

CHAPTER III

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CHAPTER III

SOCIO ECONOMIC PROBLEMS OF THE WEAVER DUE TO THE DECAY OF HANDLOOM INDUSTRY.

The tradition of weaving by hand constitutes one of the richest and most vibrant aspects of the Indian cultural heritage. Handloom weaving is largely decentralized and weavers in the sector are mainly from the vulnerable and weaker sections of the society, who weave for their household needs and also contribute to production in the textile sector. The weavers of this industry are keeping alive the traditional crafts of different States. The level of artistry and intricacy achieved in the handloom fabrics is unparalleled and beyond the scope of modern machines. It can meet every need, ranging from the exquisite fabrics, which take months to weave, to popular items of mass production for daily use. The enormous variety of Indian handloom creations reflects the ethnic diversity in the country and the intricate compositions are known throughout the world since ancient civilizations.

The handloom industry, the state's oldest traditional cottage industry, has special socio-economic significance due to its vast potential for economic activities like the generation of employment and revenue. Handloom holds enormous potential to create self-employment opportunities and bring distinctive improvement in the quality of life. The unique selling point of the Handloom sector is that, it is highly labour intensive industry with low capital investment. It is also a low energy sector with no adverse impact on the environment as weaving is a totally pollution free activity. The sector has an edge over the power loom a mill sectors in its ability to commercially produce the goods in small volumes, openness to innovations, switch over to new

designs, adaptability to suit suppliers requirements and creation of exquisite designs. In Assam, handloom weaving is a way of life. It is inexorably linked with Assamese Culture and Heritage. Handloom Industry of Assam is known for its rich glorious tradition of making handloom and handicraft products. It also plays a very important role in the socio-economic development of the State.

The weaving industry in the District has experienced significant decline since the early 1990s. Demand for the weaving product is stagnant in the face of increased competition from cheaper alternatives, shifting consumer taste, disruptions to the supply and manufacturing process, and trade policies. Unfortunately, certain traditional crafts appear to be slowly dying due to prolonged neglect as well as lack of awareness and inadequate appreciation of the intricacies and skills involved. Presently, handloom weavers are facing severe livelihood crisis because of adverse government policies, globalization and changing socio-economic conditions. Over the past decades, the situation of most of the weaver's has deteriorated into a pitiful state, as weavers face increased poverty, hunger, health issues and inability to provide for their families. It is estimated that majority of weavers' children are malnourished .In addition, many weavers cannot even afford basic medical care for their children. Weavers have started supplementing their traditional income with labor work, such as driving cycle rickshaws, pulling carts etc. Because of all these, some weavers suffer from such disappointment that they want to commit suicide. This informal sector have traditionally little public voice. With no culture of unions, they have rarely fought together for their common interest. Weavers and family members also frequently suffer from a wide range

of health ailments related to malnutrition and exhaustion. Weaver's children face significant health issues, particularly malnutrition.

The present chapter concentrates on the socio-economic analysis of handloom weavers in Cachar District. The handloom industry is facing several problems such as non-availability of adequate quantity of quality raw material, shortage of working capital, non-availability of marketing facilities, credit needs to handloom weavers in co-operative field, low capacity utilization due to not utilizing of new technology, failure of co-operative societies, facing stiff competition from organized mill and power loom sector in the area of marketing the handloom products and central and state government's low budget allocations and no utilized budgeted funds in a proper way. Due to all these factors, faced by the handloom industry the weaver community in the Cachar district are in pitiable condition. Majority of the weavers in the District are not financially sound because of the inadequate earnings from their profession. Many Primary Weavers' Cooperative Societies are defunct. Very few societies are earning profits and the other societies are eagerly waiting for a savior to lift them from the disastrous conditions.

