CHAPTER 4

WEAVING INDUSTRY IN THE FIELD AREA

4.1 The Issues Under Study

The division of labour, the stage of technology, skill content in labour process, effect of skill and technology on conception and execution, organisation of production, role of informal credit and *mahajan* (the supplier of credit in the informal credit market), marketing channels for distribution of raw material and finished products—are the issues which are necessary to understand the labour process and the dynamics of capital formation. We discuss these issues in this chapter and attempt to outline the mode of production in the textile sector of the field area.

There are some macro studies that discuss the role of informal credit in the textile sector. The problems of distribution channels for the yarn and the marketing channels for the finished products have also been studied earlier. The role of family labour in petty handloom and the features of the wage labour system in the handloom sector have also been discussed. For example, there is a report of the Fact Finding Committee on Handloom and Mills — a report prepared as early as 1940 under the patronage of the then colonial government. The report was published in 1942. It contains a rich set of information on the role of the merchants in the yarn and cloth market and the role of the usury capital in the credit market of Indian textiles. The study highlights decline of the independent weavers and the emerging power of *Mahajan* and *Karkhanadar* in the handloom sector.¹

In 1954, the Programme Evaluation Organisation of the Planning Commission studied the structure of production pertaining to the traditional village handicraft and cottage industries. In this study the plight of the handloom weavers was also included. The distribution channel of the produce and the role of traditional moneylenders had also been discussed in this study. An important finding of the study was that the hold of merchant capital did not appear to be as powerful in the handloom sector as it was reported in 1942 study. The report of the Programme Evaluation Organisation, however, indicated that usury had a firm foothold in the rural economy including the handloom sector.²

¹ For detailed discussions, see Report of The Fact Finding Committee (Handloom and Mills), Delhi, 1942, Chapter IV, V, VII.
There are also regional studies on the economic condition of the weavers. For example, the Bureau of Economics & Statistics of the Government of Maharashtra had undertaken, as a part of a series of surveys on various industries in the non-factory sector of Maharashtra, a study on the weaving industry in Maharashtra in mid-fifties. One important observation of this study was that the proportion of household workers had been declining significantly in the powerloom sector and the family labour was still prevalent in the handloom sector.

In West Bengal also, there had been official studies on the small scale industry which included the handloom sector. One important finding of the survey, taken from a sample of 1,99,701 establishments of 20 industries which included the cotton textiles, was that the proportion of family labour to total labour was very high in this sector. There are also some others studies including some micro studies on the handloom sector in West Bengal. However, to the best of our knowledge, there is no published report on the labour process of the handloom weaving sector in West Bengal. In order to study the features of the labour process it is therefore necessary that one takes up a field survey on the labour process of this sector. Such a study alone can extend the Braverman theme in the context of a transitional economy of the Third World. This rationalises the field survey that collects information from primary sources with respect to the labour process in the handloom sector. The present work takes up this approach with the handloom sector in Nabadwip and Santipur region as its point of reference.

Given this background, we now describe, after a brief discussion on methodology, the results of the field survey that we have taken up.

4.2 The Methodology of Survey

For the survey, non-probability sampling method has been followed. Data have been collected through structured questionnaire from 170 weavers. After proper scrutiny, 4 schedules were dropped because of incompleteness of information. There were thus 166 weavers, of which 100 were loom-less weavers, 46 were weavers with one loom only (one-loom weavers or OLWs) and 20 multi-loom weavers having more than one loom (multi-loom weavers or MLWs). The Sample size is small because it is a type study, we wanted to study the labour process and production process by closely observing a select group of

5. At the time of processing the data we have rejected 4 filled-up questionnaire of the one-loom weavers due to insufficiency in information. Hence we have considered the data related to 46 OLWs in place of 50 OLWs and as such the total number of respondents reduced from 170 to 166.
units in the handloom sector. Applying the concept of Convenience Sampling, weavers were selected from Nabadwip, Swarupganj, Santipur and Fulia of Nadia district and from Samudragarh and Purbasthali areas of Barddhaman district. In selecting the individual respondents we followed the Snowball Sampling Method in which some initial respondents were selected by applying individual judgement and additional respondents were then obtained from referrals or by other information provided by the initial respondents. The purpose of such sampling was to capture the various characteristics that are existing in the field area. The survey continued until the information became repetitive.

