

Loom Industry of Chowhali-Enayetpur in Sirajgonj District – its History and the Socio-Economic Scenario

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ABSTRACT

Loom is a machine or device for weaving thread or yarn into textiles. It can be manual or automatic. Loom industry is one of the oldest and traditional cottage industries in Bangladesh. Historically, Bengal was famous for her own textile products from the ancient era and it is the part of our glorious culture and heritage. Bangladesh is famous for producing its own textiles such as saree, lungi, dhuti, gamchas etc. from the beginning of this industry. Primarily, clothing was made to meet the clothing needs of a community in a region but later, it becomes an occupation, a business, an industry and a source of huge employment opportunities. It is one of the most innovative and artistic manufacturing industry of our motherland. Loom industries have been developed in various places of Bangladesh and among these areas the Chowhali-Enayetpur belongs to one of the richest history of loom industry. In this article, we will expose the history of loom industry in Chowhali-Enayetpur of Sirajgonj district and then elucidate the socioeconomic scenario of this region for the blessing of loom industry.

Keywords: Loom, Weavers, Loom industry, Clothing, Textiles

Introduction

Loom industry¹ is the very old and famous cottage industry in Bangladesh. This cottage industry is the mainstay of all economic activities in the rural region. Cottage industry is common in the villages of Bangladesh and similar to other cottage industries loom industry is likewise founded on family oriented and particular area oriented. This Loom industry provides 75% of our total needs of clothing². Weavers zone (Tanti Polli) has been developed in the specific areas of our country such as Chowhali, Enayetpur, Belkuchi, Shahzadpur, Sirajgonj, Narshingdhi, Raipur, Demra, Tangail, Magura. The quality of our loom products is comparatively higher than other countries³. Among these, the loom products of Enayetpur-Chowhali of Sirajgonj district⁴ such as Saree, Lungi, Three-piece, Gamchas (Napkins) and other textiles are very popular across the country as well and there is goodwill of the loom product business in this region⁵.

History of Loom Industry of Chowhali-Enayetpur in Sirajgonj District:

The history of loom industry is very old in this region. It is very difficult to say the beginning of this industry. There are various explanations about the history of this ancient industry. The weavers of the aged Boshak community⁶ are primitive weavers. They are known as one kind of nomad or vagrant. At the beginning of loom industry, they were set up in the Sindhu basin to Murshidabad of West Bengal. But the environment was not favorable for clothing production by weaving on looms. The Boshak community, then migrated in Rajshahi region of present Bangladesh. They too did not cope with the conditions of Rajshahi, then split into two groups, one group migrated at Bajidpur in

Kishoregonj and another group at Dhamrai in Dhaka. Nevertheless, some of them stayed in Rajshahi to work with silk clothing. While living in Dhamrai, the Boshak community again divided into two groups and clashed each other. And so, some Boshak went to the Chowhatta of our neighbor state. Thus, these two groups of Boshak community known as “Chowhatta” and “Dhamraya”, are still present in Boshak community. The Munipuri tribes in Bangladesh are weaving these clothings for a long period of time. They used three types of weaving machines – (i) Waist loom (ii) Handloom (iii) Thoang. They mainly produce table cloth, scarf, ladies cloth, saree, towels, maflar, gamcha etc. To fulfill their own demand, the Munipuri tribes built their own loom industry⁷.

The history of loom industry of Chowhali-Enayetpur in Sirajgonj district begins approximately from the 7th century. Sirajgonj was then under the Mymensingh district. As a riverside region, hence most of the lands were submerged with water from 8 to 9 months around the year. In the dry season, Banaba trees, Jhai trees, Venna trees, Shimul trees, Carpus trees etc. grew naturally. A lot of such wild trees were found in the Char of Jamuna River. Among these wild trees, a type of cotton plant called “Pamba⁸” was found which was abundantly grown in the Chars of Jamuna and Padma rivers. The textiles in the region were made by these “Pamba” cotton. Due to the favorable environment for loom industry the weavers built their Polli (zone) in this region. Most of the upazillas in Sirajgonj district are renowned for loom industries for a long time. Loom industries are still present in the bank of Jamuna river such as Chowhali-Enayetpur, Belkuchi, Shahzadpur, Ullapara, Kamarkhanda, Kazipur, Sirajgonj Sadar and Raigonj⁹.

