

**THE CONTEMPORARY LANDSCAPE OF  
HANDLOOM WEAVING IN BALARAMAPURAM  
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM**

**MSW DISASTER MANGEMENT**

**2024 - 26**

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## ABSTRACT

Balaramapuram, located in Thiruvananthapuram district, is one of the most important traditional handloom centres in Kerala. The region is famous for the production of Kerala sarees, Kasavu mundus, and other handloom products. However, today the weavers in this area are facing several economic and social challenges in order to sustain their livelihoods.

The major problems faced by weavers include intense competition from low-cost power loom and mill-made products, increasing prices of raw materials, lack of marketing facilities, and exploitation by intermediaries. Although the cost of yarn and dyes has increased, the selling price of handloom products has not increased accordingly. Since the work requires extensive labour but provides low income, the younger generation is reluctant to enter this profession. As a result, the traditional weaving skills are gradually declining.

Despite these challenges, weavers continue to make efforts to sustain this sector through various methods. Direct purchase of handloom products by tourists from weaving villages helps to increase the income of weavers. In addition, adopting new designs and modern marketing strategies helps attract more customers.

To improve the living conditions and employment stability of weavers, it is essential to promote online marketing, provide design training for young people, ensure direct sales by reducing dependence on intermediaries, provide easy access to loans, and establish better working facilities and work sheds.

In conclusion, Balaramapuram handloom is not merely a means of livelihood but also an integral part of Kerala's cultural heritage. Despite facing intense competition and low income, social support and government initiatives play an important role in sustaining this sector. Only by combining traditional weaving practices with modern designs and improved marketing systems can the handloom sector achieve long-term sustainable growth.

**Keywords:** Handloom weavers, Handloom Industry, Balaramapuram.

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# **CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION**

# INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 INTROCUCTION

Balaramapuram is one of the most renowned handlooms weaving centres in Kerala. The handloom industry of Balaramapuram has a rich history dating back to the 18th century during the reign of Maharaja Balarama Varma of Travancore. Skilled weavers from Tamil Nadu were brought and settled here to promote traditional weaving methods and to produce high-quality cotton textiles. The region of “Balaramapuram” became widely known because of its association with handloom weaving.

A study on the traditional handloom sector in Kerala points out that places like Balaramapuram have become cultural symbols of Kerala (Nair et.al., 2007). The weaving process is carried out entirely by hand. Therefore, it reflects the skill, patience, and artistic heritage of the weavers. Traditional garments such as mundu, veshti, and set sarees are mainly produced here. The handloom sector plays a significant role in the socio-economic development of the local community. Many families have depended on the handloom industry for their livelihood. In particular, the sector has created employment opportunities for women and traditional weaving families.

However, over time, changes in people’s attitudes, social interactions, and economic needs have seriously affected the handloom sector. The growth of power loom industries, the expansion of the modern textile market, low income, rising production costs, and the lack of interest among the younger generation have pushed the handloom sector into crisis. This region, which gained fame through the production of traditional garments such as sarees, mundus, and kasavu fabrics, remains an inseparable part of Kerala’s cultural heritage. in this context, the present research focuses on the handloom weavers of Balaramapuram in Kerala. The main objective of this study is to understand the socio-economic conditions of handloom weavers, the occupational challenges they face, their living conditions, and the impact of modernization on their lives.

This study examines the contemporary living conditions of handloom workers in Balaramapuram and the changes occurring within the weaving sector. Mechanization, health issues, climate change, developmental activities in the region, the increase of power loom products, excessive workload, and urbanization are some of the major factors influencing the handloom industry. The spread of the power loom industry and the availability of low-cost

machine-made textiles have reduced the demand for traditional handloom products and negatively affected the economic condition of workers.

Today, many handloom workers in Balaramapuram face several challenges such as low wages, job insecurity, health problems, limited housing facilities, rising production costs, and marketing difficulties. Despite working long hours, the income they receive remains very limited. As a result, the younger generation is increasingly leaving handloom weaving and moving towards other occupations. This threatens the survival of the weaving knowledge and traditional skills that have been passed down through generations.

Women constitute a major workforce in the handloom sector of Balaramapuram. They play a crucial role in activities such as yarn winding, bobbin preparation, dyeing, and weaving. However, women workers are more affected by issues such as economic insecurity, low wages, dependence on middlemen, and the dual burden of family and work responsibilities. In many families, weaving activities are carried out within or near their homes, making work and family life closely interconnected. Nevertheless, several challenges still remain in improving the living standards of workers and ensuring job security.

This research closely examines the social, economic, and cultural realities of handloom workers in Balaramapuram. In addition, the study evaluates the conflicts that exist between heritage conservation and the demands of the modern economy. Through interactions with local workers, researchers, handloom members, and social workers, and through a review of relevant data, it will attempt to provide a detailed description of the present conditions of Balaramapuram handloom.

## **1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Balaramapuram is one of the main centres of Kerala's traditional handloom weaving. The region's identity, unity, and simplicity were part of its collective work culture. The rhythm, flow, and sound of weaving represent the work culture and life experiences of handloom workers. It is said that handloom work influenced the entire lives of the workers.

In the handloom sector, the study points out that the spread of power loom products and changes in the market are negatively affecting the traditional weaving sector (Radhakrishnan et al., 2017).

However, in the contemporary context, the handloom workers of Balaramapuram are facing numerous challenges. Low wages, climate change., increased production of power loom products, health problems, the struggle to sustain livelihoods, lack of education, and lack of technical knowledge are among the factors pushing the handloom sector into crisis. This affects the financial stability and living standards of workers.

In addition, the younger generation is abandoning handloom work and engaging in various other jobs and locations for better living standards. The children of workers are unwilling to continue the traditional occupation or support their parents. As a result, a situation is emerging where indigenous knowledge and the traditional art of weaving are gradually being lost. Women handloom workers have to experience the double burden of family responsibilities and occupational workload. Work is also being done using power loom machines. When wages decreased, men began shifting to jobs that offer slightly higher pay.

The aim of this research is to conduct a comprehensive study, with special focus on the basic factors of contemporary handloom work, and to address the critical gap.

### **1.3 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY**

Balaramapuram is one of the important traditional handlooms weaving centres in Kerala. This weaving tradition, which is more than two and a half centuries old, remains an integral part of Kerala's cultural heritage and textile culture. This sector has played a crucial role in providing employment and livelihood to many weaving families.

Kasavu sarees and mundus are highly valued for their quality, simplicity, and cultural significance. However, in the contemporary situation, the handloom sector in Balaramapuram is facing several economic and structural challenges. Over the years, the decline of the handloom sector has affected the Balaramapuram region. At present, mainly elderly people continue to work in handloom weaving as part of tradition. The study found that workers in the handloom sector in Kerala face low income, job insecurity, and market problems. The study shows that there has been no significant improvement in the living standards of the workers. (A. Gopalakrishnan et al.,2015)

Due to low wages, unstable income, and lack of job security, the younger generation is increasingly moving away from the weaving profession. As a result, many traditional weaving families are leaving this sector. The COVID-19 pandemic further worsened the problems of

the handloom sector. It has been observed that pandemic-related disruptions have further deteriorated the livelihood conditions of weaving households (Nair and Muley et al., 2024).

At the same time, this sector still holds strong cultural and economic importance. In this context, the study titled “The Contemporary Status of Handloom Weaving in Balaramapuram, Kerala” has been developed. The main objective of this study is to analyse the socio-economic condition of weavers, production practices, marketing problems, technological changes, and strategies adopted for the sustainability of the sector. The study also aims to understand how traditional weaving communities sustain themselves by balancing cultural heritage preservation and economic survival in a rapidly changing textile industry.

#### **1.4 RELEVANCE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

Balaramapuram handloom was part of the cultural heritage of the community. With each passing year, the existence of handloom is decreasing significantly. It is a fact that many people do not do this profession even though they know about it. Due to various reasons, the livelihood of the weavers is seriously affected. This study also helps to analyse the problems they face. In addition, the job changes of the younger generation can be clarified through this study. Therefore, a comprehensive study is very important. Because it helps to protect the traditional handloom sector and also understand the current problems of the weavers.

Qualitative studies that include the life experiences of the workers, job security and social status are very few. In this context, the main objective of this study is to deeply analyse the current socio-economic conditions of the Balaramapuram handloom weaving sector. The study attempts to clarify the lifestyle of the weavers, job changes and the impact of market changes. This study is relevant as it will lay a foundation for future research efforts related to Balaramapuram handloom.

#### **1.5 CHAPTERISATION**

The Chapterisation of the dissertation is as follows:

- Chapter 1: Introduction
- Chapter 2: Review of literature
- Chapter 3: Research Methodology

- Chapter 4: Case Description
- Chapter 5: Data Analysis and Discussion
- Chapter 6: Findings, Suggestions and Conclusion

References and Annexures will be appended in following Chapter.

