that the lockdown would last long. Master weavers maintain a good stock of cotton, hence it was available in abundance. Silk threads are imported from China, and zari comes from Surat, but due to the lockdown these couldn't be transported to Chanderi and hence there was a shortage of zari and silk threads. The shortage of zari continued for a long time as Surat had a surge in COVID-19 cases. This also led to the decrease in production. In the case of Maheshwar, silk is the only yarn that is used, hence the weavers faced a similar problem.

For traders and master weavers with limited capital, buying yarns became a challenge as there was no income during Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the lockdown. With no new orders and the inventory piling up, they restricted the purchase of yarns and as a result they asked their weavers to produce less and in extreme cases, they had to let them go.

The credit system which was followed by the yarn dealers in both Chanderi and Maheshwar was suspended during the lockdown. The yarn dealers wanted cash payments and refused to give raw materials on credit which was a regular practice before COVID-19.

During May 2020, when Prime Minister Modi called for a ban on Chinese apps and products due to the military stand-off at Galwan, the price of silk threads fell as weavers were not willing to buy Chinese threads. In a lot of cases, yarn dealers lied and said that the threads were from South Korea or Japan.

### Disruption of the cash cycle

The entire cash cycle was disrupted, as a result payment at each level was stopped or delayed. With handloom products being categorized under 'non-essential goods', showrooms, boutiques and retail shops held back some payments as their sales became zero, due to this whole sellers and master weavers found themselves in a vulnerable spot and they responded by controlling the production.



“In many cases, traders and master weavers who have been working with weavers and their families for years refused to take their calls or open the doors for them” narrated Dilshaad. To ensure that more of their cash doesn’t get blocked, master weavers stopped giving new orders to the weavers as a result many handlooms stopped functioning. By September, Maheshwar had more than 20 crore worth of inventory and the handlooms were producing only 40% of their actual produce.

“Crores of money was lost as privileged people with high-end shops and thriving businesses refused to pay the money”, shares Muzzaffar Ansari, a weaver from Chanderi. Ansari has been associated with Chanderiyaan a platform which digitally empowers weavers. Along with his teammates, he conducted a survey of 1248 families in Chanderi who are involved in weaving. They calculated a loss of wages worth Rs. 2 crores. This survey was shared with the central government as well as with Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chauhan.

### Online selling

During the lockdown, a lot of weavers started selling their saris on Facebook marketplace, Instagram, and websites like Amazon and Flipkart. “B2C sales increased drastically, however it won’t be great for in the long run as it would disrupt the supply chain”, shares Ashish Katharya. “More than 1000 weavers have started selling their saris on Facebook Marketplace”, he added.

However, weavers don’t see huge profit margins in selling saris online. Ansari shared that the selling price on the online portals includes a nominal profit. Expressing his disappointment at the online platforms, Dilshaad said, “One sari is sold in 10-12 on Facebook marketplace, whereas with traders and master weavers, we could sell at least 7-8 saris in one go.” Some weavers who were not acquainted with digital modes of payment also lost money due to improper transfers or incorrect account details. “For small-scale weavers who make up for 90% of the weavers in Chanderi and Maheshwar, selling garments online is a challenge as it requires them to have a GST number”, shared a senior official from Weaver’s Service Centre, Indore.

For whole sellers in both Chanderi and Maheshwar, online selling was not a viable option as it would mean dismantling their entire business system. Aminuddin Ansari, the owner of an enterprise named ‘Fankaar’ runs a wholesale business and he shared how his efforts to push sales online went in vain.

According to a senior government official in Maheshwar, both state and central government are holding virtual conversations with weavers to acquaint them with the tools for online selling. E-Shilpmart website is under construction and will be launched soon.