One of the important elements of the research study is to prepare a socioeconomic profile of the weavers communities engaged in rural handloom enterprises. The primary household survey conducted among the sample 405 weavers in the Cachar District of Assam to bring out their socio-economic profile after the decay of the industry with respect to caste, occupation, family size and structure, education, skill, income, employment, training etc. The underlined implication of such analysis has determined the household characteristic and composition of the age, skill, literacy, education, family income, employment etc. This chapter is divided into two part 3.1 and 3.2. The

first part 3.1 deals with the socio economic profile of the weaver in Cachar District. The second part 3.2 of the chapter deals with the socio economic problem of the weaver of the District.

3.1 Socio economic profile of the weavers in Cachar District:

3.1.1 Social Class:

Weaving in Cachar is not considered to be a caste profession. The magnitude of unemployment in the country at present, is such that no profession is any longer the exclusive, prerogative of a particular caste. In the light of this, the following table represent the distribution of weaver by social groups. The distribution of surveyed weaver engaged in handloom activities in the sample district according to their social class is presented in Table No. 3.1

Table No. 3.1 Distribution of weavers by social class

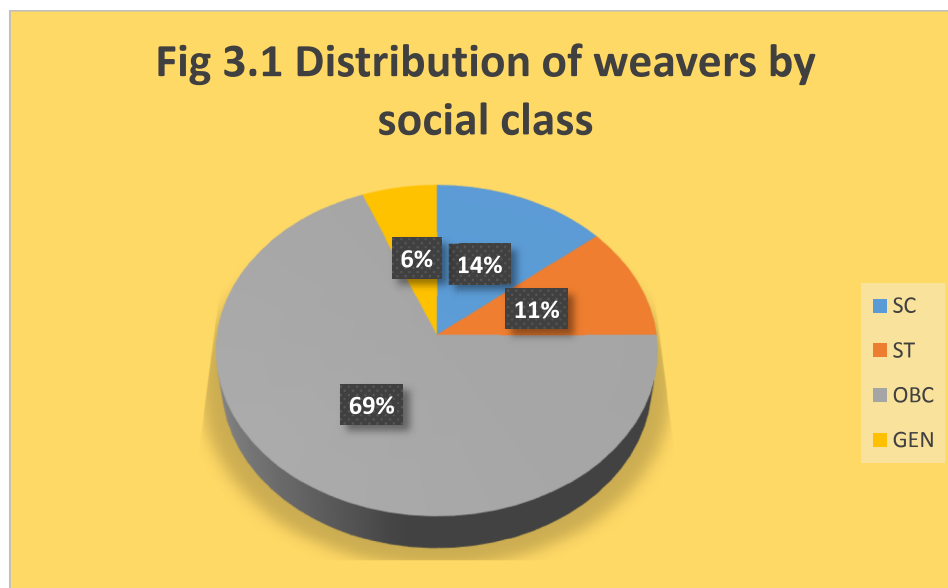
Sl. No.	Social Group	No. and Percent of respondents
1	SC	58(14%)
2	ST	43(11%)
3	OBC	280(69%)
4	GEN	24(6%)
Total		405(100%)

Source: Field Survey

Notes: SC- Scheduled Caste; ST-Scheduled Tribe

OBC-Other Backward Class; GEN-General

Table 3.1 reveals that among the total number of surveyed weaver engaged in handloom sector 69% of them belong to other backward communities. Nearly 14% and 11% of the surveyed weaver in belong to scheduled caste and scheduled tribes communities respectively and remaining 6% belong to general category.