## **CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

### **2.1. INTRODUCTION**

A literature review is a scientific study of existing literature within a specific field. It involves finding previous studies on a topic and analysing and comparing them to find trends, and any gaps in the research. A literature review is done to get a clear understanding of what is already known about a particular topic. Conducting a literature review is an important step in the research process. It helps researchers understand the existing knowledge base related to their research problem.

According to Neuman, “literature review builds on the idea that knowledge accumulates and that we can learn from and build on what others have done. The review rests on the principle that scientific research is a collective effort, one in which many researchers contribute and share results with one another” (Neuman, 2014).

Literature review is a continuous process during a research study. It helps in finalizing the topic of a study. And it also helps in analysing the research findings of existing studies. By reviewing the literature, researchers can identify how the topic was studied by other researchers and refine their methodology. Review of literature also helps in identifying the research gap which allows researchers to narrow down and sharpen their research focus. It highlights common themes that emerged from previous studies and identifies any differences or issues that still require further exploration. Basically, a literature review provides a base for a study.

Various researchers put forward similar ideas about literature review. According to researchers like Kothari (2004), Bryman (2016), Rubin and Babbie (2017), literature review is a systematic collection, evaluation, and critical analysis of existing research within a field of study. A literature review offers a detailed examination of available knowledge, which can help understand various concepts and theories that can be used in the study. Additionally, a literature review helps to reduce the chances of duplication of knowledge by clarifying what has already been studied and where new research can contribute.

This chapter includes the existing literature related to the field of study. The handloom workers of Balaramapuram have a traditional heritage that influences all aspects of their lives. Health, income, family, and other relationships all pose challenges. The tools and techniques involved in the weaving process have undergone minor changes over time. Through the literature review, the researcher aims to identify research gaps and narrow down the focus of the study.

## **2.2 THEMATIC REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

### **2.2.1 OLD TRADITION FOR WEAVING BEAUTY**

Handloom weaving is an essential element of cultural identity and aesthetic expression in many parts of the world. In India, especially in Kerala, the tradition of handloom weaving has long been known for its purity, elegance, and social symbolism. The greatness of handloom is known for its unique cultural practices, traditions, heritage, and collective growth.

The beauty of handloom, which was followed in the old days, is being adapted to the desires of Malayalis with slight changes. It is possible to see people working in the handloom sector with a sense of tradition. The weaving tradition of Kerala is often described as simple elegance. It is upheld by several weaving communities across the state.

Kasavu is the most recognizable handloom fabric of Kerala, known for its simple colour palette of unbleached off-white - dhotis, sarees, set mundus, mundus - and shiny gold sari borders. The kasavu worn on special occasions such as Onam, temple rituals, and weddings symbolizes purity, prosperity, and cultural identity (Nair, 2010).

### **2.2.1 MAJOR WEAVING CLUSTERS IN KERALA**

Several towns and villages in Kerala are known for their unique weaving heritage. Each of these places is famous for its distinct weaving traditions, and kasavu fabrics are widely sold.

The tradition in Balaramapuram dates back to the 18th century, when weavers from Tamil Nadu were brought by the Maharaja of Travancore, Balarama Varma, to produce fine cotton fabrics. Balaramapuram fabric is known for its softness and often features intricate gold borders with peacock or paisley motifs. The region is closely associated with royal patronage and cultural identity. The handloom industry of Kerala is centuries old.

Balaramapuram in Thiruvananthapuram district is the most historically important and one of the oldest handloom centres in Kerala. The weavers belonging to the Shaliyar community migrated from Nagercoil and Tirunelveli in Tamil Nadu during the period of Balarama Varma, ruler of Travancore, about 250 years ago.

Kuthampully in Thrissur District is also well known for handloom fabrics. In Kuthampully, Devangas who migrated from Karnataka are engaged in weaving. It is believed that this community of traditional weavers was brought by the Kochi Royal family about 500 years ago to make dress materials exclusively for the palace.

Chendamangalam in Ernakulam District is another important handloom centre in Kerala. Here, the weavers are producing double dhotis, mundus, and neriyathu.

It is not just a craft; rather, it is a cultural activity that is passed down through generations. (Menon et al., 2004) Similarly, it is emphasized that weaving embodies social memory and collective identity and connects artisans to their ancestral heritage while sustaining the local economy. (Krishna et al., 2015)

### **2.2.3 SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS OF HANDLOOM WEAVERS**

The livelihood of handloom weavers is in distress (Das, 2021). Their income remains relatively poor (Rao & Sridhar et al., 2017), and the community suffers from severe financial hardship and extreme poverty, which makes it difficult to meet daily expenses (Tiwari et al., 2017).

The socio-economic status of weavers is further reflected in low wages, unemployment, lack of demand (Muneendra & Prakash, 2016), and inadequate working capital and availability of raw materials (Selvaraj, 2016). Moreover, the work sheds used by weavers in the Balaramapuram area can accommodate only 8–10 looms, which are placed very close to each other. Most of these sheds are open structures with unfinished floors, tin roofs, pit looms, and inadequate lighting.

The COVID-19 pandemic has added to their misery, and only a small number of weavers receive benefits from various government schemes (Khatoon & Ifa et al., 2021). The production of handloom products has declined significantly in recent years (Gawreeshwari & Bama, 2019), and many weavers have become unemployed (Naidu & Jayachandra, et al., 2014).

Varghese and Saleem (2015) focused on the difficulties and challenges of the handloom industry in Kerala, finding that the sector mainly competes with the power loom industry. Bari et al., (2015) found that weavers were discouraged from continuing weaving due to lack of education and limited alternative sources of income. Handloom weavers face adverse socio-economic conditions and are unable to meet their daily expenses. Weavers often do not receive adequate respect or recognition in social settings, and those in Balaramapuram do not receive adequate support services.

#### **2.2.4 CHALLENGES OF HANDLOOM WORKERS**

Handloom weavers do not earn enough income to sustain a decent livelihood. While most respondents are aware of health insurance schemes, financial insecurity remains widespread. Tasneem and Abdul et al. (2014) found that the main factors motivating women to work in handlooms are economic necessity, unemployment, poverty, and low income. Due to economic and political factors, the handloom weaving industry in Balaramapuram has been in steady decline over the last few decades. These factors have adversely affected the condition of women weavers in particular. Therefore, issues related to women workers must be addressed, and schemes to support poor women weavers should be implemented. It is also essential to ensure consistent assistance to improve the education system and provide weavers with affordable raw materials.

Naga Raju and Veni Rao et al., (2014) explained that the handloom industry is crucial for preserving the heritage and culture of the country and is an essential part of the national economy. In terms of employment, the handloom sector ranks second only to agriculture. However, the sector faces problems such as outdated technology, irregular production systems, low productivity, inadequate working capital, limited product range, and weak marketing linkages. Moreover, the handloom sector has struggled to compete with the power loom and mill sectors.

Tauheed Yusuf et al., (2013) examined the socio-economic background and problems of weavers and offered suggestions to address critical issues. The study found that weavers are in a vulnerable condition due to illiteracy, lack of capital, health problems, very low wages, and minimal government support.

Beddig (2008) noted that weaving is done by both men and women. Most weavers in Balaramapuram live in villages and do not market handicrafts independently. They often depend on home-based systems or master weavers for work and wages. Sometimes, when weavers seek wage work, payment is delayed or denied. Due to low wages, some weavers shift to other jobs for security. The occupation affects all aspects of life, leading to health problems and social challenges, though some attempt to overcome these difficulties and move forward.

Chakraborty et al. (1982) remarked that the quality of handloom products declined due to the high cost of raw materials. Weavers resorted to using low-quality dyes, which led consumers to prefer mill-made cloth, causing the weaver community to lose its livelihood. To overcome this, the government should supply quality raw materials at subsidized rates and on time.

Dakshina Murthy et al. (1982), in a study on financing handloom cooperatives through NABARD, suggested that the handloom sector needs liberal financial assistance for the development of cooperative weaver societies. Similarly (Rajula Devi et al.,1983) stated that the handloom industry in recent years has fallen into deeper crisis owing to lack of adequate financial support and recommended that the government should allocate more funds for the development of the industry.

### **2.2.5 OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH CHALLENGES**

Handloom workers face numerous health problems due to the nature of their work. Unnatural postures adopted during weaving cause joint discomfort and severe musculoskeletal disorders, particularly in the fingers, neck, waist, elbows, shoulders, and knees. These issues become more prevalent with longer service periods, as weavers often work for extended hours performing repetitive tasks.

Various pre-loom operations, such as warping, require workers to operate for hours under poor ergonomic conditions, which are often painful and physically taxing. A detailed analysis of the handloom production process shows that it directly affects the health of weavers. Common ailments include body aches, respiratory problems, chronic bronchitis, and loss of grip strength. Among weavers with 10–30 years of experience, 94% report pain in the knees, back, and neck. Eye disease is also a serious problem, directly linked to the continuous and repetitive movements involved in weaving.

(Tauheed Yusuf et al.,2013) revealed that sixty percent of weavers reported health problems such as knee pain, back pain, headaches, respiratory issues, and joint pain. Weavers typically work in a sedentary posture, using their feet to operate a wheel or board.