As narrated by Hemendra Singh, CEO of Women Weave, The Handloom School in Maheshwar made a unique contribution in imparting online selling skills to weavers. Handloom school (a subsidiary of Women Weave) has designed a course for young weavers to help them become entrepreneurs. During the pandemic, the school couldn’t enroll new students in the residential course, hence it provided online handholding support to its graduates and alumni. They organized buyers-seller meets, connected the weavers with new clients and conducted sessions to teach them how to package and photograph their garments to sell them online.



In Chanderi, the Digital Empowerment Foundation along with Chanderiyaan trained weavers how to sell their garments online. The postal department also started a portal which would allow weavers to register themselves and sell their garments online, however the platform could not take off. “A few years ago, Hastshilp Vikas Nigam’s office in Chanderi had invested in a studio and a professional camera to help weavers sell their garments online, however, those were never used adequately”, shared Ashish Katharya.

### Government’s relief measures

The state officials from both the handloom clusters attest that rations were distributed to each home and was available in abundance. The officials also said that weaving was not encouraged during the lockdown as they did not want to stockpile their emporiums and showrooms. They also expressed that Mrignayani, the emporium of Madhya Pradesh Hastashilp evam Hathkargha Vikas Nigam has a purchasing limit which it cannot exceed.

The officials also mentioned about the shift in priorities as these clusters did not report many COVID-19 cases. Most of the resources were dedicated to Indore and Bhopal, where cases were rapidly increasing. Handloom units were materials for government supply are produced were completely functional. Gauze, hospital sheets and blankets were continuously weaved in Sarangpur, Barasewni, Gwalior, Mandsaur and in these areas weavers received work regularly.

In Maheshwar, the state officials tried involving the weavers in other kind of weaving work however they were reluctant to take work which was not intricate. Weavers said that it could potentially spoil their craft as their fingers are more used to intricate work. The weavers also stated that they couldn’t take new work when threads from previous order are still on the handloom.

According to Dilshaad, Ansari and Singh, local news reports have mentioned that Hastashilp evam Hathkargha Vikas Nigam have received Rs. 10 crores from the central government and that the state government will be buying some of the garments from the inventory. However, nothing has materialized as of yet and the weavers have not received any formal communication regarding the same.

Government officials from both Chanderi and Maheshwar stated that they are waiting for the new fiscal year to start as it would provide them with better clarity on the allocation of the budgets.

### Road to recovery

In Maheshwar, the sale of saris also depends on tourism. Winters is the peak time for tourists to arrive, however due to the rising COVID-19 cases, the sales remained low during the winters as well.

After the second phase of lockdown, many weavers found themselves in a fix as no new orders were coming in, online sale of saris was an unreliable source of income. Many weavers stopped weaving and started looking for other sources of income. Many started their own grocery shops or started selling vegetables. “There were difficult times, I wanted to sell my motorcycle to get some money, but no one would even buy it during this time”, shared Dilshaad, who has been



weaving for the last 15 years. Similarly, in Maheshwar, once the state officials told the weavers that nothing would pick up before Diwali, they started looking for other jobs.

The sales picked up during Diwali and during the weddings in the winter. Since then the numbers have increased, most of the traders and master weavers started receiving wholesale orders by the end of January.

Dilshaad and Aminuddin suggested that celebrity endorsements are another way to drive the sales. Sharing their past experience, they shared that each time a celebrity wears a handloom print, they receive orders to weave exact replicas of the same.

All the weavers and master weavers interviewed have voiced that the state government could help them by purchasing 20-25% of their inventory for Mrignayani emporium. The weavers are clear that they do not want ‘charity’ or anything for free. “Each weaver is registered with the state department, all they have to do is take 20% of our original turnover, they have 37 emporiums, they can buy some of our saris and sell them online or offline”, shared Aminuddin Ansari. He believes this is the best help that the government could offer them. This move will restore the cash cycle and eventually revive the production. According to a senior government official, the state government has written to the Union government for monetary help.

