



Bhagalpur Textile Industry: An Industrial Heartland for Fabric Production in Bihar

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Abstract:

Bhagalpur preeminently renowned as the Silk City has been the production nexus of fabrics in Bihar for centuries. The city has faced several ups and downs reflecting broader economic, technological, and social changes. After contributing to the local economy, the Bhagalpur silk products are exported in the international markets. This paper has a comprehensive review of the Bhagalpur textile industry covering its historical background, structure of the industry, and its several challenges.

Keywords: Textile cluster, Silk Centre, Geographical Tag, Harmonized System of Coding.

Introduction:

Also known as the kingdom of Anga, Bhagalpur goes back to the Vedic period and can be found in the Ramayana and Mahabharata. Out of all the four categories of silk, Tussar silk has been venerable in the district and holds a prominent position in the history of the silk industry of India. So far, Bhagalpur is the hub of weavers and their allies. The total trade of Bhagalpur is approximately 100 crores per annum comprising both domestic and export markets equally (Bihar, 2024). It has been the nexus of the production of fabric adjoining all the pre-weaving, weaving, and post-weaving activities employing thousands of households. The weavers of Bhagalpur who earned a deferential “Geographical Tag” due to their unique art of the weaving profession have lost their status socially. Disparate challenges have led them to be stuck in a rut, failing to access societal resources. The inevitable challenges in the industry due to the unorganized nature have left the weaker section of society in

apprehension. The socio-economic conditions of the workers in textile manufacturing units have made the mass contributors desirous of reforms. According to the Ministry of Textiles, Bhagalpur, Gaya, and Banka are some of the well-known districts in Bihar considered textile clusters. But Bhagalpur, the city with a rich culturally vibrant heritage in fabric production, is pompously known as the “Silk City of Bihar”. It has been the production nexus and an epicenter of fabric production in Bihar. The vivacious weavers of the city have hard-earned a Geographical Indication tag for “Bhagalpur Silk Fabrics and Sarees” in 2013 for their artistic and unique style of weaving. Bhagalpur Silk Handloom is recognized by the India Post via a stamp issued in 2018. Over the years, some specific centers developed and became a pattern of design and weaving. According to the Central Silk Board, Ministry of Textiles, Government of India the following is the list of some famous Silk Centers in India: -

Table with 3 columns: S. No., State, and Silk Centers. It lists 11 silk centers across various Indian states, with Bihar highlighted in green.

Source: - Central Silk Board, Ministry of Textiles, Government of India.

Review of Literature:

The two important domestic cottage industries during the 17th century constituted spinning and weaving. The artisans did the work by their hand with the help of Charkha and a wooden loom. With an estimated 7279 looms, the Bhagalpur district was famous for producing cotton carpets, tapes, tent ropes, chintz, and blankets in 1808. The weaving industry set up in Bhagalpur of Bihar and Dinajpur of West Bengal influenced a large market in England (Dipak, 2017).

In the 18th century Rangpur, Dinajpur, Purnia, and Bhagalpur became the prominent regions for producing mulberry silk. Though Bhagalpur fabric was famous, the trade in tasar diminished due to imported cloth. The introduction of machinery and its impact on the handloom sector was a great pity for handloom weavers since then (Nitya, 1903).

Bhagalpuri Silk reveals its emergence and is renowned for using tussar silk also known as peace silk but the city is losing its patina and the weavers are struggling for survival. Earlier the inrush of imported yarn since the 1990s and now the dominance and monopoly of few businessmen have distressed the textile industry of Bhagalpur (ANAMIKA, 2014).

Apart from Bhagalpur, Nawada district in Bihar is also prominent for weaving silk where the outer shades of most of the households are generally used for setting looms. Almost every member of the house participates in this ornate and lengthy process of weaving. The families involved in this profession are declining with the decline in quality and increase in competition.

The talk is about the cheaper powerloom products are becoming a serious threat to handloom weavers. For the weavers to fetch more compensation, heed is to be paid to new products and designs for the sustenance of good quality crafts. The artisans need to understand their needs and preferences to empower the handloom weavers. Thus, it is an imperative urge to comprehend the need and relation of both the craftsmen and consumers for the textile industry to flourish (Priyanka & Anjali, 2017).

In today's world, the prevalence of sustainability and zero-waste are the need of the hour. In the context of this subject (Mercan, 2023) In his study, he asserted that 100% of Bhagalpur Silk fabric provides cooling and comfort sessions.