Financial stress compounds these health challenges. (Diksha Tiwari., 2017) found that weavers and their families suffer from multiple health issues. Many experience back pain and poor eyesight due to sitting for eight to nine hours continuously in dark, poorly ventilated spaces. Most looms are located in houses without adequate lighting and ventilation, which contributes to impaired vision and serious respiratory problems. Despite these conditions, many continue to work out of concern for their family's financial situation.

### **2.2.6 EMPLOYMENT FOR WORKERS**

Since the time when only handloom existed in Balaramapuram, unemployed individuals turned to the handloom sector for livelihood. Over time, special emphasis was given to weavers'

cooperatives, which helped the sector grow. The incentive structure of handloom products has been analysed in various studies.

This area of inquiry falls under the scope of empirical research. Findings reveal that handloom is a traditional cottage industry that provides employment to millions of weavers in India. However, the industry has faced numerous challenges recently and is moving toward a stage of decline. Promotion of the handloom sector remains a key area of concern, and considerable efforts are needed for the advancement of handloom products.

(Rani and Bains et al., 2014) analysed consumer behaviour towards handloom products in Kerala and further examined the position of allied workers and handloom weavers. Their analysis identified several factors that influence consumer behaviour and found that this industry provides vital employment opportunities to poor households.

Similarly, Kumudha and Rizwana et al. (2012) suggest that handloom work does not require formal educational qualifications or specialized skills. Workers rely on this income to meet the basic needs of their families, which is a primary reason they choose the handloom sector.

### **2.2.7 INNOVATION TOWARDS ORIGINALITY**

Innovation towards originality highlights that handloom weaving embodies the identity of Kerala's tradition, heritage, uniqueness, culture, and ethics in which weavers have grown up. Skilled weavers enrich the craft with rituals, imagination, mythological beliefs, and symbolic motifs.

Aswathy (2020) notes that the strength of handloom lies in the fact that many of these innovative designs cannot be replicated by the power loom sector. Geographical Indication (GI) of Goods, an aspect of Intellectual Property Rights, identifies products as originating from a specific place and covers various categories such as agricultural products, natural products, and handicrafts produced in rural areas, including textiles. GI status has become a significant form of intellectual property in rapidly growing economies, contributing to the protection and promotion of unique traditional crafts.

### **2.2.8 PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES**

Since the 1990 s, the growth of the power loom sector, especially in rural areas, and the entry of low-priced power loom products into the market forced handloom to face intense competition from earlier times. Further, the increase in the price of yarn and dyes weakened

handlooms. This was mainly affected by independent weavers and small-scale loom owners employing wage labourers. The displacement of independent weavers led to the growth of major urban power loom and handloom centres under master weavers: male weavers migrated to them, and female weavers shifted to other manufacturing jobs. In urban areas where job opportunities are relatively better, young weavers take up jobs as shop assistants and shift to construction work, as skilled handloom weaving was found unattractive due to low wages and continuous insecurity. Critical to the crisis in the handloom industry is the increase in the prices of yarn and dyes. The volatile nature of yarn prices created great difficulties for handloom weavers. Trade liberalization, initiated as part of economic reforms, worsened the problem by allowing exports. Master-weavers were reluctant to continue production, thus laying them off from work, pushing weavers into starvation and suicide. (Srinivasulu et al., 2010).

Most handloom units have only limited financial resources to implement even simple marketing concepts. Many of them face numerous problems. If their current problems are improved and sincere efforts are made to change the marketing culture in which they operate, the handloom market can increase the sales of their products and thereby increase the overall market demand for their products, leading to an increase in their market share. According to India's Third Handloom Census, only 25 percent of weaver families report that their children are interested in taking up handloom as a profession. Although the handloom industry is a large employer in rural India with 77 percent female workers, the sector still remains impoverished, and the vast majority of weavers lack basic infrastructure. A common problem in the industry is the difficulty in procuring yarn. Currently, the National Development Corporation meets approximately 15 percent of the handloom sector's yarn requirement. In many areas, yarn availability for weavers is very low or unavailable. The way weaving functions complicates the problem. The master weaver acts as an intermediary, providing yarn to others, and paying for the work. Therefore, democratic access to yarn, dyeing facilities, etc. is generally not available to everyone.

### **2.2.9 POLICY AND SUPPORT MECHANISMS**

Although various central and state government schemes for handloom welfare are currently in place, such as credit cards, yarn distribution schemes, and Mudra loans, studies indicate that these often fail to reach the grassroots. Handloom workers report that benefits remain inaccessible due to illiteracy, lack of knowledge about registration processes, or lack of time to pursue them. Thomas and Pillai (2019) highlight the inefficiency of cooperatives in Kerala,

which are intended to protect weavers' interests but suffer from political interference and corruption. While designer collaborations and e-commerce have opened new opportunities, most weavers are not digitally literate or connected to such platforms. As Dasgupta (2022) notes, many handloom workers are elderly and unfamiliar with online methods. Although their children may know how to use the internet, it is rare for them to train or inform their parents, leaving a digital divide that further limits access to markets and support.

## **2.2.10 CHARACTERISTICS OF THE HANDLOOM INDUSTRY**

The handloom industry is extremely diversified in terms of both product and relations of production. From weaving coarse cloth for local needs to producing a range of medium and fine fabrics for larger urban markets, the varieties of cloth produced on handlooms are vast, with each region known for a specific product that is unique in design and style. What is woven, however, cannot be separated from where and how it is woven, not in terms of technology, but in terms of the structure and organization of production itself. These modes and relations of production are equally diverse: there are independent weavers, weavers organized into cooperatives, and those working under master weavers. While a few areas may be characterized by one clear mode of production, most regions show a combination of types and a multiplicity of relations. The industry is also largely decentralized and home-based, drawing labour from the entire family. Though weaving sheds exist in some places, it is more common for weaving to take place at home, where every member of the household has a defined role in each stage of the production process, whether pre-loom processing, weaving, or finishing. In many ways, this resembles the subsistence agricultural household that engages in the self-exploitation of labour in order to remain at a subsistence level.

## **2.2.11 FEMINISATION OF LABOUR**

Feminisation of labour has been discussed in several research studies as an important socio-economic concept explaining gender-based inequalities in the labour sector.

Women are often compelled to accept low wages as a fixed and unavoidable condition of employment. Economic necessity and household responsibilities further restrict their ability to reject such wages. As a result, they are forced to continue working even under unfavourable conditions. In contrast, some male workers are able to secure comparatively higher wages due to diversified design skills, technical experience, or additional training opportunities. However, literature critically argues that this wage difference is not merely the result of individual skill differences, but is largely shaped by social structures and gender-based divisions of labour.

Studies on Kerala's handloom sector analyse the position of women workers, feminisation of labour, and gendered division of work. These points out that as men gradually leave the sector, women continue to remain in handloom weaving despite low wages and insecure working conditions.

Women workers are often excluded from formal skill development programmes, resulting in their labour being undervalued and categorised as low-skilled work, thereby justifying lower wages.

This inequality leads not only to economic injustice but also to long-term consequences for the social status, self-confidence, and occupational security of women workers. Therefore, studies suggest that feminisation of labour should be treated as a central analytical factor while examining wage-related issues in the handloom sector. These further points out that although women's participation in the labour force has increased, it is largely associated with low wages and temporary forms of employment (Guy Standing et al., 1989).

#### **2.2.12 FINANCIAL CRISIS**

The handloom sector in Balaramapuram is facing a severe financial crisis. Most handloom owners do not have sufficient funds even for basic operations. Declining sales and weak market demand have led to continuous financial losses, forcing many household weaving units to shut down their operations. Even master weavers, despite having assets like land and houses, experience financial stress due to reduced demand and increasing losses. The absence of adequate government financial support further worsens the situation. As a result, many weavers are losing their jobs and facing unemployment or underemployment.

Widespread studies show that handloom workers operate on very low incomes and lack financial security. Studies indicate that irregular income and indebtedness are major problems for weavers. Limited access to bank loans, the weakness of cooperatives, and deficiencies in the marketing system also intensify the financial crisis (Teki Surayya et al., 2015).

#### **2.2.13 DECLINING WORKFORCE AND AGEING WEAVERS**

The literature on handloom sectors, including Balaramapuram in Kerala, records that labour shortage and the increasing proportion of ageing weavers have become a major structural problem. Studies indicate that the majority of workers in this sector are above the age of 40–50, while the entry of younger generations is steadily declining.

It is also stated that the declining attractiveness of handloom work, along with low income, physically demanding labour, and lack of social recognition, are driving younger generations away from this occupation. (Sonia George et al., 2013) Further studies report that most handloom workers are elderly, and that long-term physical difficulties such as back pain, eye strain, and other health issues contribute to younger generations avoiding this profession (Arjun Nair et al., 2023).

#### **2.2.14 WOMEN IN THE HANDLOOM SECTOR**

Women form a major workforce in the handloom industry and play a crucial role in sustaining family-based production systems. In traditional weaving centres such as Balaramapuram, handloom work often reflects the idea of “women producing for women,” highlighting their central role in both production and household economies.