Hemendra Singh spoke about the ‘Handmade Dil Se’, an initiative by Habba to rebuild livelihoods of rural artisans and weavers. NDTV hosted a 2-hour telethon for the same which was attended by celebrities and organizations such as Women Weave, Dastkar and Delhi Crafts Council among others. Over Rs. 1.30 crore collected at the end of the 2-hour during which viewers were encouraged to buy surprise hampers as gifts during the festive season.<sup>3</sup> This initiative helped Maheshwar bag an order of 1000 saris from a corporate. He added, “Such initiatives help the weavers get media coverage and encourage the younger generation to buy handicrafts, rather than their usual fast fashion”.

The state government has been setting up exhibitions regularly in Bhopal, Indore, Gwalior, Pune, Delhi, Hyderabad and Nagpur. It recently opened its 39<sup>th</sup> Mrignayani showroom in Nagpur.<sup>4</sup>

To promote both handicrafts and tourism in Madhya Pradesh, motifs of Narmada river and Maheshwar forts will be weaved on the saris that are known in Madhya Pradesh. Fabrics from Chanderi and Maheshwar would be used to weave these motifs and these saris will be made available in all the Mrignayani stores.<sup>5</sup> This was followed by the launch of Khajuraho print sari in Raj Bhavan. It was prepared by the weavers of MP Handicrafts Development Corporation,

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<sup>3</sup> “Handmade Dil Se - An Initiative By NDTV and Habba – Special.NDTV.Com.”

<https://Special.Ndtv.Com/Handmade-Dil-Se-79/> , <https://special.ndtv.com/handmade-dil-se-79/>

<sup>4</sup> IANS. “Nitin Gadkari Praises Madhya Pradesh’s Handicraft, Handloom Sectors.” Telangana Today, <https://telanganatoday.com/nitin-gadkari-praises-madhya-pradeshs-handicraft-handloom-sectors>

<sup>5</sup> Jan 30, TNN /. et al. “River Narmada & Forts to Grace MP’s Famous Chanderi, Maheshwari Sarees | Bhopal News - Times of India.” The Times of India, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/bhopal/editedriver-narmada-forts-to-grace-mps-famous-chanderi-maheshwari-sarees/articleshow/80592075.cms>.



weavers from Chanderi and Maheshwar worked on the saris.<sup>6</sup> The cottage and village industries department has sanctioned Rs 107.24 for generating employment in the state.<sup>7</sup>

## SUGGESTIONS

### Streamline the processes for weavers

The weavers require social security schemes which are easy to avail. However, in the current scenario, both the measures under Handloom Weavers Comprehensive Welfare Scheme by Government of India have proved to be unfruitful. The Health insurance scheme and Mahatma Gandhi Bunkar Bima Yojana Scheme cover a lot of aspects such as health, education and disability<sup>8</sup>, however the myriad of paperwork and the time-consuming processes have led to an aversion among the weavers. “The weavers can’t afford spend so much time and stand in lines and wait in government offices, they often ask us to redo the paperwork or retrieve multiple documents, which often takes days”, shared Nasheen Tuntuni, a master weaver from Chanderi. To speed up the process of claims, weavers can be provided with clear guidelines on how to apply for the claim and be given a checklist. The state government could create a portal which can keep the weavers up to date with latest schemes and policy changes. Master weavers/traders can help raise awareness about these schemes as they are more in touch with government officials.

### Involving the private sector

The pandemic has revealed the exploitative nature of the relationship between weavers and master weavers and the involvement of private sector in the handicrafts business is crucial. Private sector can bring innovation and technology in the sector and help the weavers market their garments in an appealing fashion. The private sector can help develop the infrastructure needed for traditional handicrafts business and impart skills to the younger generation of weavers. With cash influx, the weavers could have access to better opportunities and clients, which can eventually help them decrease their dependency on master weavers and traders. Better work conditions and more autonomy over their products will empower the weavers and create more job opportunities.