There were steamer Ghat in Chowhali and a regular transportation system from Chowhali to Murshidabad, Assam, Guwahati, Kolkata. It was too beneficial for agriculture. Zamindars tradition was also found in these regions such as Pakrashi Zamindar, Shitlai Zamindar, Shohagpur-Kalidas Chowdhury Zamindar. Zamindars tradition was also found in Dowlotpur, Shahzadpur and other regions. They fulfilled their food needs from agriculture, but it was very troublesome to meet their clothing needs. There was no such necessity for clothing among the poor farmer classes except the rich and Zamindar classes. It was the thing of luxury, for these rich people wore fashionable and colorful attires. And then to run into their clothing requirements, the Zamindars built their own loom factory and appointed some farmers in their loom factories for clothing production. The raw materials for weaving in loom were available in Chowhali-Enayetpur, as a result the Hindu and Marwari weaving community started living here, and they spent their livelihood on this business. At that time, the yarn was made from cotton and jute fiber, fabric was dyed by the natural indigo dyes which was cultivated that time (1777 - 1867) in farmland. So the clothing needs were met in this area¹⁰.

From the record of District Collector in 1871, it was known that a vast number of people were involved in loom industry. Weavers belong to both the Hindu and Muslim communities. The name of a Muslim Tanti was given Jola or Joala. Instead of the name, a Muslim likes to call himself as a Karigar or a skilled workman. The Karigar was working on the loom as monthly basis and the payment was in advance. The best quality Dhuti was produced in the village of Dogachi of Sirajgonj. The price ranges were from 5 taka to 15 taka per pair. Dhuti, Chador were exported in foreign market¹¹.

The issue of historic Swadeshi Movement also outbreaks in Sirajgonj. The Indian National Congress announced the ban of British products in Indian Subcontinent, as a result the students of Sirajgonj Victoria and Banowary High School protested the local Marowari people to choose the materials brought from Manchester of The UK in the Sirajgonj Bengal warehouse. The Swadeshi Movement activists also burnt the British clothings in several domestic markets. As a consequence, the needs of local textiles in Sirajgonj were increased, the effect was also found in the loom industry of Chowhali-Enayetpur¹².

In 1916, the Hardinge Bridge was built and the railway transit system had been developed from Sirajgonj to Kolkata. And so the loom product of Chowhali-Enayetpur has been introduced into the market of West Bengals and other parts of the Subcontinent. Most of the Tantis were from Hindu community and most of them were Marowari. The Marowaries were the merchant class, they blew up their clothing business in Kolkata, Murshidabad, Asam, Gohati and so on. After that the goodwill of textiles of these looms industry also expanded into the world market. In 1947, after the liberation of India, the majority Hindu Tantis left Sirajgonj and started living in India. Among the remaining Hindu Tantis who lived in Sirajgonj, after 1947, most of them migrated again in India in the period of the liberation war of Bangladesh in 1971. As a result, Hindu Tantis are now-a-days very rare to find in Enayetpur. Today the majority of Tantis are Muslims. In 1950, the Government introduced trade license for the Tantis, this also caused a negative result on this industry. Referable to the deficiency of raw materials like yarns, dyes during the period of 1971 to 1973, this industry declined. After 80s decade the progression of this industry was steady. After the Free Export-Import Trade in 2008, there is no crisis of yarns and dyes. Besides the local spinning mills produced comparatively very high of quality yarn than the foreign lands and it supplied to these loom industries. At present, the loom industry of Enayetpur produces their own featured Sarees, Lungis, Ghamchas and other artistic textiles¹³.