However, despite their significant contribution, women’s work is often confined to the domestic sphere and lacks proper recognition. In many cases, they receive low wages or sometimes unpaid labour within family-based production units. Their contribution is frequently overlooked in government policies and even in NGO or private initiatives.

Due to increasing globalisation and market competition, the handloom sector is facing serious challenges, and women workers are among the most affected because of declining income, job insecurity, and reduced social protection.

Bina Agarwal et al. (1997) points out that in family-based production systems, women’s contributions often become invisible and are thereby economically neglected. This also leads to the exclusion of women from decision-making processes.

### **2.3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This study is based on the Sustainable Livelihood Theory, Social Capital Theory, and Resilience Theory to understand the challenges and survival of handloom weavers in Balaramapuram, Kerala.

The Sustainable Livelihood Theory explains how individuals and households use available resources, skills, and assets to sustain their livelihoods despite economic and social challenges. In the context of this study, handloom weavers depend on traditional weaving skills, family support, and multiple income sources to cope with low wages, unstable employment, and financial insecurity.

The Social Capital Theory emphasizes the importance of social relationships, trust, family support, and community networks in improving people's well-being. The theory helps explain how family members, neighbours, cooperative societies, and the local community support handloom weavers during financial crises, health problems, and other life challenges.

The Resilience Theory focuses on the ability of individuals to adapt to adversity and recover from difficult situations. Despite poverty, declining income, health issues, debt, and occupational uncertainty, the handloom weavers in Balaramapuram continue their traditional occupation with determination, perseverance, and hope. Their ability to cope with these challenges reflects the concept of resilience.

## **2.4 RESEARCH GAP ANALYSIS**

Balaramapuram is one of the major traditional handlooms weaving centres in Kerala. It is famous for its handwoven sarees and mundus with golden borders. The handloom tradition of Balaramapuram holds great cultural, historical, and economic significance. However, this sector is currently undergoing rapid changes due to factors such as globalisation, urbanisation, technological advancements, changing consumer preferences, and the declining interest of the younger generation in the occupation. Although several studies have been conducted on the handloom industry in Kerala, significant research gaps still exist regarding the contemporary realities and challenges faced by the weaving sector in Balaramapuram.

Most existing studies have focused on the historical development of handloom traditions, production methods, and the economic conditions of weavers. Issues such as competition from power looms, low income, the role of cooperative societies, and government welfare schemes have also been discussed in previous research. However, while these studies explain the fundamental problems of the handloom sector, they do not deeply examine how current social, cultural, and geographical changes are affecting the weaving community.

One of the major research gaps is related to the impact of urbanisation and land-use changes on traditional weaving settlements. Urban development in Balaramapuram and surrounding areas has resulted in changes in residential patterns and workspace availability. These transformations have also affected the socio-economic structures associated with weaving occupations. However, very few studies have explored how these geographical and environmental changes influence the survival and sustainability of the handloom sector.

Another significant research gap is the lack of interdisciplinary studies connecting culture, identity, and livelihood transformations. Existing studies mainly view handloom weaving either as an economic activity or as a cultural heritage practice. However, limited research has examined how factors such as modernisation, education, migration, and changing employment aspirations among the younger generation are transforming the identity of the weaving community.

There is also limited research on how digitalisation and new marketing systems are influencing the handloom sector in Balaramapuram. Although online marketing, social media promotion, e-commerce, and branding have created significant changes in India's handloom industry, studies examining how Balaramapuram weavers adapt to these technological and marketing transformations remain limited.

Environmental sustainability is another important research gap. Traditional handloom weaving is considered an environmentally friendly occupation due to its low energy consumption and use of natural materials. However, the increasing use of synthetic yarns, chemical dyes, and industrial production methods may be changing the environmental characteristics of the sector. Contemporary studies focusing on this aspect remain inadequate.

Gender-related aspects within the handloom sector also require further investigation. Although women play a significant role in various stages of production, including yarn preparation, dyeing, and finishing processes, their contributions are often undervalued. Research on wage differences, division of labour, and decision-making roles within families and cooperative societies remains limited.

Furthermore, there is a lack of qualitative and ethnographic studies documenting the lived experiences of weavers within the context of socio-economic transformations. Most available studies rely mainly on statistical data and economic analysis. However, the life histories, cultural experiences, and occupational struggles of weavers have received limited attention and documentation.

Therefore, this research aims to address the above-mentioned gaps by conducting a comprehensive study of the contemporary handloom weaving sector in Balaramapuram. The study focuses on the interrelationships between urbanisation, cultural changes, technological adaptation, livelihood sustainability, gender relations, and marketing systems. Through geographical and socially grounded field-based research methods, the study seeks to develop a

deeper understanding of the changes and challenges influencing the future of Balaramapuram's handloom tradition.

# **CHAPTER III: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

# **RESEARCH METHEDODOLOGY**

## **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter deals with the methodology used for the study. “Research methodology is a way to systematically solve the research problem. It may be understood as a science of studying how research is done scientifically. In it we study the various steps that are generally adopted by a researcher in studying his research problem along with the logic behind them” (Kothari, 2004).

The term 'Methodology' is understood to be the science of methods and of the knowledge obtained by using them. The diverse approaches to social research differ in methods, objectives, hypotheses, and the role of research (Hammersley, 2011). Research methods involve the specific tools and techniques used by researchers to study a topic. In contrast, research methodology encompasses the broader framework that guides the study. It involves acquiring and mastering various techniques necessary for conducting research. Researchers use the knowledge and skills gained through research methodology to apply research methods effectively. Research methodology addresses how the study is conducted, providing a rationale for the chosen tools and techniques.

This chapter includes the study's title, research questions, and definitions of key concepts. It provides an overview of the research design, research site, and participants, as well as the sampling and selection strategies. Additionally, it details the data collection methods and explains how the data will be analysed and interpreted to derive the study's findings and conclusions. Ethical considerations, assumptions, limitations, and the study's scope will also be discussed in this chapter.

## **3.2 TITLE OF THE STUDY**

The contemporary Landscape of handloom weaving in Balaramapuram Thiruvananthapuram.

## **3.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

### **3.3.1 General Research Question**

What is the contemporary landscape of handloom weaving in Balaramapuram, Thiruvananthapuram, as experienced by the weaving community?

### **3.3.2 Specific Research Questions**

- How do handloom weavers in Balaramapuram sustain their livelihoods in the current socio-economic context?
- What changes in income, market access, and employment opportunities have affected the handloom weaving community in recent years?
- How social and cultural aspects affect the handloom sector?
- Does handloom contribute to the wellbeing and unity of the people?

### 3.4 DEFINITION OF CONCEPTS

| Sl. No. | Term                  | Conceptual Definition                                                                                                                                                                                   | Operational Definition                                                                                                                                                              |
|---------|-----------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1.      | Handloom Weaving      | “Handloom weaving is defined as the process of producing cloth by interlacing warp and weft yarns using a loom operated entirely by human labour, without the aid of electricity” (Handloom Act, 1985). | Handloom weaving refers to the process of fabric production carried out in Balaramapuram using wooden frame looms and pit looms, operated solely through human labour.              |
| 2.      | Market Competition    | “Market competition is the state of rivalry among different producers and traders to attract consumers through price, quality, and marketing strategies” (Porter, 1985).                                | Market competition is assessed based on price competition with power loom products, the influence of online markets, increase or decrease in sales, and changes in consumer demand. |
| 3.      | Heritage Preservation | “Heritage preservation is the process of protecting and transmitting a community’s traditional arts, knowledge systems, and cultural practices                                                          | Heritage preservation is measured through the use of traditional designs, the number of families continuing weaving as a hereditary occupation, the                                 |

|    |                |                                                                                                                                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|----|----------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|    |                | to future generations” (UNESCO, 2003).                                                                                                  | functioning of weaving centres, and the transmission of weaving knowledge to younger generations.                                                                                                      |
| 4. | Health Issues  | “Health issues refer to physical and mental health conditions caused by occupational, environmental, or lifestyle factors” (WHO, 1948). | Health issues refer to occupational health problems experienced by handloom workers in Balaramapuram, such as back pain, joint pain, eye strain, and physical fatigue arising from weaving activities. |
| 5. | Family Support | “Family support refers to the emotional, financial, and social assistance provided by family members to an individual” (Cobb, 1976).    | Family support refers to assistance provided by family members of handloom workers in Balaramapuram, including financial help, work assistance, household support, and emotional encouragement.        |

### 3.5 PILOT STUDY

As part of the research, the researcher visited Balaramapuram in Kerala. The researcher met with handloom workers and others connected to the weaving sector. Discussions were conducted regarding the contemporary condition of handloom weaving in Balaramapuram. The pilot study revealed a decline in the number of workers engaged in the traditional handloom weaving sector and an increasing influence of the mechanized textile industry. In addition, the rising cost of raw materials, low participation of the younger generation, and marketing-related issues were identified as major challenges.