Supplementary information had also been collected from the officials of the Handloom Office and hat, and also from the yarn and cloth merchants through unstructured questionnaire. The initial study was conducted in 1993-94. The findings were also supplemented with the information gathered from the field survey in 1994-95. We submit that the information should not be considered as dated because the labour process and the accumulation process is not expected to change radically within a span of a few years.

4.3 The Findings of the Survey

4.3.1 An Overview

In the field area, among the weavers that we met, there are traditional weavers of the district. They are the caste-based weavers, locally called 'Tanti' and 'Jogi' who perform weaving as a part of traditionally fixed social division of labour. However, a sizeable section of respondents were settlers who migrated from East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) and settled at Santipur, Fulia, Nabadwip and also at Samudragarh and Dhatrigram areas of Barddhaman district. The migration started from nineteen forties and continued upto sixties. Most of these immigrants are Debnath and Basak families. They came mainly from Pabna, Dhaka and Tangail districts of Bangladesh. They are skilled weavers. They weave Jamdani, Tangail and silk sarees which need specialised skill. These families possess this

6. It was expected that the enhancement of the sample size could hardly add to the information related to labour process and capital accumulation in the sector because the phenomena under observation are typespecific. A sample that may represent the type would be sufficient for capturing the features. We went on studying the cases until we found that the information had been repetitive in nature and a further enhancement of a sample size was adding very little to the already acquired set of information.
8. Ibid.
9. Such a phenomenon has also been noted in the Nadia District Gazetteer. We have mentioned this in subsection 3.3.2 of Chapter 3 of the present work, pp. 60-61.
skill. There are some respondent families who weave such a special variety of cloth generation after generation and skill is handed down through the family line, i.e., from father to son and then from son to grandson. The senior members of most Basak families give training to their junior family members. Sometimes, the outsiders are also inducted as trainees. Training involves a cost. In case of an outsider, whether the cost is to be paid for training depends on the extent of intimacy in the relation. It appears that some sort of a master-journeyman relation exists in this type of training. The weaving of Jamdani or Tangail saree requires a special skill which is traditionally preserved by the Basak families. Usually they do not encourage outsiders to get a training in this skill. Family based social division of labour is thus the basis of production of Jamdani or Tangail saree. The outsiders usually come from the same caste and the induction is done through a master-journeyman relation.

Apart from weaving communities, people belonging to other communities, such as, farmer, carpenter, fisherman, washerman, potter, blacksmith, confectioner, etc. are also being engaged in weaving either in part time or in full time employment. They are generally engaged in the weaving of ordinary saree, lungi or gamcha where less skill is required compared to the weaving of Jamdani, Tangail or Silk saree. This implies that caste-based social division of labour is declining. In a labour surplus economy like India, the power of absorption of labour force is declining fast in agriculture. Consequently, the search for an alternative source of income is increasing fast. Weaving is an area in which the possibility of absorption of part of labour exists. Hence the traditional caste-based division of labour is being replaced by absorbing labour from other communities in the weaving sector, and a new alignment of social forces in the economy is taking place. This is a feature of the transitional economy.

The third interesting feature in the production process of the handloom weaving is that part-time job involving female and child labour exists in a significant proportion in this sector. For example, the thread rolling in bobbins and in pirns through charkha which is a part of the production process is usually shared by the female and the children (because this does not involve much skill). For the female members particularly this is an additional burden of unpaid job because they are to do this along with the regular domestic work.

10. It seems that there are some castes who are traditionally specialised in weaving. A statement of the Textile Enquiry Committee (TEC) would be relevant in this regard: A social structure came to be built up, whereby handloom weaving was pursued by particular castes and there was a growth of caste guilds. The Padmasalis of Hyderabad, who have spread out into neighbouring Maharashtra (specially Sholapur) and into Andhra, the Devangas of Mysore and other areas, the (Muslim) Julahas of Uttar Pradesh, who have been important founders of weaving communities in places as far afield as Mau (Azamgarh), Banaras, Malegaon and Bhiwandi, are examples of the growth of caste guilds in the pursuit of handloom weaving as profession (TEC Report, 1954, Vol. 1: 10).