Yarn Collection:

The owners of the loom factories in Chowhali-Enayetpur bring their weaving raw materials from the local yarn production house, various spinning mills of Bangladesh and also import some special types of yarns for particular uses or design in textiles. The yarns are delivered into the loom factory¹⁴ in the form of a big size cone. The required yarns for weaving, then winded by the weavers into the different beams, rollers, bobbins for their required weaving operations. Tant Bazar of Narayangonj is the largest yarn market in Bangladesh. These yarns supplied in the local market by the Dealers. There are some spinning mills in Sirajgonj district of which M. A. Matin Cotton Mills Ltd., Syed Spinning & Cotton Mills Ltd. are the most reputed. Yarns are also supplied from Alhaj Textile Mills Ltd. in Ishwardi, Pabna which was founded in 1962¹⁵.

Types of Yarn:

Types of yarn used in the loom industry are listed below¹⁶ (Used the local term):

1. Cotton yarn
2. Gas Mercerized Cotton yarn (High quality yarn)
3. Half Silk yarn
4. Silk yarn
5. Jori yarn
6. Rayon yarn
7. Polyester yarn
8. Viscose yarn
9. Mercerized cotton yarn

Yarn Price:

The price of the yarn varies according to their count, quality and types of fiber used in yarn. The more the count is the yarn will be finer and more qualitative, so more will be the price. The following Table shows price of some yarn which is supplied in Enayetpur loom industries¹⁷.

Table 1 : Local Yarn Price Range

Yarn	Count	Price (TK)
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Cotton yarn	60	180 – 222
Cotton yarn	62	175 – 180
Cotton yarn	64	175 – 184
Cotton yarn	66	175 – 185
Cotton yarn	68	175 – 230
Cotton yarn	70	195 – 220
Cotton yarn	72	195 – 220
Cotton yarn	74	215 – 220
Cotton yarn	80	225
Cotton yarn	82	250
Cotton yarn	100	300
Cotton yarn	80/2	290
Gas-Mercerized cotton yarn	100/2	700
Gas-Mercerized cotton yarn	80/2	500
Gas-Mercerized cotton yarn	30/1	140

Source: Zilan Weaving Factory, Eanyetpur, Sirajgonj-6751

Dyes Used in Weaving:

Three types or processes of dyeing found in local factories of Chowhali-Enayetpur¹⁸, are as follows:

“Dyeing Color”: This type of color is used by the weavers in their own home or factories. It is known as “Dyeing Color” in term.

Natural Color: They also used some natural dyes for this color.

Firoza Color (Turquoise Color): This color is produced in the Dyeing Factories which supplied from China, Japan, and Germany by the local Dealers. German Habroop & Company were running their dyes business by the cooperation of Mr. Abdul Aziz before the Old Hatkhola Madrasa of Enayetpur.

Socio-Economic Scenario:

Loom industry has a great blessing to the social and economic development of Chowhali-Enayetpur of Sirajgonj district. There have been found several classes in the society in this region and they have a distinct features in their lifestyles. Agriculture, education, infrastructure of this area also developed with the advancement of the economy driven loom industry. A number of women workforces have contributed in this industry. With our National Economy, the annual production of loom industry is approximately 68.70 core meter, which matches 40% of the demand of our internal textiles¹⁹. In case of value added tax in our National Economy, loom industry contributes more than 12027 crore Taka. Around 15 lakh people are dependent on this industry directly and indirectly. It is the third largest industry, according to the employment opportunity after Garments and Agriculture industry, and second largest sector after Agriculture with the rural employment opportunity in Bangladesh.