During the study, it was observed that some family-based weaving units had become non-functional, and many people had shifted to other occupations. However, local community members stated that the traditional quality and cultural significance of Balaramapuram handloom weaving continue to exist. Based on interviews and discussions conducted with key informants, an in-depth interview guide was prepared to further study the social, economic, and cultural changes in the handloom sector.

### **3.6 RESEARCH DESIGN**

A research design serves as a blueprint that outlines the tools and techniques a researcher uses to collect, analyse, and interpret data. It provides a structured approach to addressing research questions, thereby ensuring the accuracy, reliability, and validity of the study (Rubin and Babbie, 2009). Research design refers to the systematic process of planning and outlining how a study will be conducted before making any research decisions. It involves developing a comprehensive strategy for conducting research, with all steps clearly documented to avoid uncertainty. This stage begins after identifying the research problem and ends before the data collection process starts. An effective research design includes detailed information about the research topic, objectives, concepts and their operational definitions, variables, hypotheses, methods of data collection and processing, techniques of analysis and interpretation, time frame, and estimated costs (Akhtar, 2016)

In this study, a qualitative research strategy is used. It is a research approach that gives importance to non-numerical data. It focuses on exploring and understanding social phenomena through data collection and analysis. This approach aims to gain insights into participants' perspectives, attitudes, and experiences. According to Creswell (2014), the qualitative approach involves researchers making knowledge claims based on constructivist perspectives, which recognize the multiple meanings of individual experiences and their social and historical contexts, with the aim of developing theories or patterns.

A case study design is adopted for this study. In case studies, researchers conduct an in-depth investigation of an event, individual, or group, allowing for a detailed and nuanced understanding of the subject. It provides deep insights into the complexity of the phenomenon being studied. Robert K. Yin defined case study as “a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (Yin, 1981). In a single case study, the focus is on one specific instance to gain a deep understanding of its unique characteristics and influencing factors.

In this study, Balaramapuram is taken as a single case and examined in detail. The reason for selecting a single case study is that Balaramapuram represents a unique case influenced by its historical, socio-economic, and cultural factors, particularly those that have shaped the development of the handloom weaving sector. By focusing on this single case, the researcher is able to closely examine the specific conditions, changes, and processes that have influenced the contemporary landscape of handloom weaving over time.

This approach enables a deeper understanding of local realities, including the roles of different stakeholders, the impact of economic and policy factors, and the social and cultural significance of the handloom industry.

### **3.7 DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH SITE AND PARTICIPANTS**

The research site for the study was the Balaramapuram region in Balaramapuram. Balaramapuram is a well-known centre for traditional handloom weaving in Kerala. The region is characterised by its long-standing pit loom-based weaving system and the distinctive quality of its handloom products. However, at present, the sector is being affected by several socio-economic changes such as the influence of mechanisation, market fluctuations, rising prices of raw materials, and declining participation of the younger generation. Therefore, this area was considered an appropriate research site for studying the contemporary condition of handloom weaving.

The participants of this study primarily include handloom weavers. In addition, individuals who are directly or indirectly associated with the handloom sector were also included. These participants were selected through purposive sampling. Since they possess direct experience and knowledge of the handloom sector, the information provided by them contributed to obtaining rich qualitative data for the study.

### **3.8 SAMPLING STRATEGY**

Sampling is defined as the process of selecting a subset of individuals, cases, or observations from a larger population to represent the entire group. This selection is guided by principles aimed at ensuring that the sample accurately reflects the characteristics of the broader population, allowing researchers to make valid and generalizable inferences (Bryman, 2012).

“In qualitative studies, to allow us to make statements about categories in the population, we rarely sample to gather a small set of cases that is a mathematically accurate reproduction of the entire population. Instead, we sample to identify relevant categories at work in a few cases.

The logic of the qualitative sample is to sample aspects/features of the social world. The aspects/features of our sample highlight or ‘shine light into’ key dimensions or processes in a complex social life. We pick a few to provide clarity, insight, and understanding about issues or relationships in the social world. In qualitative sampling, our goal is to deepen understanding about a larger process, relationship, or social scene” (Neuman, 2014).

In this study, Balaramapuram has been selected as the study area using purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling technique in which the researcher selects participants or cases based on their judgment of who can provide the most valuable and relevant information for the study. This selection is appropriate for the research questions because it enables an in-depth exploration of the historical, socio-economic, and cultural processes that have shaped the contemporary landscape of handloom weaving in Balaramapuram.

### **3.8.1 INCLUSION CRITERIA**

- Handloom weavers who are currently engaged in weaving activities in Balaramapuram.
- Individuals who have been involved in the handloom weaving profession for 10 years or more.
- Weavers belonging to households where handloom weaving is a primary source of livelihood.
- Members who are willing to participate and provide information for the study.

### **3.8.2 EXCLUSION CRITERIA**

- Individuals in Balaramapuram who are not engaged in handloom weaving work.
- Individuals who are not willing to participate in the study or are not ready to provide information.
- Individuals who are not directly involved in weaving work but are engaged only in trade or sales activities.

### **3.9 DATA COLLECTION**

Data Collection is the process of gathering and measuring information from various sources to find answers to research questions, test hypotheses, and evaluate outcomes. It is an important stage in research because accurate and reliable data help researchers reach valid conclusions and make appropriate decisions. Data can be collected through various methods such as surveys, interviews, observations, questionnaires, experiments, and existing records. The quality of data collection directly influences the reliability and success of any research study.

### **3.9.1 SOURCES OF DATA**

Sources of data refer to the origins from which information is collected for research or analysis. In this study, both primary and secondary data sources were utilized.

#### **PRIMARY DATA**

Primary data was collected from two main sources. First, it was directly collected from handloom weavers in Balaramapuram. These weavers have long-term experience in traditional weaving practices. Second, key informant interviews were conducted with individuals associated with the handloom sector. Through these interviews, firsthand information was gathered on the current status of handloom weaving, the challenges faced by weavers, and the changes taking place in the traditional handloom industry, leading to a comprehensive understanding of the study area.

#### **SECONDARY DATA**

Bryman (2016) defines secondary data as “data that has already been collected and published by others. It involves analysing pre-existing information such as reports, books, or databases that were collected for other research purposes.” Secondary data for this study was collected from a wide range of sources to gain a comprehensive understanding of the research topic. These include books, academic articles, journals, and periodicals that provide theoretical and contextual background related to the subject. In addition, news reports and evaluation study reports related to the handloom weaving sector in Balaramapuram were examined to understand the broader socio-economic and industrial changes affecting the region. Furthermore, relevant information was also gathered from blogs, YouTube videos, and various literature sources specifically connected to the handloom industry in Balaramapuram.

### **3.9.2 TOOLS FOR DATA COLLECTION**

An interview guide was used as one of the primary data collection tools for this study. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with handloom weavers and master weavers in Balaramapuram to collect detailed information about their experiences, traditional weaving practices, livelihood, production methods, marketing strategies, challenges faced, and the impact of modernization on the handloom sector. Open-ended questions were included in the interview guide, enabling participants to freely share their opinions and experiences while covering all major aspects related to the research. This tool provided rich qualitative data and

helped in developing a comprehensive understanding of the contemporary landscape of handloom weaving in Balaramapuram.

### **3.10 PRE-TEST**

As part of the study the researcher conducted a pretest in Balaramapuram. The pretest was conducted to evaluate the relevance and effectiveness of the research interview questions. During the study, informal interactions were carried out with handloom workers, weaving unit owners, and local people associated with the handloom sector.

Through the pretest, the researcher was able to understand the current conditions of the handloom sector. The decline of traditional weaving practices, the influence of the mechanized textile industry, and the challenges faced by weavers were the major issues observed. In addition, the lack of participation from the younger generation, low income, marketing difficulties, health problems, the increase of power looms, and the high price of yarn were also identified as major problems.

The pretest helped in assessing the clarity and suitability of the interview schedule, and necessary modifications were made accordingly. Based on the observations and responses from the field, the research tools were revised and finalized.

### **3.11 DATA ANALYSIS**

Data analysis is the systematic process of examining, interpreting, and organizing data in order to identify meaningful information and patterns. In this qualitative study, data was collected using an Interview Guide and a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) Guide.

The collected data was analysed using the method of Thematic Analysis. The transcripts of interviews and FGD discussions were carefully reviewed to identify recurring themes and ideas. These themes were then categorized and analysed in detail. The main objective of data analysis was to answer the research questions and to derive accurate findings and conclusions from the study.

### **3.12 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Throughout the study, strict adherence to ethical considerations was maintained. Prior to participation, all participants were provided with detailed information regarding the purpose of the study. Consent was obtained voluntarily, ensuring that participants clearly understood their involvement and agreed to participate without any form of coercion. The researcher ensured

the anonymity and confidentiality of all participants and took necessary measures to protect their privacy and safety. Personal identifiers were removed from the data to prevent the possibility of tracing responses back to individual participants.

Additionally, interview recordings were kept confidential and securely stored by the researcher. Participants were given the freedom to voluntarily participate in or withdraw from the study at any time, ensuring their autonomy and comfort throughout the research process. The researcher also made conscious efforts to minimize bias and avoid any form of judgment during the study, thereby creating a safe and neutral environment for participants to openly share their experiences.