11. See Chapter 5, section 5.2.5. of the present work for detailed discussion, pp. 97-99.
Some of the weavers inherited loom/looms from their ancestors. For the new comers, the initial source of finance is chiefly personal assets, in the form of land or ornaments (non-financial assets) or accumulated cash resources (financial assets). Assets are transferred to weaving industry because the expected yield is higher there. Other sources of finance are friends & relatives, mahajan and institutional loan like SESRU (Self Employment Scheme for Rural Unemployed) and co-operative.

Since petty production involves less capital, proprietorship is the form of organisation in most cases. In our sample of 20 MLWs, 13 respondents are sole owners. It has also been found from the sample of 100 loom-less weavers that 93 per cent of them works in the establishments in which the form of ownership is sole proprietorship.

4.3.2. Technology and Production process

Technology is simple in this industry and as such division of labour is also simple. Hence handicraft is the basis in manufacture. Both household and non-household production are organised in the small scale. There are many tiny units in this sector. The total work of weaving can be divided into ten operations. These are: (i) Dyeing the yams, (ii) Sizing the yams, (iii) Rolling the threads in Pirms through Charkha, (iv) Rolling the threads in Bobbins through Charkha, (v) Warping in Drum and Beam rolling (Tana or Feti), (vi) Denting and Drafting (Shana, Bâ), (vii) Design drawing, (viii) Weaving, (ix) Calendering, (x) Carrying the finished products to the market. The following figure describes the interrelation among these operations (network).

Figure 1: The Operations Involved

12. Mahajan is one who binds a small weaver with a contract or obligation to sell his product to the mahajan by supplying input (yarn). Often a mahajan does not supply the input but enters into a forward contract to buy the product (often at a reduced rate). A mahajan may also be a person who finances the working capital at an usurious rate of interest.
The operation is as follows: At first the dyeing of yarns is performed. Then the yarns are sized. The sized threads are then rolled in pirns and in bobbins through charkha. These two operations are done simultaneously. The bobbins are then fitted to drum and the threads of the bobbins are rolled in the beam by rolling the drum. This process is known as warping in drum or drumming & beam rolling. In this way a warp (locally known as tana or feti) is prepared. Then the denting and drafting is done. Through this process all the threads of the warp are taken up in a reed, taking two threads in each cell of the reed by a drawing hook. The design drawing may be performed at the very beginning, i.e., before dyeing, or it may be performed at any stage during the time between dyeing and denting & drafting or between the dyeing and threads rolling in pirns. After that, the beam is fitted in the loom (the core instrument of labour) and the pirn is set into the shuttle-box. The shuttle-box is then fitted in the loom and then the weaving starts. After the completion of weaving, the finished product is calendered by a compressure machine or manually, as the case may be. Finally, the finished products are carried out to the market.

Each process requires involvement of labour power separately. The entire process or a part of the total process may be organised under a single weaver or each process may be organised under different individuals. The person doing the weaving is known as the weaving worker. A weaving worker has no loom. That is why he is also known as loomless weaver. Generally dyeing is not done by the weavers. They purchase coloured yarns from the market. The design drawing in most cases, is done by the Design Master who has little knowledge of weaving. The small weavers own no drum. That is why they do not perform the drumming, i.e., the warping in drum and beam rolling and, give order to outsider (known as Drummer) for this job. In our sample, no OLW was found to own the drum. At present some traders are involved in printing of handloom cloth. In such cases, calendering is not done and the cloths after being woven in the loom, are sold or carried out to the mahajan, as the case may be.

4.3.3. Systems of Production

The weavers produce independently (independent of mahajan) or work under mahajan. Mahajan organises production in either of the three ways according to his convenience. These are—Dadan System (DS); Forward Contract System (FCS) and Job on Wage-basis popularly known as Tana Ana System (TAS) in the locality. Table 4.1 shows the distribution of weavers under different categories in our field study.

4.3.3.1. Independent Production System (IPS)

The independent producer is independent of the mahajan who exercises control over the pro-
ducer either through Dadan System or through the Forward Contract System or through the Tana Ana System. Under this system the weaver buys yarn directly from the market, produces with or without the help of the wage labour and sells the product to the market independently. The weaver under Independent Production System would be either a single loom owner or a multi-loom owner. But the master controls over the production process and the labour process. From Table 4.1, we find that the large majority (70 per cent) of the MLWS were independent producers. In case of OLWs the percentage of independent producers is rather poor (37 per cent). While no estimation can statistically be performed out of our sample which is non-random, the description :n Table 4.1 highlights a very important point that one experienced in the field area. The OLW who usually organises the production with the help of the family labour and himself sits on the loom normally is a petty producer. And this petty producer is more vulnerable to the attack of the mahajan. The mahajan may also try to control the multi-loom weavers by supplying dadni yarn or purchasing cloth through the forward contract, but the incidence of such a phenomenon is rather low. This is the expected outcome given that the petty producers operate on a poor asset-base.