In India, weavers came from both the Muslim and Hindu communities, and the generic term used for both communities in Bhagalpur was "jolaha". (Murari, 2017) accredited Bhagalpur as an important textile weaving center densely populated by weavers specialized in mixed-piece goods made of silk and cotton.

Supportive institutions in the Bhagalpur textile cluster:

- **Weavers Service Centre:** - Established in 1974, Weavers Service Center situated in the Bhagalpur district of Bihar aims to increase the primary wages of the handloom weavers along with the product and market development for its promotion. Numerous expos are organized at different places at various times to introduce new products and designs and find better and wider ways of marketing. The center is vital in facilitating the weavers, dyers, master weavers, and exporters in the technology field by channeling them into various marketing agencies. The
- **District Industries Centre-** The clothing and textile industries have thrived as a cottage industry for ages. To promote small village and cottage industries a central scheme as District Industries Centre has been established in various districts to provide all the necessary services to facilitate setting up MSMEs. DIC in Bhagalpur smooths the way for textile industry players in the district as nearly all the weavers in the location have their production setup in their households.
- **Central Silk Board-** Under the Ministry of Textiles, Government of India, the Central Silk Board operates for research and development, training and transfer of technology, seed management, and the marketing of silk products.
- **BSMTC (Basic Tasar Silkworm Seed Organisation) Bhagalpur** – The Central Silk Board has published a "disposal of the cocoon at BSMTC Bhagalpur" tender which belongs to the Silk Waste category.
- **Powerloom Service Centre-** In 2005, the Government of India established the power loom service centre in Bhagalpur which is situated in Nathnagar in the district's main town. The main motive is to develop the power loom industry of the cluster from training weavers to designing, testing, and other technical consultancies. Here the weavers are acquainted in case new upgradation in the technology of power loom and trained accordingly to gain proficiency in their job.
- **Bihar Institute of Silk and Textile-** The institute established in 1994 is a Co-education located in Nathnagar, Bhagalpur that offers 4 years of certification courses on Textile Technology and Silk. The institute is affiliated with Tilka Manjhi Bhagalpur University, a prestigious university known for its academic excellence. The approval of the All-India Council for Technical Education ensures quality education and maintains standards in technical education preparing students for real-world

challenges. The institute conducts workshops, lectures, and internships to provide the skills required for a successful career in the silk and textile industry.

- **Indian Silk Export Promotion Council-** Sponsored by the Government of India, as a company not for profit The Indian Silk Export Promotion Council has a membership of 1151 regular exporters of Silk goods with more than 2450 exporters registered with it (Ministry of Textiles, 2014-2024). As a member name of the “Silk Buying Centre” in Bhagalpur city, the

registered division deals in 4 different products which include Silk Linen Fabrics, Scarf, Stoles, and Sarees.

- **Product Categories:**
- Bhagalpur textile cluster is the most densely populated region in terms of interweaving threads, be it on handloom or powerloom which results in some varied and artistic fabric productions. Here are some of the remarkable fabric productions which are named as: -

S No.	Categories	Products
1	Saree	Synthetic Silk, Mulberry Silk, Tussar ghichha and linen
2	Dress Material	Salwar suits, Kurta, Scarfs and Stoles
3	Home Furnishing	Cushion covers, Sofa covers, Rugs, Table covers, Bedsheets and others

Source – Small Industrial Development Bank of India

Textile weaving workforce in Bhagalpur

- **Handloom Weaving-** Out of 25,510 handloom weavers in Bihar, Bhagalpur is the most densely populated district in Bihar in terms of

Handloom weaving as compared to the other regions. Here are some of the well-known districts prominently known for handloom weaving-

S. No.	Name of the district	No. of handloom weavers
1	Bhagalpur	6175
2	Gaya	4948
3	Aurangabad	3692
4	Banka	2802

Source- Handloom Information System, Office of The Development Commissioner (Handlooms), Ministry of Textiles.

- **Powerloom Weaving-** Unfortunately, there is no proper census of powerloom weavers as likely to handloom census in India. The only path to get information about the registered powerloom weavers in Bhagalpur leads to the District Industries Center in the region. The primary visit of the researcher showed that currently there are approximately 2,700 registered powerloom weavers in the Bhagalpur district.

System (HS) of coding which was adopted in India for export operations.