### **3.13 ASSUMPTIONS LIMITATIONS AND SCOPE**

#### **3.13.1 Assumptions**

- It is assumed that the handloom weaving sector in Balaramapuram has undergone significant social, economic, and cultural changes that have influenced the livelihoods and working patterns of weavers.
- It is assumed that the growth of mechanized textile industries has negatively affected the traditional handloom weaving sector.
- It is assumed that the rising cost of raw materials is a major factor affecting production and the income of weavers.
- It is assumed that the younger generation shows limited interest in handloom weaving, which affects the continuity of the traditional weaving practice.
- It is assumed that the handloom weaving industry in Balaramapuram still retains its cultural and traditional significance.
- It is assumed that the experiences and perspectives of handloom weavers and individuals associated with the sector provide reliable and in-depth information for the study.
- It is assumed that issues such as marketing challenges, low income, and changes in employment opportunities significantly influence the current condition of the handloom sector.

#### **3.13.2 Limitations**

- The analysis of the contemporary status of handloom weaving is limited to available interviews and field observations, which may restrict the overall scope of the study.

- Some data is based on the personal experiences and perceptions of participants, which may introduce a degree of subjective bias.
- Due to limitations of time and resources, it was not possible to include all weaving units in the study area.
- Some participants may have been reluctant to fully share their experiences, which may affect the depth and completeness of the data collected.
- The unavailability or incompleteness of certain official records and statistical data related to the handloom sector has also posed limitations to the analysis.

### **3.13.3 Scope**

This study focuses on the handloom weaving sector in Balaramapuram. It examines the historical processes and changes from the past to the present. The study also includes the contemporary condition of the handloom industry along with the social, economic, and cultural changes that have taken place over time. Using qualitative methods such as an in-depth interview guide, interviews, Focus Group Discussions (FGD), observation, and thematic analysis, the study aims to gain a deep understanding of the current situation of handloom weaving in Balaramapuram.

It also helps to highlight the changes and losses that have occurred by incorporating personal narratives that describe past conditions.

## **CHAPTER IV: CASE DESCRIPTION**

## CASE 1

A 55-year-old handloom worker from Balaramapuram, is not merely an ordinary weaver but a symbol of hard work, courage, and perseverance. Unable to receive formal education, she was compelled to start working from an early stage of her life. Despite facing numerous personal hardships, financial struggles, health problems, and the decline of the handloom sector, she continues to strive for a self-reliant life. Her life is truly inspiring.

Due to poverty and adverse family circumstances, she had to discontinue her education during childhood. Although she wished to continue her studies, her family's financial condition did not permit it. As a result, she entered the handloom sector at the age of fifteen. Initially, she learned by carefully observing her mother's work and assisting with small tasks. Later, through her own skills and experience, she became an independent handloom weaver. For her, this profession was not merely a means of earning a livelihood but a struggle to sustain her family.

After marrying at the age of nineteen, she continued working near her husband's house. Family life was not always smooth, and there were many occasions when her husband's support was limited. However, she never allowed these difficulties to discourage her. She took full responsibility for her family and worked tirelessly to move it forward. Providing quality education to her two sons, became the greatest goal of her life. The family survived on the meagre income from her handloom work combined with her husband's salary. Despite increasing household and medical expenses, she never compromised on her children's education.

They performed well in their SSLC, Higher Secondary, and degree examinations. First son later secured a job in the Kerala Government Police, got married, and now lives with his mother while sharing family responsibilities. Second son works as a video producer. She stated that her children's achievements are the result of her years of hard work and sacrifice. Although she lost the opportunity to receive an education herself, she devoted her life to ensuring that her children received the education she could not.

She shared that the death of her husband due to age-related illness six months ago left her emotionally devastated. Although losing her life partner was a great shock, she did not remain overwhelmed by grief. After a short break, she returned to her work. She explained that staying busy helps her overcome the emotional pain caused by the memories of her husband. For her, work is not merely a source of income but also a source of emotional strength.

She also explained that her health condition is becoming increasingly concerning. Her eyesight has gradually deteriorated, and she experiences severe body pain due to long hours of sitting and weaving. She continues to suffer from complications following the hysterectomy she underwent five years ago. Nevertheless, she has no intention of giving up her profession. She stated that waking up at four o'clock every morning, completing household chores, visiting the temple, and then beginning her weaving work has become her daily routine.

Her greatest wish is to repay the housing loan she borrowed to build her house and spend the rest of her life peacefully without debt. Although she is aware of the pension schemes available for handloom workers, she has decided to continue working for as long as possible, believing in self-reliance rather than depending on others.

Her life is not merely a story of personal struggle but also reflects the present realities of the handloom sector in Balaramapuram. Once regarded as one of Kerala's proud traditional industries, the Balaramapuram handloom sector is now facing serious economic and social challenges. Traditionally, weavers produce Kasavu mundus and supply them to intermediary shops, receiving only a very small payment in return. Consequently, they do not receive wages that truly reflect the value of their hard work, and their income is insufficient even to meet the basic needs of their families.

The monthly income from handloom weaving is approximately ₹7,000 to ₹8,000, depending on the availability of orders and seasonal demand. Demand increases only during festivals such as Onam, Vishu, and the Malayalam month of Chingam. During the remaining months, workers experience severe financial difficulties. Rising prices of raw materials, low wages, electricity expenses, and healthcare costs further worsen their situation.

Today's younger generation is reluctant to enter the handloom profession. They believe it requires immense physical effort while offering very little financial return. Consequently, many young people pursue higher education and professional training in order to obtain better jobs in the government or private sector. Concerns regarding social status, financial security, and family prestige also discourage them from choosing handloom weaving as a career.

Another major challenge faced by the sector is the shortage of skilled workers capable of repairing damaged looms. Road development, urbanisation, and the reduction of available workspace have further affected production. In addition, the growing popularity of machine-

made and modern garments has significantly reduced the demand for traditional handloom products.

Despite these challenges, the Balaramapuram handloom tradition continues to remain an important part of Kerala's cultural heritage. Kasavu garments still hold great cultural significance during weddings, temple festivals, and traditional celebrations. Therefore, preserving and modernising this sector while encouraging the younger generation to participate has become increasingly necessary.

According to her, education and secure employment are the greatest assets in today's world. This belief motivated her to work tirelessly throughout her life to provide her children with quality education. Although she is not particularly interested in joining cooperative societies, she is proud to continue her traditional occupation and believes that she is contributing to the preservation of Balaramapuram's handloom heritage. She believes that by continuing this profession, she is helping to preserve an important cultural tradition.

Despite all the hardships she has faced, she remains a compassionate and caring person. She warmly welcomes visitors and often asks, "Would you like a glass of water?" Her kindness reflects her humanity and generosity. The many difficulties she encountered in life did not weaken her; instead, they made her stronger. She stated that she considers herself not merely an ordinary handloom worker but a strong woman who has overcome countless challenges through perseverance and determination. Her life is not only a story of personal struggle but also a reflection of the present realities and future challenges faced by Kerala's traditional handloom sector.

## CASE 2

He is a person who has been engaged in handloom work in Balaramapuram for more than fifty years. His life has been filled with hard work and perseverance. Due to financial difficulties during his childhood, he was able to study only up to the fifth standard. He entered the handloom profession at a young age to support his family. Although he faced many hardships at different stages of his life, he never gave up his dedication to his traditional occupation.

He got married at the age of thirty. After marriage, he decided to continue with handloom work rather than seeking another occupation. His wife also accepted this profession with interest and works alongside him. They operate two handlooms installed near their house, where they continue weaving after completing their daily household responsibilities. They find pride and satisfaction in preserving their family's traditional occupation.

They have two children, Thatha and Jayan. Despite financial limitations, they gave great importance to their children's education. They made sincere efforts to provide them with the best possible education and create a better future for them.

One of the major challenges faced by the handloom sector today is the lack of interest among the younger generation. Even though employment opportunities exist, factors such as concerns about social status, reputation, and income insecurity discourage young people from entering this field. A profession that was once the primary source of livelihood for many families is now surviving only on a limited scale. However, handloom continues to remain an important symbol of our cultural heritage and social unity.

Due to the long hours of sitting and working, he suffers from severe back pain and knee pain. As a result, he has reduced his working hours to around one hour per day. Despite receiving treatment and medicines from several hospitals, he has not experienced significant relief. Although his old-age pension is his main source of income at present, he is unwilling to abandon the handloom profession that has been passed down through generations. His emotional attachment to the profession and his cultural commitment continue to motivate him to remain connected with weaving.

The income from the handloom sector is not stable. Good prices for dhotis are usually received only during special occasions and festival seasons. Therefore, financial uncertainty has become a constant part of his life. In addition, climate changes, especially increased humidity, negatively affect the drying of yarn and make the weaving process more difficult.