Table 4.1 : Distribution of Weavers Under Different Types of Production

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Systems</th>
<th>IPS</th>
<th>DS</th>
<th>FCS</th>
<th>TAS</th>
<th>DS &amp; IPS</th>
<th>DS &amp; FCS</th>
<th>IPS &amp; TAS</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Multi-loom weaver</td>
<td>14*</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One-loom weaver</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source : Field Survey 1993-94

* Two respondents are from co-operative.

4.3.3.2. Production Under Mahajan

**Dadan System**

Under DS, a master-weaver (mahajan in this case) supplies yarn to the small weaver on the condition that all the products produced by the small weaver shall have to be supplied to the master-weaver. In some cases, cash amount is also provided by the mahajan to the weaver in addition to yarn. Cash is supplied for running the various operations of weaving, such as, sizing the yarns, rolling threads, warping, denting & drafting, etc, and also for the
subsistence of the dadan taker. The price at which the products are supplied to the mahajans may be termed as 'dadan price' which is below the ruling market price. Through this system an weaver with dadan becomes economically tied with the mahajan. When an weaver faces continuous working capital problem and marketing problem, he is forced to take dadan from the mahajan. Accounting is done after six to twelve months' transaction is completed between the mahajan and the small weaver after completing a tana. Ordinarily the mahajan charges the yarn price at 'cost-plus' to be given by the dadan-taker and fixes the dadan price for him.

The dadan price depends on the market price. Under the normal market situation, the dadan price is lower than the market price because in fixing dadan price, mahajan plays a dominating role. If the value of the products at dadan price exceeds the value of yarn plus cash amount (if any), taken as loan from the mahajan to meet the working capital requirement, the excess is receivable from the mahajan, and is finally paid by the mahajan to the dadan-taker. The situation usually is otherwise. The small weaver usually has a negative balance with the mahajan. Over time, therefore, the dadan-taker becomes indebted to the mahajan who gains in two ways, firstly, by charging excess yarn price (difference between transfer price and cost price) and secondly, from excess of market price over dadan price.

**Forward Contract System**

Under FCS, a cloth merchant or a big weaver and a small weaver makes a contract so that the merchant or big weaver would purchase the entire output of the small weaver throughout the year at a fixed price. The forward contract price is ordinarily below the market price. Since the small weaver ensures his market through FCS, he is compelled to accept a forward contract price which is below the ruling market price. Of course, the forward contract price is subject to revision when the market price becomes abnormally high or low. Even there, the mahajan usually gains from this contract. When the market price is abnormally low, he compels the producer to accept a price which is lower than the forward contract price, thus flouting the contract that he would bear the consequence of market uncertainty. When the market price is abnormally high, the producer may get a share of the high price — but this is very small compared to what the mahajan gets out of the buoyancy in the market. In sum, the market system is under-developed and the direct producer suffers more due to market failure.

**Tana Ana System**

*Tana Ana* means to bring the warp. *Tana Ana System* means to bring the *tana* from
mahajan. Under this system, mahajan provides 'tana' to a weaver for weaving. A tana is prepared with the operation of rolling the threads in bobbins, the bobbins are then fitted to drum. The threads of the bobbins are rolled in the beam by rolling the drum. In this way a warp or tana is prepared. Sometimes denting and drafting is also done by the mahajan in the preparation of a tana. This production system is mostly found in case of OLWs. The system is more or less same as the putting-out system that was developed in the early phase of industrial capitalism in the Western Europe. Under TAS, the weaver, after completing the weaving, sends the finished products to his mahajan and receives money from him. The money includes wages, loom rent and maintenance cost (if it is borne by the weaver) of the loom. The system of production can be presented in the following way:

Figure 2: Tana Ana System

4.3.3.3. Summary

The system of production in the field area is not one that can be described in terms of a simplified production system in which the market forces do not play a dominant role. The market for input (particularly that of yarn) as well as that of finished product plays a very important role in shaping the system of production in the field area. There are small producers who own the loom but do not have access to the yarn market because of the paucity of working capital. Again, there are small producers who cannot confront the volatility of the product market because of the poor capacity of maintaining a certain level of inventory which is necessary to absorb the market shocks. A mahajani system that plays intermediary role therefore develops as an institution in the field area. The mahajani system operates under the Dadan System or the Forward Contract System or under Tana Ana System. While under the Dadan System or the Forward Contract System, the mahajan does not exercise control over the production system per se, under the TAS the mahajan exercises partial control over the production system by exercising control over the tana.
i.e., the base on which the weaver performs the weaving.