At a time, the weavers were neglected in the society due to their poverty and occupation. They were considered as the low class people in society. Farmers were known as “Chasa”, lower class Hind and Muslim weavers were called “Jola”. The higher and middle class people in society never wanted to make a marital relationship with these Chasa, Jola and Kholifa (Tailor). The weavers felt ashamed of having this “Jola” title. So they were also called “Karigor”. The weavers work hard from dawn to dusk on a loom to make fabrics to fulfil our clothing needs. Traditionally, it’s a family occupation, all the members of a weaver's family are instantly or indirectly involved in this sector, they are bound together in the same yarn²⁰. In that respect are three categories in the weaver’s society (Tanti Somaj). A flow chart of the Tanti Soamj has been represented below²¹:

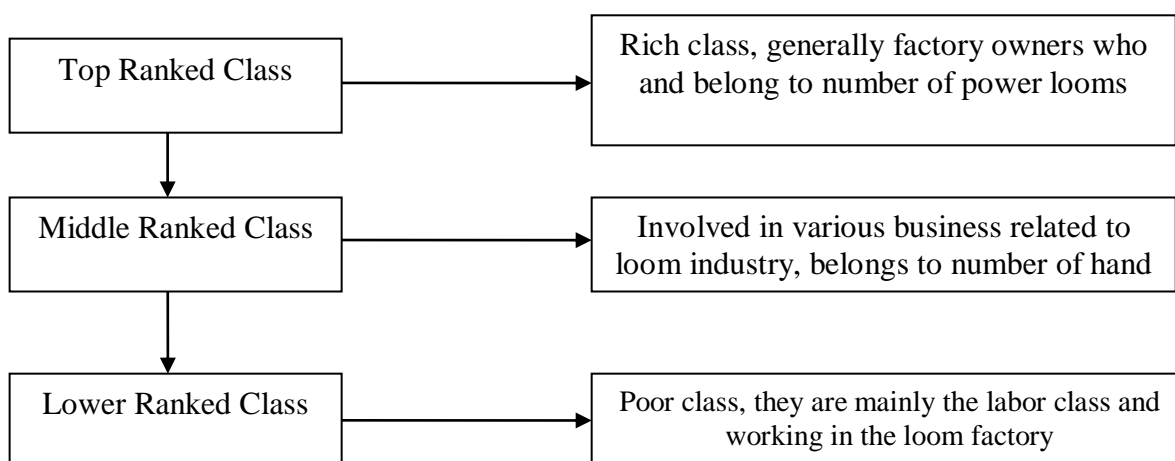


Figure 1: Classification of Tanti Somaj.

At that point is likewise found an administrative post in a loom factory as below (local term used).

Table 2: An Administrative Post in a Loom Factory

Position	Duties
Owner	Head of the Administration in a Loom factory
Sorker	List all the materials and labors, work as a treasurer
Master	Supervise the production process and workers
Hook Jacket Master	Make a fabric design
Dyeing Master	Make dyeing recipe and dye the fabric
Dum Master	Making “tana”
Worker	Weaving in the looms

Source: Zilan Weaving Factory, Eanyetpur, Sirajgonj-6751

Local workers come from mainly the Char of Jamuna River. Workers as well come from Rangpur, Gaibandha, Kurigram, Kushtia, Dinajpur, Nilphamari, Bogra etc. and the factory owners provide their accommodation. The owner determines their wages on the basis of their production of fabrics in per piece. Only the payment of Sarker and Master is weekly basis and they have been paid minimum 700 taka to maximum 4500 taka per week on the footing of their expert and acting skill. A Table is given below for the wages of the workers²²:

Table 3: Wages of weavers per piece production

Textiles	Wages of the worker	
	Lowest wage (TK)	Highest Wage (TK)
Saree (Normal)	80	100
Saree (Design)	250	1200
Three Piece	100	200
Lungi	50	200
Gamcha	20	35

Source: Zilan Weaving Factory, Eanyetpur, Sirajgonj-6751

Subsequently, the production in loom the fabrics are finished in Calendar Mills. At present, there are some Calendar Mills in Enayetpur. Fabrics also can be sent to Dhaka for Calendaring. The Tanti businessmen also participated in the various textile or trade fairs in Bangladesh such as International Trade Fair in Dhaka and Chittagong; they display their products to the world.