At one stage, due to difficulties in repaying the housing loan, there was a situation where the house faced the possibility of being seized. However, his son repaid the loan from his own savings and protected the family from that crisis. Although his son, daughter-in-law, and grandchildren live in the same house, he states that he does not always receive the required emotional and physical support in daily life. Nevertheless, the assistance provided by family members during hospital visits and medical treatments for age-related illnesses remains a great source of comfort for him.

Despite health issues and financial difficulties, family support and his determination to continue the traditional occupation remain the major strengths that help him move forward in life.

He believes that preserving the handloom industry of Balaramapuram is not merely a personal wish of the weavers but also a social responsibility to protect our cultural heritage. However, handloom workers today face several serious challenges, including low income, increasing prices of raw materials, competition from machine-made textiles, market uncertainties, exploitation by intermediaries, debt burdens, and insufficient government support. The declining interest of the younger generation in entering this field has also become a major concern for its future.

Therefore, he believes that only through timely government interventions, financial assistance, improved marketing facilities, and policies that encourage young people to enter the handloom sector can the traditional occupation of Balaramapuram be preserved for future generations. Such efforts would improve the living conditions of weavers and ensure the protection and continuation of Kerala's rich handloom heritage.

### CASE 3

She has great respect and affection for people engaged in handloom work. Her grandmother and mother were also handloom workers in the past. However, they stopped continuing this occupation in recent years due to health issues. During her childhood, she loved listening to the sound of weaving, and that sound still remains vivid in her memories. Witnessing the hardships experienced by her parents motivated her to focus more on her studies. Through their efforts and sacrifices, she was able to achieve excellent results in Plus Two.

Since the wages received from weaving work are very low, today's young men and women are showing less interest in this sector. They prefer to pursue higher education, secure better employment opportunities within the country or abroad, and lead more stable lives. Although they are aware of health insurance and insurance schemes available for weavers, many are unwilling to choose handloom work due to low income and the lack of job security.

The present generation of youth prefers to understand changing times and move towards new opportunities. At the same time, Balaramapuram continues to be recognised as a place where uniqueness, unity, and togetherness are preserved. Although modern clothing is commonly used in daily life, the tradition of wearing khadi and handloom clothes during special occasions and temple visits continues to exist.

Her younger brother is currently working as an auto driver. His income, along with the small income earned by her, helps meet their family's daily needs. However, due to their limited income, they continue to face several financial difficulties. The condition of their house is particularly poor, making daily life challenging. During the rainy season, water enters the house, creating difficulties in maintaining a safe living environment. Although an application has been submitted to the panchayat for housing assistance, no support has been received so far.

Along with these challenges, her personal responsibilities have also increased. After her marriage, she has a young daughter who is currently studying in a nursery. Ensuring her daughter's education and future has become one of her major concerns. Despite various difficulties, her main aim is to support her family and work hard to secure a better future for her daughter.

According to her, today's youth respect handloom weavers and their products, but certain changes are necessary to make the sector more attractive. Handloom products, especially

Kerala's traditional Kasavu garments, are highly valued among young people. However, she believes that modern designs, trendy colours, and innovative styles should be introduced along with traditional patterns. She also points out that the high cost of handloom products prevents many ordinary people from purchasing them. In the present digital era, greater availability through online platforms and stronger social media marketing strategies are essential. She also emphasises the need for increased government support and assistance to improve the living conditions of handloom workers.

After marriage, since her husband does not have a house, she is currently living with her mother. She wishes that more benefits and support systems should be provided for handloom workers. Many people engaged in this profession face serious health problems. The existence of Balaramapuram handloom has helped preserve the region's uniqueness, reputation, and cultural identity. Although young people respect handloom products, she believes that improvements are necessary to meet changing consumer preferences. Traditional products such as Kerala's Kasavu garments remain popular, but incorporating modern designs and fashionable colours can help attract more customers. She also highlights the importance of online marketing, digital platforms, and government initiatives to improve the livelihood of weavers.

In her opinion, handloom products are environmentally friendly and represent a valuable part of our cultural heritage. To attract the younger generation, handloom clothing should be promoted through fashion shows, college programmes, and other public events. Sharing the personal stories of weavers and their struggles through social media can create a stronger emotional connection among consumers. Providing customised designs can help meet individual preferences. Young entrepreneurs should be encouraged to enter this field, and awareness programmes should be conducted at school and college levels. Promoting handloom products as gift items can also help expand the market.

The health problems faced by handloom weavers are a serious concern. Sitting in the same position for long hours and continuously operating handlooms often lead to back pain, neck pain, and finger-related problems. Exposure to dust and textile fibres can cause respiratory difficulties, while continuous close-up work may affect eyesight. When physical health issues combine with financial struggles and mental stress, effective measures are necessary to improve the health and quality of life of handloom workers.

She shared that her mother experienced back pain, neck pain, and finger-related problems due to working on the handloom for extended hours. Continuous strain on the eyes while performing detailed weaving work also affected her eyesight. She emphasised that proper healthcare facilities and support systems are essential for improving the well-being of handloom workers.

She also expressed concern that the number of people continuing handloom work is gradually decreasing. The younger generation is increasingly moving towards higher education and better employment opportunities in other sectors, resulting in reduced interest in continuing traditional handloom occupations. As a result, even the existing workforce in this sector is facing difficulties in sustaining the profession. She expressed concern that if this trend continues, the future of the handloom industry may face serious challenges.

During special occasions and festival seasons, people from different places visit Balaramapuram to purchase handloom textiles. These products, which reflect the beauty and purity of tradition, provide a unique sense of satisfaction and cultural connection. As symbols of an eco-friendly lifestyle and heritage, handloom products must be protected and promoted. Therefore, encouraging young men and women to recognise the value of handloom and actively contribute to preserving this valuable cultural heritage is essential.

## CASE 4

A 63-year-old woman from Balaramapuram is a handloom worker. She was born and brought up in a family that had been closely associated with the handloom industry for generations. From her childhood, she experienced financial hardships and various life challenges. Due to the poor economic condition of her family, she had to assist her parents in handloom weaving from a very young age. Although she wished to continue her education, meeting the family's daily expenses became a greater priority, and therefore she was unable to complete her studies. Entering the workforce at an early age to support her family became the most significant turning point in her life.

She got married at a young age. After marriage, she assumed the full responsibility of managing her family. Her family consists of her husband and their three children, Sandhya, Chinnu, and Manoj. She and her husband depended on the limited income earned through handloom weaving to support the household. However, this income was insufficient to meet all the family's needs. They often struggled to provide basic necessities such as food, clothing, healthcare, and education.

Handloom weaving is a highly labour-intensive occupation that demands long hours of work. She stated that despite working from early morning until evening, the wages she received were very low. Rising prices of raw materials, poor remuneration for handloom products, and uncertainties in the market further worsened the living conditions of handloom workers. As she grew older, she developed several health problems, yet she continued working because her family's livelihood depended on her income.

She attached great importance to her children's education. However, due to financial constraints, she was able to educate them only up to the SSLC level. She could not afford the expenses required for higher education. Meeting her children's healthcare needs and medical expenses was also a major financial challenge, and the family frequently had to borrow money to meet these expenses.

The marriages of her two daughters became the greatest financial burden on the family. To meet the marriage expenses, she obtained a bank loan. Although she initially tried to repay the loan, the low income from handloom weaving made it impossible to continue the repayments. As a result, the bank initiated proceedings to seize her house. The fear of losing their home caused severe emotional distress to the family.

To prevent the house from being seized, she borrowed money from relatives, acquaintances, and private lenders. She used this money to clear the bank dues and recover her house. However, this increased her personal debts. Eventually, to overcome the financial crisis, she was forced to sell her land. Selling the property, which she had considered the result of years of hard work and savings, caused her immense emotional pain.

Despite all these hardships, she remained determined to support her family. She often sacrificed her personal needs and aspirations for the welfare of her family. Throughout every challenge, her primary goal was to ensure the safety and future of her children and family.

Even at the age of 63, she continues to work as a handloom weaver. Although advancing age has brought physical difficulties, she continues to work as much as possible to improve her family's financial condition. She expressed hope that handloom workers would receive fair wages, employment security, healthcare facilities, and old-age pension benefits to improve their quality of life.

She stated that her life is a remarkable example of how self-confidence, hard work, and perseverance can help a person overcome financial hardships.

## CASE 5

The respondent is a 65-year-old handloom worker from the Balaramapuram region. He was born and brought up in a family traditionally associated with the handloom industry. From his childhood, handloom weaving was the main source of livelihood for his family. Since both of his parents were handloom workers, he became familiar with the methods and techniques of this occupation from an early age. Using the knowledge and training received from his parents, he later adopted handloom weaving as his means of livelihood. He continues this traditional occupation, which has been passed down through generations.

He is a person who has faced many challenges throughout his life. The death of his parents was a major turning point in his life. After the death of his parents, he had to continue his life alone. Since he did not get married, he currently lives by himself. He does not have regular support from family members or close relatives. He has to take responsibility for all aspects of his life and move forward independently.

At present, he lives in a small house situated on a two-cent plot of land. He leads a very simple life. The house where he lives is his only shelter and support. Since he lives alone, he manages cooking, household activities, and daily needs by himself. Although he faces difficulties in carrying out these activities due to his increasing age, he tries to live as independently as possible without depending on others.