There are, however, the independent producers who do not work under the control of the *mahajan*. In the field area, out of 20 MLWs surveyed, there had been 14 such producers. In case of OLWs on the other hand, the tied relation under the *mahajani* system seems to be prevalent. Thus out of 46 OLWs the number of IPS had been only 17. Of course, there are some producers both in the category of OLW and MLW who produce independently or work under *mahajan* alternatively (Table 4.1).

### 4.3.4. Channels of Distribution of Raw Materials (Yarn)

The most important raw material which controls lifeline in the production of weaving is the yarn. As discussed in Chapter 2, the yarn policy of the Government of India has a crucial role in shaping the fate of the weavers in the handloom sector. The field survey was taken up in a period when the Government of India, as a part of the new economic policy, had been introducing the new yarn price policy that had been reducing the role of a government agency in the distribution of yarn through a regulated market.

In the field area, it was observed that the supply of yarn is controlled by the big merchants, big weavers, and the government regulated agencies. The weavers that we surveyed usually received yarn either from *mahajan* or from yarn merchants. The weavers outside the co-operative did not receive yarn directly from the government regulated agencies. The yarn distribution network in this district may be presented in the following way:

![Yarn Distribution Network](image)

13. See Chapter 2 of the present text, section 2.3, 2.4.
The spinning mills have their selling agents in different cities and towns. The wholesalers collect yarn from the agents. In West Bengal, yarn is mainly imported from Orrisa, Maharashtra and Gujarat. The yarn merchants and the master-weavers in the district purchase yarn from the wholesalers at Calcutta. The yarn merchants of the district are mainly located at Nabadwip.

The small weavers generally purchase yarn in small quantities in cash from the yarn merchants or take yarn on dadan from master-weavers. It has been found also that a weaver purchases yarn from the merchant against rukka\textsuperscript{14} which he obtains from his mahajan and to whom he would supply the cloths after weaving. On the due date, the yarn merchant encashes the rukka from that mahajan who has issued that rukka. A big weaver generally purchases yarn on credit. Generally a big weaver and an yarn merchant make an oral contract to make transaction of certain quantity of yarn in a year. In this case payment is made at an agreed price through the instalments. The final settlement of accounts is done at the end of the year (i.e., at Chaitra – last month in Bengali calendar).

The co-operatives (of both primary weavers and loom-less weavers) procure their yarn from the local market and government agencies like Tantuja. Tantuja and such other agencies purchase yarn from the mills (preference is given to co-operative spinning mill) directly. They sell yarn to co-operatives at subsidised rate, i.e., at below the printed or purchase price. But the yarn which the co-operatives get at subsidised rate is very little compared to their total requirements. So they meet the major part of their requirement from the open market. Sometimes many loom-less weaver's co-operatives sell the yarn which they obtain at subsidised rate to the market at higher prices in stead of producing cloths. These mulpractices are encouraged by the high officials of the co-operatives having connections with the political party and officers of the government agencies. As a result, yarn is not consumed in co-operatives for production, rather it is used for unfair trading business.

4.3.5. Marketing Channels

For the weavers working in the co-operative, the marketing problem is taken care of by the apex body of primary co-operatives. As we pointed out in Chapter 3, the sway of the co-operatives is rather weak in the district. The weavers usually produce the handloom