Source: Field Survey

3.1.2 Age:

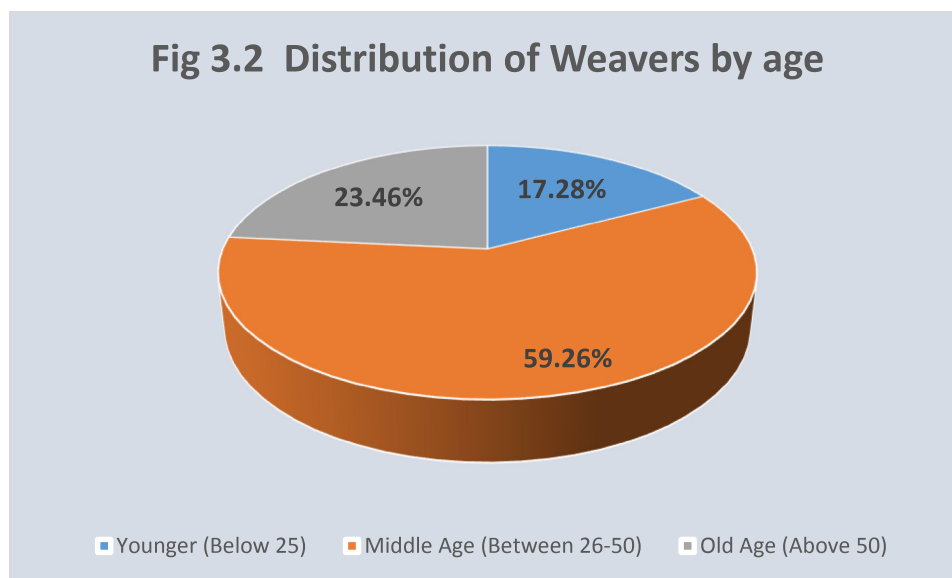
Age is an important aspect to be considered in the study of the socio economic analysis of the weavers. A weaver entering in the weaving profession and continues to toil throughout his life without any retirement. In the light of this background it is necessary to examine the age composition of the work force. Table3.2 presented the distribution of weaver by age

Table No. 3.2 Distribution of weavers by age

Age(in year)	No. and Percent of respondents
Younger(blow 25)	70 (17.28%)
Middle age(between 26-50)	240 (59.26%)
Old age(above 50)	95 (23.46%)
Total	405 (100%)

Source: Field Survey

Most of the weavers belonged to middle age group of 26-50 years, it constitute 59.26% of the total sample, because the productivity is relatively more at this age due to their physical capabilities. Younger generation in the weavers' community preferred to take employment in the town other than handloom weaving after their higher education. Therefore their involvement is very minimal in weaving. On the other hand involvement of older people was less conspicuous because of their physical health, strength and visual problems.



Source: Field Survey

3.1.3 Sex composition:

A large percent of women are engaged in the handloom sector in Cachar. Although male workers are also involved in hand weaving, but the percentage is very minimal.

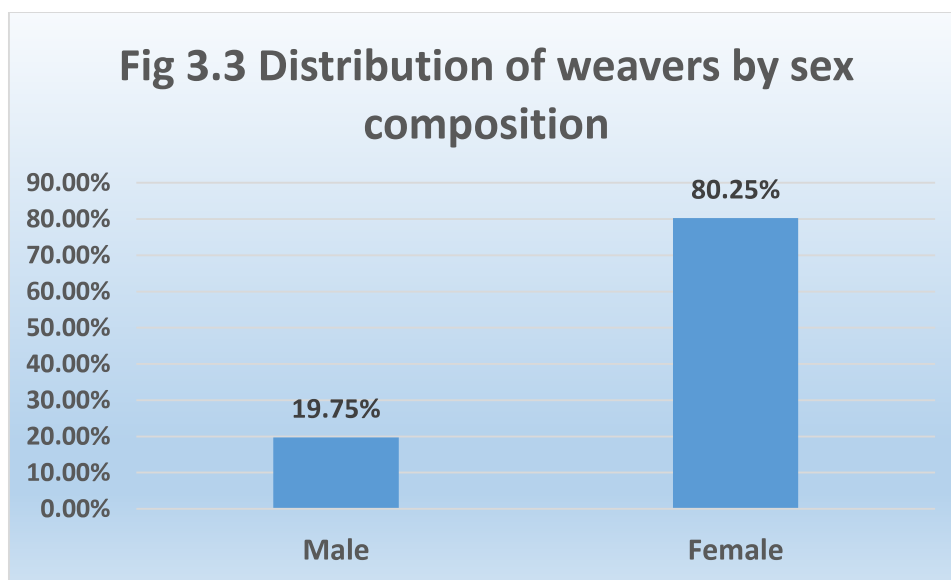
Women are engaged mostly in agriculture and rural industries. Handloom industry being a rural based industry, it is desirable to make a study of the sex composition of the sample. Table 3.3 gives the sex particulars. The distribution of surveyed weaver engaged in handloom activities in Cachar according to their sex composition is presented in Table No. 3.3