Table 4: Number of Handloom establishment and loom in Chawhali Upazila (2011)

No of unit (factory)	No of loom		
	Operational	Non-operational	Total
1319	5274	1720	6994

Source: District Statistics 2011, Sirajgonj District, Published by Bangladesh bureau of Statistics, December 2013

Table 5: Employment status in handloom industry at Chowhali Upazila (2011)

No of handloom	Person Engaged			Total
	Family member	Regular	Hired/Casual	
6994	2012	5015	322	7349

Source: District Statistics 2011, Sirajgonj District, Published by Bangladesh bureau of Statistics, December 2013

At a time, it was a village, now it is an industrial zone. The living cost is comparatively high than other villages. Most of the business is developed here, which is directly and indirectly related to loom industry. There are some Commercial Banks such as Sonali Bank Ltd. (two branches), Agrani Bank Ltd., Krishi Bank Ltd, Trust Bank Ltd and Uttara Bank Ltd. There are six branches of Grameen Bank which manage approximately 2668 members and number of account 3031, and number of Cooperative Society is 155 which have 7146 clients. There is a good loan facility for the weavers and other businessmen. The government has earned huge income Tax from here. The rich Tantis contributed in the social development. The businessmen arrange “Halkhata” every year to pick up their dues from other businessmen and they serve them the “Misti”.

Teaching rate is likewise increased in this region both for male and female. There are a number of Kindergarten Schools Primary Schools, High Schools and Madrasahs. The colleges are Chowhali Degree College, Chowhali S.B.M. Mohilla College, Khamar Gram College, Manzur Kader MohaBiddaloy, Manzur Kader Technical School & College, Chowbaria Shikdar Para Technical & BM College, Baghutia Technical School & College, Rehaipukuria Adarsha College. Renowned industrialist Dr. M.M. Amjad Hussain contributes in the education and medical sector in this area. He established Khwaja Yunus Ali Hospital which is a nonprofit & 586 bedded tertiary hospital and a Cancer Center in Enayetpur by the name of his Pir Hajrat Khwaja Yunus Ali (R). He also established Meherunnisa Uchchya Balika Biddyalay, an English Medium School & College, Khwaja Yunus Ali Medical College, Nursing Institute and Khwaja Yunus Ali University. The idea of university establishment in this area is revolutionary and it will change the whole socioeconomic condition of this area and the light of higher education will illuminate the area in future. Some technical and business programs are launched in this university, such as Textile Engineering, Mechatronic Engineering, BBA, MBA etc. The graduate from these fields can contribute in the loom industry in this region in future.

Table 6: Literacy rate of 2001 and 2011 at Chowhali Upazila

2001			2011		
Male	Female	Both	Male	Female	Both
43.2	30.7	37.2	40.6	32.5	36.5

Source: District Statistics 2011, Sirajgonj District, Published by Bangladesh bureau of Statistics, December 2013

From the District Statistics 2011, in Chowhali Upazile, we find that there are 24 government offices, 12 post offices, 11 NGOs, 19 daily bazars, 17 weekly hats, 32 restaurants, 9 residential hotels, 2 cinema halls, 57 registered clubs, 1 auditorium, 3 public libraries, 3 orphanages, 5 union health centers and 18 physicians or practitioners. Twenty four villages are electrified in which 2504 are residential holding and 197 are commercial holding. The available local vehicles are rickshaw, van, easy bike, auto-rickshaw and CNG auto car. The length of metalled, unmetalled (kacha) road is 32 kilometer and 106 kilometer respectively which comprises 138 kilometer road. In monsoon, the

length of water way (both river & canal) is about 55 kilometer. There are 6 bridges and 37 culverts in Chawhali upazila. There are several regular bus services from Enayetpur to Dhaka such as SI Poribahan, Dina Poribahan, Ovi Poribahan etc. Number of trips is available in a day. Mobile network coverage is also available here.