\textsuperscript{14} Rukka is a local instrument used for credit transaction. It can be discounted with the local moneylender. The rate of interest for discounting is very high. The Rukka is more or less akin to Bill of Exchange usually seen in the formal business world.
products either as independent producers or as producers under the control of the mahajan. The independent producers sell the products usually in the local market. There exists big market at Nabadwip Tantkapar Hat or Chakdaha Rail Bazar Hat where the independent producers bring their products, usually once in a week for direct sale. There are intermediaries in the market and also some wholesellers who purchase the handloom products directly from the independent producers. The mode of transaction is usually cash which the independent producers need for purchasing yarn from the market and also for having his own maintenance. This is true particularly for the petty producers. The multi-loom producers also bring the products in the weekly markets. In the field survey, we also encountered some multi-loom owners who sell their products directly to retailers either in local market or even to distant places like Calcutta.15

The small weavers face marketing problems frequently and are forced to make distress sale. It also happens that a weaver takes loan by mortgaging their produce with the money-lender, sometimes with yarn or cloth merchant at a very high rate of interest (usually 4 per cent per month in the field area) for continuing further production and meeting the household consumption. They pay the usurious interest for the loan and get a lower price for the product. Thus they are doubly exploited. For the weavers who organise production under the control of mahajan sell their produce to their respective mahajans either through dadan or through forward contract.16 What they get in return is usually the wage equivalence.

As pointed out earlier, an informal system of credit sales locally known as rukka system is in existence in the field area. The petty producers are exploited also through this system.

4.3.6. Loom-less Weavers

Employment of family labour as well as outside labour in the production process is the feature of this industry. Wages for outside labourers are paid on the basis of piece rate system. There are different piece rates for different operations. For example, sizing the yarns, rolling the threads in bobbins and in pirns, warping in drum and beam rolling, denting & drafting, weaving – each job has a different piece rate.

Lungi, gamcha and most ordinary saree are generally standardised products to a great extent. That is why more or less standard piece rates are there for weaving these products.

15. See case studies in Chapter 6 of the present work, section 6.3.2.
16. Strictly speaking under tana ana system, the direct producer is not entitled to sell the product. He is to hand over the product to mahajan and receive compensation for his work.
The rates are generally revised and increased after every one or two years (generally 10% increase over the last year). In case of saree, wage rate varies with the variation in design and quality of yarn. In case of lungi and gamcha wages depend on the number of shuttles. Wages also depend on the personal relation between owner and worker. During the time of survey it has been found that wages for lungi per than (4 pieces = 1 than) varies between Rs. 22/- and Rs. 25/- and, for gamcha between Rs. 4/- and Rs. 10/- per than. In very few cases, wage for gamcha is Rs. 12/- per than. Gamcha, generally, can be weaved 10-12 pieces per day. According to this calculation a weaving worker weaving gamcha can earn Rs. 10/- to Rs. 30/- per day at 1993-94 prices. Lungi can be weaved on an average 5-6 pieces per day and as such a lungi worker's daily earnings may be Rs. 25/- to Rs. 30/-. In case of silk saree different wage rates are existing. At the time of survey, the rates prevail in the field area had been ranging from Rs. 50/- to Rs. 500/- per piece. In case of swiss-cotton, polyester, tangail and santipuri saree, wages vary from Rs. 30/- to Rs. 210/- depending upon the design. The difference in wage rate is skill-driven. The variation is high because there exists variation in skill which is reflected in the wide variations in product price.

In the field area, a high percentage of the workers work more than eight hours. It appears that they do work 12-14 hours in a day. Thus, 43 per cent of the loom-less weavers in our sample work more than 8 hours. These working hours are exclusive of time needed for tiffin, meal, rest for fatigue, etc. The workers work for a longer hours to produce more pieces and thereby to earn more wages. One may note that this enables the individual owners to raise more easily the normal degree of intensity of labour. In the field area, there does not exist the time rate system.

Employment in weaving is made on the basis of personal relation between the owner and the person willing to work. Job is permanent to the extent the owner provides the tana to the loom-less weaver. The weaving workers face monetary problem very frequently. They need money generally for three reasons, namely, (i) illness of any family member or himself or herself; (ii) the large time gap between finishing a warping and starting the new one; and (iii) in rainy season when weaving is hampered due to rainfall and high moisture in the weather. In order to meet these problems the weaving worker needs loan or advance. To what extent he would get such a loan depends on personal relation between the loom owner and the weaving worker, because the owners usually offer such loan without any interest and collateral security. In case of MLWs in our sample, 16 out of 20 respondents reported to provide advances to the workers without interest. The advance is repaid through
Instalments out of wages. It seems that the job of a worker is enough for security because there is low mobility of the worker—it is not possible for a worker to leave the job and to obtain another job. It seems that the tied relation between the weaver and the weaving worker that exists in this sector explains this credit without security at a zero rate of interest with an (oral) forward contract for labour.