Table No. 3.3 Distribution of weavers by sex composition

Sex	No. and Percent of respondents
Male	80 (19.75%)
Female	325 (80.25%)
Total	405 (100%)

Source: Field Survey

The above table 3.3 reveals that more than 80 % of female are engaged in weaving in Cachar. The male constitute only 19.75%. Women constitutes a major workforce in the handloom sector. However, their working, living and wage conditions need to be improved.



Source Field Survey

3.1.4 Family status:

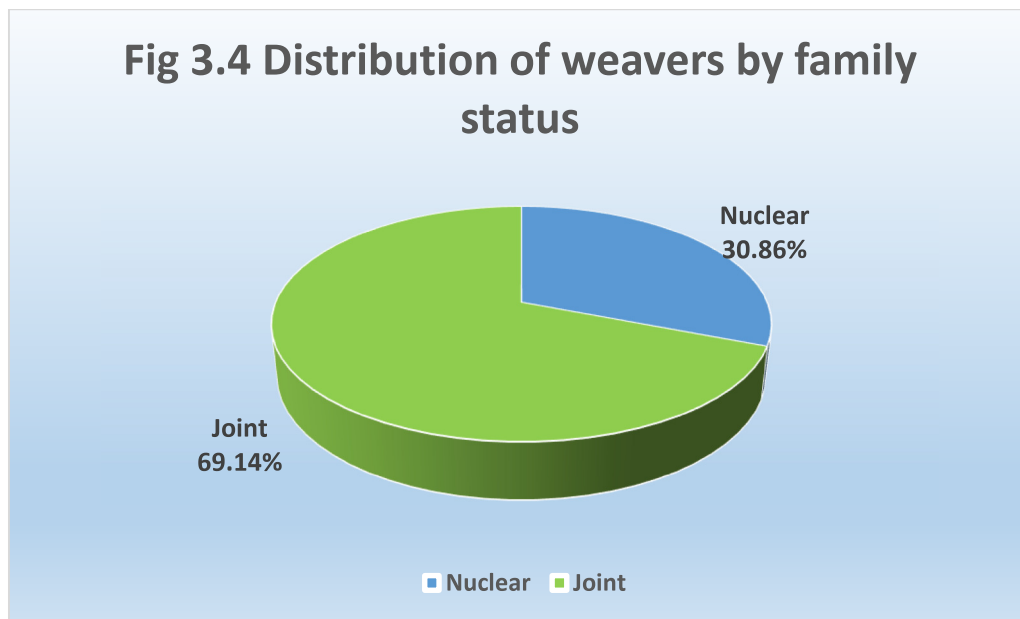
Family size and system are important features that contribute to the family income. The joint family still prevails in the weavers' community. The weaving occupation is one such profession which involves all family members from children to elderly, who contribute their valuable service in pre-weaving, and post-weaving processes. Furthermore, the standard of living of a family depends on its size apart from family earning, and hence the necessity arises to go in this demographic aspect. Table 3.4 throws light on this aspect of the study.

Table No. 3.4 Distribution of weavers by family status

Family type	No. and Percent of respondents
Nuclear	125(30.86%)
Joint	280(69.14%)
Total	405(100%)

Source Field Survey

Table No. 3.4 presents the family status of surveyed weaver by joint and nuclear type. The proportion of surveyed weaver belonging to joint families constitutes only 69.14% of the total sample. At present, nearly 30.86% of the weaver families of the surveyed weaver live in nuclear families. The joint families are noticed prominently among the weaver members surveyed under the District.