### Set up emergency funds:

The pandemic has shone light on the shortcomings of the financial planning process. Both state departments and private firms should set up emergency funds in the future to tackle unforeseen events such as the pandemic. Women Weave has pledged to budget for the same in this year.

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<sup>6</sup> Feb 24, Ankur Sirothia /. TNN /. Updated: et al. “Deck up Your Wardrobe with Khajuraho Sarees | Bhopal News - Times of India.” The Times of India, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/bhopal/deck-up-your-wardrobe-with-khajuraho-sarees/articleshow/81178591.cms>.

<sup>7</sup> Pioneer, The. “460 New Roads Proposed in Budget Show State on Path of Development: Min.” The Pioneer, <https://www.dailypioneer.com/2021/state-editions/460-new-roads-proposed-in-budget-show-state-on-path-of-development--min.html>.

<sup>8</sup> Social Security for Handloom Weavers. <https://pib.gov.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=95784>.



### Digitization & digital training

Digitization is the need of the hour, however the weavers realized this only when they had no other options. While there have been multiple initiatives undertaken for the digitization, however, the groups that could reap the most benefits are left behind. There is a need for sector based digital training that could help weavers gain more autonomy over their produce and connect with more customers and clients. With the help of private sector and involvement of NGOs this can be achieved.

### Promoting exports

The Union department of textiles should also increase the exports of handicrafts products from India. By setting up more buyer-seller meets and setting up exhibitions abroad, the central government can boost the sales of these crafts and also attract foreign direct investment in the same.

The pandemic has been cruel to every sector, however, free rebates can only offer momentary relief. In order to make the supply chains and business processes more forbearing, structural changes are required.

## **APPENDIX**

The paper is based on qualitative and quantitative data collected through interviews with weavers, government officials and NGOs in India. The research also relies on news reports and government websites as well.

Some lists of weavers along with their contact details are available in the public domain - on Hastshilp Vikas Nigam website or on social media where they are trying to sell their garments. A list of weavers who've won awards at state-level also helped me locate master weavers who've been in the weaving community for a considerable amount of time and are well-connected with their contemporaries and markets in other cities. Most NGOs were reluctant to offer any contribution or participate in the study, similar to Government officials, who were also reluctant to share information or get into specifics. The weavers eagerly shared information and aided the study by putting me in touch with their peers and local government officials.

Telephonic interviews were conducted for the purpose of this report. While it was easy to have a structured conversation, there was little room for improvisation and gather data on other socio-economic aspects of weavers lives and families. Another challenge was the credibility of the facts. There was no way to cross-check information and facts as very little updated information is available in the public domain about the two handloom clusters. Most of the data on the government websites is dated and does not provide the recent figures. There is a lack of clarity on the relief schemes sanctioned by the state government and the central government as the local media reports and the accounts of government officials are incompatible.

I strongly believe that visits to the two handloom clusters would've benefitted the research more and I could've added more observations. Interviewees would be more comfortable



engaging in conversations around caste, family income and gender disparities when they happen in person.

I learnt how to structure conversations in a logical manner and how to frame interview questions which are broad enough for the interviewee to add as much as they can. The entire process of transcribing the interviews and sifting through the material to draw patterns was extensive. Each interviewee added another dimension to the study hence, I restricted my research to a limited number of variables.

## INTERVIEWEES:

- Mohammed Dilshaad, Weaver at a Self-help group, Chanderi
- Aminuddin Ansari, Master Weaver/Trader Fankaar, Chanderi
- Ashish Katharya, Gorelalji Traders, Chanderi
- Nasheen Tuntuni, Master Weaver, Chanderi
- Muzaffar Ansari, weaver/author/tourist guide, Chanderiyaan associate
- Hemendra Singh, CEO - Women Weave, The Handloom School, Maheshwar
- Senior government Official from Hastshilp Vikas Nigam, Maheshwar
- Senior government official from Weavers Service Centre, Indore

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