Bhagalpuri Silk exports significantly contribute to the GDP of India. Not only it is the symbol of rich cultural heritage but also an imperative component of the economy’s fabric. The robust demand for silk in the international market drives the production and export stiffening the contribution of the textile sector to the national economy. Successively, this keeps up the sustenance of the numerous artisans and weavers in Bhagalpur, amplifying the economic and cultural importance of Bhagalpuri Silk in India’s GDP. The vital export that encompasses HS codes of Bhagalpuri Silk is as follows: -

Insights of Bhagalpuri Silk Export:

The export data are classified according to the “Classification of Export Commodities” based on “The Harmonized Commodity and Coding System”. The data refers to the details of Import-Export classification based on the Harmonized

HS Codes	Product Description
5007	Woven fabrics of Silk or Silk waste
50072010	Sarees
5407	Woven fabrics of synthetic filament yarn, including woven fabrics obtained from materials heading 5404
54075240	Polyester Sarees
54075430	Polyester Sarees
6204	Women’s’ or girls’ suits, ensembles, jackets, blazers, dresses, skirts, divided skirts, trousers, bibs and brace overalls.
62041990	Of all other fibers
62041919	Other

Source- Information for Business, EXIM Solutions

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Key Indicators of Bhagalpuri Silk Exports

HS Codes	Export Shipments	Importing countries	Buyers	Exporters	Top Destination Countries
5007	1426	38	910	13	United States, Australia, and the United Kingdom
5407	1427	30	708	33	United States, Australia, and the United Kingdom
6204	567	26	453	09	United States, Australia, and Canada

Source – Volza Export Data (Update till August, 2024)

Impediments to the Growth of the Textile Cluster:

The political dominions are oblivious to the living and working conditions of the weavers of both realms. The researcher's visit substantiated that most of the predicaments in the context of textile workers other than bigger market players are suffered by the job workers due to the mendacities of the ministers involved in the state and central cabinets. Some of the paramount points that the handloom and powerloom weavers affirmed as conundrums in this industry are depicted below-

- The unorganized nature of this industry prevents it from realizing its potential which contributes to its slow growth. The complex regulations and their compliances turn out to be challenging for such informal small-scale industries hindering them to flourish.
- The informal labor practices due to the unorganized nature of this industry lack formal contracts leading to job insecurities and very low compensation for jobs with poor working and living conditions.
- The informal players face several challenges when it comes to marketing of the product. Deprivation of product branding, packaging, and marketing strategies makes it difficult for the weavers to have recognition for their artwork.
- Bhagalpur is the region where there is an absence of an airport due to which weavers face significant challenges in accessing international markets. The higher portion of profits are consumed by the bigger players, middlemen and intermediaries. Higher transportation costs, limited market reach, longer delivery times, and depending on the intermediaries prohibit the opportunities for scaling up.
- The false commitments by the ministers to reduce electricity bills have caused detrimental for the powerloom weavers of the Bhagalpur region where the energy costs are a significant burden on them. The high electricity bills have eroded their income to thin profit margins. This erosion of trust has caused low productivity and less efficiency forming discourage for any future investment in the business. This political disillusionment has caused distrust in any further government schemes and policies

negatively impacting on their quality of life and their future generations.

- Limited access to capital has caused a lack of financial support to the weavers leaving weavers to weavers to expand their business and vulnerable to economic shocks. The community is impoverished due to the inability to modernize and its high debt burdens resulting in stagnation of the weaving sector of the district. They are deprived of easy access to credit, subsidies for equipment, loans, and grants for themselves or their future generations.

Conclusion:

Bhagalpur textile industry although retains its historical significance in terms of silk production still faces challenges. Through modernization, skill development programs, and promotions, efforts are being made for its resilience. Bhagalpur's weaving tradition dates back hundreds of years and has been provided employment employed for ages. However, the industry has also faced a decline in demand, and financial difficulties in a competitive market due to globalization.

The mix of succession recession in the Bhagalpur textile industry provides a rich area for research, examining the adaptation of traditional industries to modern challenges.

Result and Findings:

This paper contributes a comprehensive review of the Bhagalpur textile industry which has the structure of both handloom and powerloom units. Renowned as a center for Silk weaving for centuries the culture and tradition of weaving has passed down through generations.

As a family-based small-scale cottage industry, it has supported as a livelihoods for entire communities. Despite all these, the industry is facing a decline in traditional weaving. Low wages, global competition, changes in the tastes and preferences of consumers, technological lag, and poor adaptation to sustainability have downturned the textile arena of the Bhagalpur textile cluster. Nevertheless, the cluster has the potential for growth by staying to its roots. With the right support and initiatives, Bhagalpur can revive its growth and continue to be a beacon of India's rich textile heritage.

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