Unionisation of workers has not yet developed widely in this sector. In Nabadwip area and in Purbasthali near Nabadwip—a border area of Nadia and Barddhaman district, lungi workers and most ordinary saree workers have formed union. Union has not been formed in case of silk saree with design, and non-silk-fine yarn made saree with design. It is to be noted that union has been formed in case of products where there exists little scope for the skill specific variation in wages. In the work in which the individual skill matters, the unionisation has not taken place as yet.

4.3.7. Living Condition of the Weavers

The petty producers in weaving industry fail to get a decent living. The higher yarn prices, marketing problem for the finished products and hence the exploitation of mahajans are responsible for miserable condition of the weavers. One may get an idea on the condition of the weavers from the following tables.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weavers</th>
<th>Pucca including walls &amp; roof</th>
<th>Kucha with only pucca walls</th>
<th>Kucha with bamboo walls</th>
<th>Kucha with mud walls</th>
<th>Total Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Multi-loom Weavers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 to 4 looms</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 to 10 looms</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; 10 looms</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One-Loom Weavers</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loom-less Weavers</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>46+</td>
<td>79++</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>164*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field Survey, 1993-94

* Excluding two co-operatives
  +8 in rented house, of which 2 are one-loom weavers and 6 are loom-less weavers.
  ++3 in rented house, of which one is one-loom weaver and the other 2 are loom-less weavers.
Table 4.3: Household Durables of the weavers
(No. & Percentage of weavers who have the following)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weavers</th>
<th>Radio</th>
<th>Cycle</th>
<th>Watch</th>
<th>TV</th>
<th>Electricity</th>
<th>Total Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Multi-loom Weavers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 to 4 Looms</td>
<td>4(100)</td>
<td>3(75)</td>
<td>4(100)</td>
<td>1(25)</td>
<td>2(50)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 to 10 Looms</td>
<td>7(87.5)</td>
<td>8(100)</td>
<td>7(87.5)</td>
<td>4(50)</td>
<td>5(62.5)</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; 10 Looms</td>
<td>6(100)</td>
<td>6(100)</td>
<td>6(100)</td>
<td>6(100)</td>
<td>6(100)</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One-loom Weavers</td>
<td>25(54.3)</td>
<td>25(54.3)</td>
<td>25(54.3)</td>
<td>1(2.2)</td>
<td>4(8.7)</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loom-less Weavers</td>
<td>38(38)</td>
<td>36(36)</td>
<td>60(60)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4(4)</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>164*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Excluding two co-operatives.

From Table 4.2 it appears that no one-loom weaver in the sample lives in *pucca* house. The percentage of loom-less weavers who live in *pucca house* is only 6. It was gathered from field survey that out of the 6 loom-less weavers who live in *pucca house*, 4 belong to the joint families who have other income. And in case of other 2 respondents, weaving is a supplementary source, not the major source of income. In case of multi-loom weavers, 10 out of 18 respondents, i.e., about 56 per cent of the respondents live in *pucca* house. All the weavers having more than 10 looms in the sample live in *pucca* house. The Table, however, reveals that while most of the loom-less weavers and small weavers (i.e., OLWs and MLWs with 2 to 4 looms) live in *kucha* house, the majority of big and medium weavers\(^\text{17}\) live in *pucca* house.

According to Table 4.3, the consumption of electricity among the one-loom weavers and loom-less weavers is very little. The percentage of one-loom weavers who owns TV is very negligible (2.2 per cent only). No loom-less weavers in the sample possess the TV. 75 per cent or more of the multi-loom weavers possesses radio, cycle and watch, the percentage is 54 in case of one-loom weavers. But the percentage of loom-less weavers who own radio and cycle is very lower (38 per cent and 36 per cent) than the OLWs' and MLWs'. All the weavers owning more than 10 looms in the sample possess all the household durables, and one of them possesses also refrigerator and motor cycle. It is, however, not reported in the table. Table 4.3 indicates that the standard of living of the weavers in the category of weavers with 2 to 4 looms in terms of entitlement to valuable household durables (TV. Cycle) and electricity is poor; the condition is poorer in case of loom-less weavers and one-

\(^\text{17}\) For classification of weavers, see Chapter 6 of the present text, section 6.1.
loom weavers. The big (more than 10 looms) and medium weavers (5 to 10 looms) live in a better condition.