Source Field Survey

3.1.5 Distribution of weavers by family size

A family has been defined as the group of people who live under the same roof and fed from the same kitchen and in addition the members are related among themselves through blood relation. The family size has been studied under three groups-small, medium, large. Table 3.5 presents the distribution of weaver by family size.

Table No. 3.5 Distribution of weavers by family size

Family size	No. and Percent of respondents
Small(up to 3)	50(12.35%)
Medium(4-6)	294(72.59%)
Large(more than 6)	61(15.06%)
Total	405(100%)

Source Field Survey

The above table 3.5 reveals that 72.59% of the weaver have family size with 4-6 member and 15.06% of the weaver family have family members more than 6 members and 12.35% have small family size with family members up to 3.

3.1.6 Marital Status:

Table No. 3.6 presents the distribution of weaver surveyed by their marital status. Around 68% of the adult women members of the surveyed families are married. Unmarried adult women members engaged in weaving activities constitute nearly 25.5% of the total adult women members in the district.

Table No. 3.6 Distribution of weavers by marital status

Marital status	No. and Percent of respondents
Married	314(77.53%)
Unmarried	91(22.47%)
Total	405 (100%)

Source Field Survey

3.1.7 Education:

Education is one of the principal means of breaking the vicious cycle of poverty. Education is the basic necessity now a days. Education is the means by which the principle of cooperation are enabled to function effectively. Moreover, an educated weaver may bring about dynamic changes in the method of production and distribution and thus may try to better his own conditions and that of the industry. A study of the socio economic aspect of the weaver would be incomplete without studying his educational attainment, an idea of which can be summerised from Table 3.7

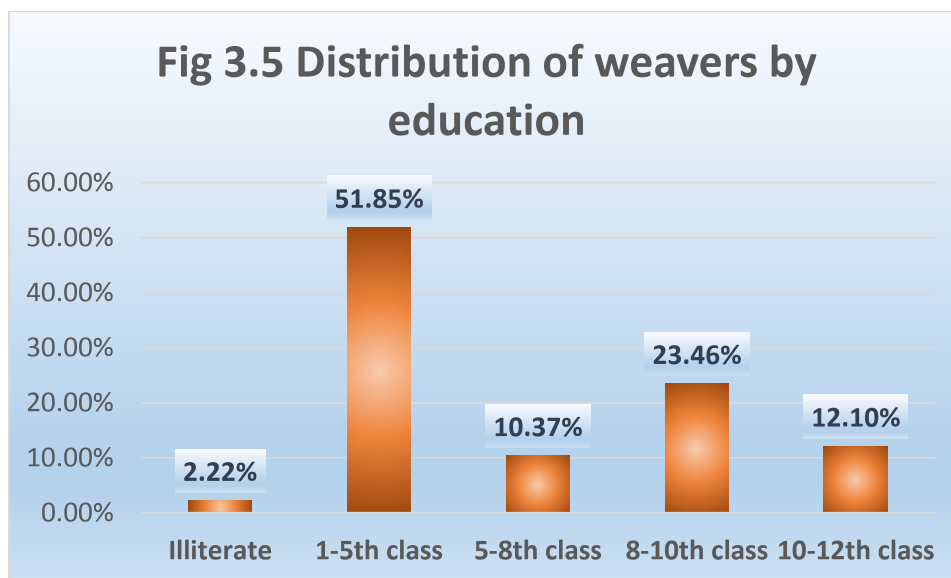
Table No. 3.7 Distribution of weavers by education

Educational Status	No. and Percent of respondents
Illiterate	9 (2.22%)
1-5 th class	210 (51.85%)
5-8 th class	42 (10.37%)
8-10 th class	95 (23.46%)
10-12 th class	49 (12.10%)
Total	405 (100%)

Source Field Survey

Among the weavers of the surveyed families nearly 2.22% of them are illiterate, majority of weaver families have only primary education, 51.85% weavers is reported having the education up to the 5th standard. 10.37% of weaver have the education up to 8th standard and 23.46% of the weaver have the education up to the 10th standard and remaining 10.12% of the weaver have the education up to the 12th standard. Thus majority of the weaver are found to have education up to the 5th standard.