Conclusion:

It is apparent that loom industry has a direct impingement on the socioeconomic development of Enayetpur village. Every family of this arena is directly and indirectly linked to this looms business. The economic conditions and social classification are separate from the Tanti community than others in this area. Weavers running their loom business with their distinct social characteristics. The loom industry of Enayetpur provides a great contribution of textile needs in our local market and their product is renowned in Bangladesh. Still, there need some initiatives from both government and private sectors. The roads and transportation system should be easy and safe. The weavers and technicians in this industry need proper theoretical and practical knowledge about raw materials, weaving, dyeing, finishing and design. So, any technical education institution relating to this industry must be established as soon as possible. The Bank loan can be more compromising for the weavers. Must be ensured continuous electricity supply. The entrepreneurs should be educated enough so that they can deal this business in the national and international markets.

References

- ¹ *The industries or in part conducted by members of the same family and domestic workers employed part-time or full time to generate and use power in the industry for more than 10 people and more than 20 if you do not use power equipment manufacturer is not involved in the production of the cottage industry.*
- ² M. Zainul Abedin (Editor), *Institute of Bangladesh Studies Journal*, Number 10, 1409, page 135.
- ³ Md. Sirajuddin, *Kutir Shilpo*, Dhaka: Bangla Academy 1984, page 11-12.
- ⁴ *Sirajganj district is a part of the rajshahi division. On the west bank of this baral river, a new bazaar emerged and most of the land of this bazaar belonged to jaminder siraj Ali, so, after his name gradually this bazaar got its recognition as sirajganj. It is bordered on the north by Bogra and nature district; on the west by nature and pabna district; on the south by pabna and manikganj district; on the east manikganj, Tangail and jamalpur District.* Mohammad Nuruzzaman, *"Bangladesher Zilla-Upazillar Namkoron and Oitishjo"*, Dhaka: Mawla Brothers, 2007, page-107.
- ⁵ Rajshekhar Basu, *Chalantika*, S. C. Sarkar & Sons Pvt. Ltd., Kolkata, 1937, page 147.
- ⁶ *Level nomadic people who worked in the weaving of cloth.*
- ⁷ Mohamad amjad khan, *Shilper satkanon*, Dhaka, 2003, page: 02
- ⁸ *Cotton is a kind of plant, which would have produced yarn.*
- ⁹ Md. Khairul Anam (Editor), *"Methopath"*, Borsho 14, Sonkha 10, April 2011, page-48.
- ¹⁰ *Report of the Census of Manufacturing Industries in East Pakistan for 1954 Issued by Provincial Statistical Board and Bureau of Commercial and Industrial, Intelligence, East Pakistan, 1960, page 1.*
- ¹¹ *Bangladesh District Gazetteers*, Pabna, 1978, Dhaka, page-148.
- ¹² Nurul Islam Khan (Editor), *Bangladesh District Gazetteers*, Pabna, Dhaka: 1990, page 107.
- ¹³ Interview: F. R. Sarker, Age: 65, Place: Dhaka, Time: 4-6 pm, Date: 15-07-2014.
- ¹⁴ Many of the textile weaving loom.
- ¹⁵ Interview: Mehedi Khan Zilan, Age: 27, Place: Enayetpur, Time: 12-1 pm, Date: 18-09-2014.
- ¹⁶ Interview: Anam Shekh, Age: 50, Place: Enayetpur, Time: 5-6 pm, Date: 09-08-2014.
- ¹⁷ Interview: Mehedi Khan Zilan, Age: 27, Place: Enayetpur, Time: 3-4 pm, Date: 19-09-2014.
- ¹⁸ Interview: Mehedi Khan Zilan, Age: 27, Place: Enayetpur, Time: 3-4 pm, Date: 19-09-2014.
- ¹⁹ District Statistics 2011, Sirajgonj District, Published by Bangladesh bureau of Statistics, December 2013
- ²⁰ "Then and now of weaving and weavers", North Bengal TimesBD, Online Edition, Published on: Monday, January 6, 2014.
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- ²² Interview: Anam Shekh, Age: 50, Place: Enayetpur, Time: 3-5 pm, Date: 10-08-2014.