Handloom industry in India is a time honoured cottage industry, providing employment directly or indirectly to about ten million people. The industry has vast inherent potentialities and has had a glorious past. It is essentially a household industry and all members of the family work together for their livelihood. The industry also contributes significant amount to the foreign exchange earning of our country.

In Orissa and particularly in western Orissa, handloom is the most important household industry. Weaving population constitute the largest section of rural labour force, next only to agriculture. Fabrics produced by weavers of this region have been enjoying a high reputation for superior craftsmanship.

Despite, such a traditional background, it is felt that, the life style and economic standard of weavers have not improved in any significant way. The feeling assumes further importance in recent times, since this has been directed towards the weavers of institutionalised sector (co-operative sector) of handloom industry in western Orissa. It is expected that, as weavers under co-operative fold get government patronage in the form of different infrastructural assistance, they should be better-off economically and socially than weavers working independently.
Hence, in the above context the study proposes to find out the real impact of handloom co-operatives on the social and economic development of weavers in western Orissa. The study is based on first-hand data collected through survey method. Though the primary objective of the study is to know about the impact of handloom co-operatives on weavers in western Orissa, for better understanding of the problem the scope of the study has been broadened.

The first chapter being introduction and methodology, the second chapter deals with economic history of the handloom industry in the national perspective. It also scrutinises characteristics of handloom industry and related problems. The third chapter is devoted to the study of handloom industry in Orissa, with special reference to western Orissa. It also includes a brief sketch of tie and dye culture of weavers in the region and various problems they encounter today. Chapter IV presents working of primary handloom co-operatives in western Orissa, particularly relating to supply of yarn and marketing the products of member weavers. Chapter V evaluates economic development of member weavers compared to non-member weavers on the basis of different economic development factors. Chapter VI analyses social development of member weavers compared to non-member weavers on the basis of a number of social development factors. The seventh chapter brings together important findings of the study.
It is hoped that the study will throw adequate light on the various problems of the industry and its impact on the social and economic upliftment of the weaving class in general in the context of India's rural development.

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