It can be concluded that lack of education is the main cause for their poor ambitions about life. A majority of them are carrying a weaving work on the age old country looms used by their forefathers without thinking of any change. Nor do they know much about the modern type of looms that are being used elsewhere, which could reduce the strain on them and at the same time increasing the speed of work. They do not have any further planning as such.



Source: Field Survey

3.1.8 Educational Status of the children of the weaver

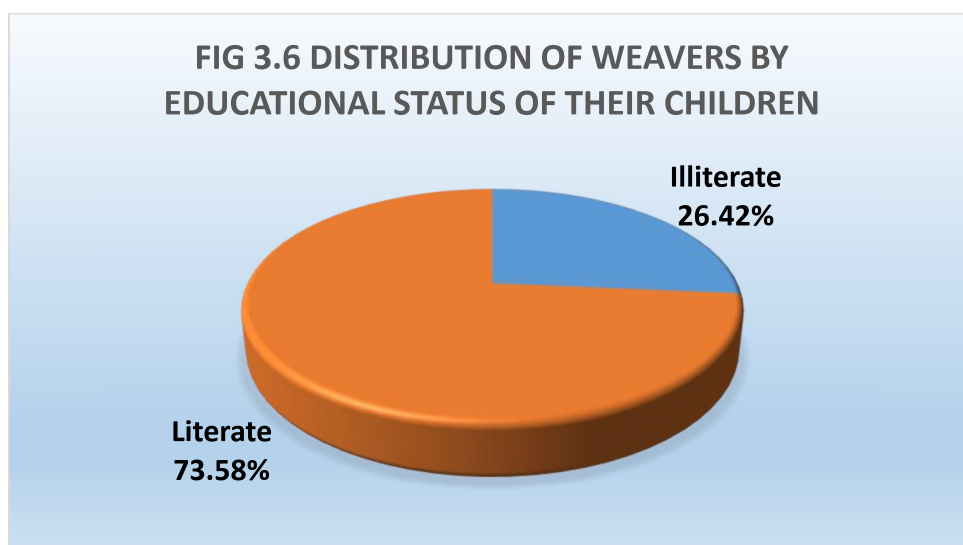
So far, attention was focused on the educational attainments of the weaver. Although they did not have the benefit of collegiate education in all cases and even literacy in some cases, their interest in educating their off spring was examined. The results are tabulated and presented in Table 3.8

Table No 3.8 Distribution of Weavers by Educational status of their children

Educational Status	No. and Percent of respondents
Illiterate	107(26.42%)
Literate	298(73.58%)
Total	405(100%)

Source: Field Survey

The weavers' communities have realized the importance of education. Children now a days are aware about the role of education and therefore they develop their career by higher education. Nearly 74% of the weaver families reported that their children are educated up to secondary level, and nearly 26.42% of the weaver children are uneducated because they cannot afford higher education, due to family constraints, ignorance and encouragement from the family members.



Source: Field Survey

3.1.9 Housing situation:

Living conditions can depend on size and types of the house, and how these two factors would influence incomes and production. Smaller houses with bigger family sizes would have difficult living and working conditions. Type of the house is also an important factor in responding to productivity and production. The dwelling assets and habitat condition of a family reflect the living standard and quality of life of the family members. The study attempts to review the housing and

environmental situation prevailing among the weaver communities. Table 3.9 presents the distribution of the surveyed households by their housing status.

Table No 3.9 Distribution of weaver’s Households by no. of living rooms in their houses

Total no. of rooms in a house	No. and Percent of respondents
One room	56(13.83%)
2-4 rooms	248(61.23%)
More than 4 rooms	101(24.94%)
Total	405(100%)

Source: Field Survey

Table 3.9 presents the distribution of the surveyed households by their housing status. About 61.23% of the households reported having 2 to 4 rooms in their houses. Nearly 24.94% of the surveyed households possess houses having more than 4 rooms. Single roomed houses are owned by nearly 13.83% of the surveyed weaver families.