4.4. The Mode of Production in the Handloom Weaving

The handloom sector in the field area is market oriented. The handloom products are sold in the market. As we pointed out earlier, the total weekly transaction at different hats of Nadia district, as reported in a publication of the Directorate of Handlooms & Textiles of the West Bengal Government, is estimated to be more than 3 crores.18 The product market has developed in a big way. But then, in spite of this, the production in the weaving industry does not seem to be fully capitalistic in nature.

The *sine qua non* of capitalism is the generalised commodity production, i.e., commodity production at the highest stage in which along with the product of labour, the labour power also becomes commodity through the buying and selling of labour power19 and recycling of capital for extended reproduction.

Even if the product has assumed the form of commodity and wage labour exists in the field area, it seems that capitalism is yet to have it sway in the economy of the handloom sector in Nadia. Thus in the product market there exist *mahajani* and *dadni* system that rule over the economy of the small weavers. Because of the poor asset-base, as observed in this chapter, many small weavers depend on *dadni* yarn provided by the master-weavers. For the sale of finished products they go through the *dadan* system under master-weaver and forward contract system under cloth merchant. In the credit market, there exist informal system of credit transactions which take place through the *rukka* system. The local money-lenders play a significant role in financing the working capital of the weavers particularly of the small weavers. The credit market is usurious in form. The failure of co-operatives has also strengthened the hands of the *mahajans* (i.e., master-weaver, cloth merchant and moneylender). The intervention of *mahajans* in the product market and credit market acts as hindrance to the capitalist development20 because it thwarts the extended reproduction in the system of production.

Secondly, in the weaving sector, the labour market also remains underdeveloped. In case of the petty producers, the involvement of the outside labour is virtually absent. The labour process in petty production is one in which the direct producer and the other members of

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18. See Chapter 3 of the present text, section 3.7, p. 64.
20. For a discussion on the role of merchants and usurers in the transition from pre-capitalism to capitalism, see Marx, K. (1986), Vol. III, Chapter XX and XXXVI.
the family usually perform the entire job. Labour market has no role to play here. It has the resemblance with the classical economy of the artisan, except for the fact that the product is completely a market phenomenon. In case of the multi-loom, the owner employs outside labour and, in case of single loom, the producer-owner, producing under Tana Ana System, performs the weaving against wage labour. But in both cases, the labour is not free in the classical double sense\textsuperscript{21} of the term so much so that the labour power does not become commodity as it happens in case of a fullfledged capitalist enterprise. In the multi-loom units where wage labour is employed in production there exists in most cases a tied relation between the workers and owner. In case of a special kind of skill is involved, even the induction of the trainees is selective. Market for labour, if it exists at all, is thus "unfree".

As we discussed in section 4.3.6. of this Chapter, for the loom-less weavers there exists a labour market and the wage labour system has developed there to a certain degree. But then typical to an underdeveloped labour market, piece rate dominates over the time rate and therefore the degree of intensity of labour is very high. Again the wage earners get involved in a personal relation with the loom owners through the inter-linkage between the credit and labour relation. This impedes the development of wage labour in the true sense of the term—in the sense of labour power being doubly free.

The situation, however, is not one of pre-capitalism, pure and simple. As we have observed, the product market has developed to a great extent. The commodity relation exists also under dadan and mahajani system. Again with respect to labour, there exists commodity relation to the extent there exists a market wage rate and to the extent the unionisation of wage workers has taken place in some pockets of the field area.

We submit that the situation is one of a transitional type in which the capitalist mode of production is developing in the handloom sector but there exists a powerful pre-capitalist bondage both in the condition of labour and in the condition of production in the weaving sector.

In sum, the product market, the credit market as well as the labour market are not developed properly. Hence the elements of pre-capitalism and the elements of capitalism both co-exist in the handloom sector in the field area. This implies that the sector is in a transitional situation.

\textsuperscript{21} This happens under the generalised condition of commodity production. For explanation, see in Lenin, (1977), Karl Marx.
In the next two chapters we shall discuss the features of the transitional situation through the study of labour process and the process of capital formation in the handloom sector of Nadia district — the theme of the present dissertation.

References

Books


Official Publications