3.1.10 Income:

Handmade fabrics have always made tremendous competition with power loom fabrics. Many times there is a setback for handmade products because of the relative price flow of the variety of power loom inexpensive silken products in the market, lack of demand and fashion issues that in turn affect the socio-economic condition of the weavers. The monthly earning of weaver’s family are a good indicator of the standard of living of the weaver and his family. Therefore, the

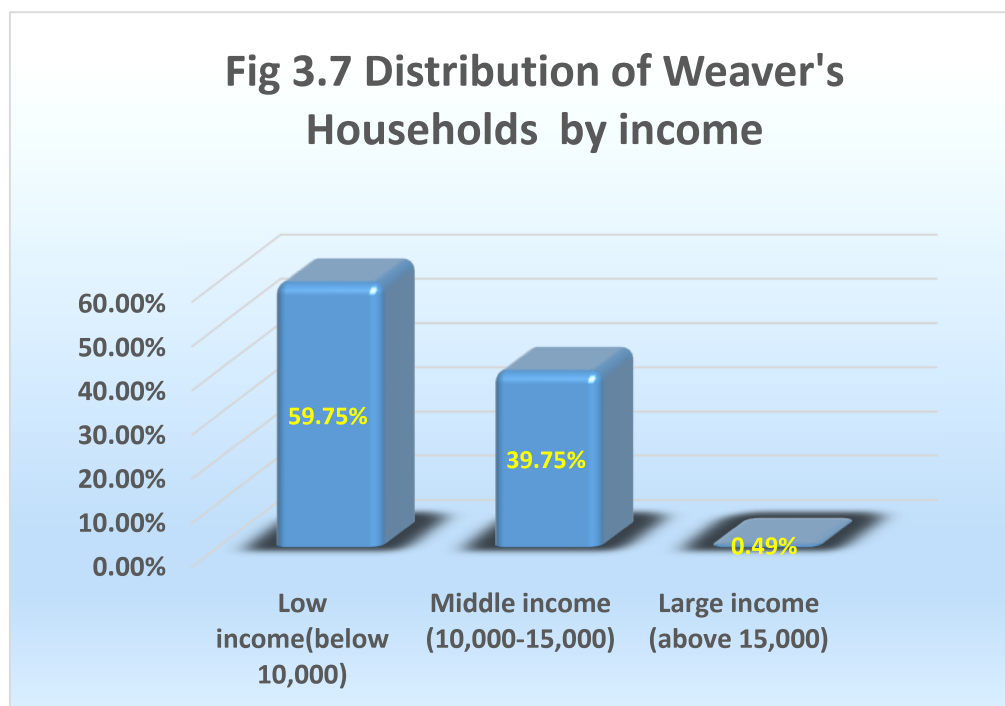
information is collected on this important aspect from the weavers studied and presented in the Table 3.10

Table No 3.10 Distribution of Weaver's Households by income

Economic Status (Monthly income in Rs.)	No. and Percent of respondents
Low income(below 10,000)	242 (59.75%)
Middle income (10,000-15,000)	161 (39.75%)
Large income (above 15,000)	2 (00.49%)
Total	405

Source: Field Survey

It is noticed that about 59.75% of the surveyed households have low income (below 10,000). After the decay of handloom industry the weaving income is decreased significantly and the share of weaving income to the total family expenditure is very less. About 39.75% of the weaver are in middle income group and only 00.49% of the weaver are in large income group



Source: field survey

The weaving activities, have witnessed a significant decline in view of the various factors. Such a low level of earning has kept the weavers trapped in the vicious circle of poverty. Thus in spite of hard labour put in by all the family members they are fail to earn as per as their expectation. It is evident from the above analysis that there is higher rates of incidence of poverty among handloom workers resulting poor socio economic status. Handloom production is not sufficiently remunerative to lift the households out of poverty. Most of the ST handloom workers belong to the District where handloom production is mainly for domestic consumption. The real income of handloom workers have declined over the years. This also acted as a barrier to socio economic up gradation of the weaver community.

3.2 Socio economic problems of the weavers

This section of the study deals with the socio economic problem of the weaver of the District. Weavers in Cachar, mainly those who have inherited this occupation, are in a pitiable condition owing to the poor socio-economic conditions. Majority of the weavers in the district are not financially sound because of the inadequate earnings from their profession. A greater number of weavers in the country try to change their profession. Particularly after the decay majority of the weaver live in poverty in the District. Most of the weavers responds as dark future of weaving. The weavers who has left weaving work are not getting proper work and wage to run their livelihoods. Due to continuous decrease in the wages of the weavers declining the interest of next generation to associate with weaving works.

A present study brought out the problems being faced by handloom weavers in Cachar. Some of the findings are presented below:

- ❖ Hunger has become a major concern for women and children in this sector. In quite a few places. 32 percent of weaver have been going without proper food, both in terms of quantity and time
- ❖ 75 percent of women are suffering from ailments, from acute to chronic diseases such as anemia, poor eye sight, sugar and blood pressure.
- ❖ Women constitute 80 percent of workforce in handloom sector. But, there is not even a single programme, or scheme, that addresses this segment, in the last 100 years.

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- ❖ 81 percent of weaver do not know of any existing government schemes on handloom sector.
 - ❖ 76 percent of the households are debt-ridden. Most of the loans are taken from private money lender, micro finance institutions and master weavers. About 27 percent of the loans are taken in the name of women.
 - ❖ Single women weaver, widows and women-headed households are completely out of the bank-based system of loans.
 - ❖ 51 percent of weavers have education up to 10th standard. There are 20 percent children dropouts from the schools, and 26 percent illiterates among weaver children.
 - ❖ Only 10 percent of women in handloom sector working for more than 10 hours per day. Often, there is no payment for this work, or if paid, they are very low wages.
 - ❖ There are 59 percent households, belongs to the low income group. All these households would come under poorest section of the society.
 - ❖ Membership in handloom cooperative societies is very low. Number of women employees in the cooperatives is also low.

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- ❖ Women have been working daily for more than 14-16 hours on household and professional work. This drudgery, over years, coupled with low economies, has been stressing upon women in physical and psychological terms.
 - ❖ Weavers have been working for more than 10-20 days constitute only 11%. This resulted low income and low profitability.
 - ❖ Involvement of younger in weaving is now less, only 17% of the younger generation are now involve in weaving. Younger generation in the weavers' community preferred to take employment in the town other than handloom weaving after their higher education. Therefore their involvement is very minimal in weaving. The weaving occupation is one such profession which involves all family members from children to elderly, who contribute their valuable service in pre-weaving, weaving and post-weaving processes
 - ❖ After the decay of the industry it is found that maximum weavers who continue the weaving practices are female, minimum number of male members are now involve in this occupation. The male weavers are now engaged in other occupation rather than weaving in order to maintain their family. More than 80 % of female in weaver's community are engaged in weaving in Cachar. The male constitute only 19.75%. Women constitute a major workforce in the handloom sector at present.
 - ❖ Due to absence of a training and skill development center/institute in the District

there is a great shortage of educated, certified and professionally trained/skilled handloom sector workforce. On the other hand, new generation prefers to work in the other sector instead due to relatively higher monetary benefits and ease of work.

Given the poor condition of weavers who have been known for supplying colourful and fanciful hand-loom dresses to the world. While the weavers' hands are busy in skillfully weaving their way to earn for their daily bread, their fallen faces and disappointed looks have only robbed the cloth of its shine. Weavers are burdened not only with debts but with very tough competition. The income of handloom weavers have declined to such an extent that they cannot even meet their basic needs. On average a weaver is earning just Rs 50 to 60 in a day, and even this too is not certain. Due to this livelihood crisis and related indebtedness, many weavers in recent times have shifted their age old occupation.