Handloom weaving is his only source of income. He receives income for his daily food and basic needs only when he goes to work regularly. If he is unable to work on a particular day, he loses that day's income. Therefore, even when he has health problems, he is forced to continue working to meet his living expenses. Handloom work requires great effort and dedication. Sitting at the loom for long hours and maintaining careful attention during weaving create additional difficulties for him due to his old age.

Currently, he is experiencing several health problems. In particular, leg pain and eye pain affect his daily life and work activities. He shared that sitting in the same position for long periods and engaging in detailed work with threads have increased his health problems. Although physical difficulties have increased due to old age, he has to continue working for his livelihood.

He lives under very limited financial conditions. The income received from handloom work is only enough for his daily food and essential expenses. Meeting the costs of medicines, medical

treatment, and household expenses is often difficult. The absence of family members or permanent supporters during emergency situations is a major challenge in his life. He uses his limited income very carefully.

He also shared his concerns about the current situation of the handloom sector. He stated that interest in handloom work has decreased compared to the past. He pointed out that the younger generation is not willing to take up this occupation. Low income, increased workload, and lack of job security are the major reasons that discourage young people from entering this field. He also expressed that the spread of modern machine-made products has negatively affected traditional handloom work.

He is more concerned about the future of the handloom occupation than his own life. He shared that, “After our generation, this handloom occupation will disappear.” He believes that it is a great loss that this traditional occupation, which has been passed down through generations, is not being continued by the younger generation. He believes that handloom work is not only a means of livelihood but also a part of culture and tradition.

He expressed the need for more support from the government and society to protect the handloom sector. He stated that this sector can be sustained if workers receive better wages, stable employment opportunities, healthcare facilities, financial assistance, and marketing support. He also highlighted the need for greater protection and support for elderly handloom workers.

Despite facing an isolated life, old age, health problems, financial difficulties, and uncertainty in the occupation, he continues to move forward with confidence. His life, which faces challenges with patience and courage, is remarkable. He shared that handloom work is not only a source of income but also a part of his life and a symbol of his family tradition.

The sacrifices and dedication she showed in fulfilling her family responsibilities are truly noteworthy.

## **CHAPTER 5: DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION**

## **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter discusses the major themes identified through the qualitative analysis of data collected from handloom weavers in Balaramapuram, Kerala. The themes were developed through careful reading, transcription, coding, and interpretation of the responses obtained from the participants. The analysis focuses on the challenges faced by handloom weavers, their working conditions, socio-economic struggles, and the strategies adopted for survival.

## **5.2 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS**

### **5.2.1 PROFILE OF THE RESPONDENTS**

The respondents of this study are handloom weavers residing in the Balaramapuram region. Both men and women who have traditionally pursued handloom weaving as their occupation were included in the study. The respondents belong to different age groups and have varying years of experience in the weaving sector. Information regarding their age, gender, educational qualification, work experience, income level, family background, and other relevant details was collected and analysed. Experienced senior weavers with long-term involvement in the profession as well as younger generation weavers were part of the study. The profile of the respondents was prepared to understand the socio-economic conditions, occupational experiences, challenges faced, and survival strategies of handloom weavers.

### **5.2.2 FINANCIAL CONDITION**

#### **ANNUAL INCOME**

annual income is primarily dependent on her handloom weaving work, which provides an uncertain and limited source of livelihood. Her monthly income from weaving is approximately ₹7,000 to ₹8,000, depending on the availability of orders and seasonal demand. Therefore, her estimated annual income ranges between ₹84,000 and ₹96,000. This income is insufficient to adequately manage household expenses, healthcare costs, and loan repayments, especially after the death of her husband.

Her financial condition reflects the broader economic struggles faced by traditional handloom workers in Balaramapuram. Despite their intensive labour and contribution to preserving Kerala's cultural heritage, weavers receive low wages due to dependence on intermediaries and limited market access. Seasonal demand during festivals such as Onam and Vishu provides temporary improvement in income, while the remaining months are marked by financial insecurity.

Like many other handloom workers, Case 1's faces difficulties due to rising raw material costs, increasing medical expenses, and reduced demand for traditional handloom products. Although she is eligible for pension benefits, she prefers to continue working and maintain financial independence. Her situation highlights the economic vulnerability of elderly traditional workers and the need for better financial support, fair wages, and sustainable employment opportunities within the handloom sector.

## **ECONOMIC CRISIS**

The continued involvement in the handloom sector is mainly influenced by economic limitations. Due to financial difficulties during his childhood, he was able to study only up to the fifth standard. He entered the handloom profession at a young age to support his family's financial needs. Although he had limited opportunities to enter other occupations, he was unwilling to abandon the traditional occupation that had been passed down through generations.

“Handloom work has become a part of my life. Even though the income is low, I do not have the desire to leave this profession.”

(Case: Interview)

The income generated from the handloom sector is not stable. Better prices for handloom products are received mainly during festivals and special occasions. During other periods, the income earned is insufficient to meet even the basic needs of the family. The increasing cost of raw materials, medical expenses, and loan repayments have further intensified his financial difficulties.

At one stage, due to difficulties in repaying the housing loan, his house faced the possibility of being seized. However, his son repaid the loan using his own savings and protected the family from that crisis. Although his old-age pension is currently his main source of income, he is unwilling to give up the handloom profession to which he has dedicated his entire life. His emotional attachment to the occupation and commitment towards preserving his cultural heritage continue to motivate him to remain connected with weaving.

Despite health issues and financial difficulties, family support and his self-confidence continue to remain the major strengths that help him move forward in life.

### **LACK OF STABLE INCOME AND UNDERPAY**

One of the major economic challenges faced by handloom workers is the lack of stable income. Employment in this sector depends on the availability of orders and market demand, resulting in irregular earnings throughout the year. Handloom products such as dhotis receive better prices mainly during festival seasons and special occasions.

Handloom workers do not receive wages that truly reflect their hard work and effort. Due to their dependence on intermediaries, they often receive only a limited share of the actual value of their products. Low wages, increasing raw material costs, and rising living expenses negatively affect their financial security.

“Handloom work requires great effort, but the income received does not increase according to the amount of labour involved.”

(Case: Interview)

Due to prolonged sitting and working hours, he suffers from severe back pain and knee pain. Because of his health problems, he has reduced his working hours to around one hour per day. The increasing expenses for medical treatment and medicines have also added to his financial burden.

The economic instability faced by handloom workers in Balaramapuram affects their overall quality of life. The growing competition from machine-made textiles, market uncertainties, and declining interest among the younger generation in entering this profession are major challenges affecting the future of this sector.

However, he believes that handloom is not merely an occupation but an important part of Kerala's cultural heritage. He believes that only through government support, financial assistance, improved marketing facilities, and policies encouraging young people to enter the sector can the traditional handloom industry of Balaramapuram be preserved and transferred to future generations.

## **LACK OF STABLE INCOME AND UNDERPAY**

Handloom weavers do not have permanent employment under the corporation, so they do not receive a stable daily income. This increases their financial instability.

The work of Case 2 is irregular. It depends on the availability of orders and festival seasons. Therefore, she often goes days or even weeks without work. To increase her income, she depends on small businesses, but that is also insufficient.

“Orders are very few. I only get good income during Onam and Vishu festivals in a year”

(Case 2: Interviewed)

Depending on irregular work prevents her from having a secure financial foundation. The lack of daily income causes a lot of mental stress. The uncertainty of whether she will be able to earn enough to support her family increases her emotional strain. Competition from machine-made garments and big companies further reduces their opportunities.

The wages Case 1 receives are not proportionate to the hard work and time she puts in. When Kasavu mundus are given to middlemen, they receive only a very small amount. Although it is not a hazardous job, this occupation which causes strain to the eyes and body does not give adequate financial compensation. Their economic situation worsens due to low wages, high family dependency, and lack of alternative income sources. However, permanent employees under the corporation or cooperative societies receive a stable monthly income with financial security.

## **BURDEN OF FAMILY**

Case 1 is responsible for her entire family including two children. Despite increasing household and medical expenses, the family manages with the meagre income from handloom work. The burden of supporting a large family on low income prevents her from improving her standard of living and accessing better facilities. The lack of government support further increases this vulnerability.

(Case 1 : Interviewed on Dec 22th 2025)

Case 2 supports the family along with his wife. Although he gave great importance to his children's education, he struggled due to financial limitations. Even in old age with health problems, he is responsible for repaying the house loan and supporting the family. His son helped by repaying the loan, but he still depends on work for daily expenses.

Case 3 has a small family after marriage. Since her husband does not have a stable income, the family manages with her small income and her brother's income. Her main concern is her daughter's education and future. The poor condition of the house and financial difficulties make their life hard.

Case 4's only source of income for her family of husband and 3 children is handloom work. This income is not enough even for food, clothing, health, and education. To meet her daughters' marriage expenses, she took out a bank loan. Unable to repay it due to low income, she faced the threat of losing her house. Finally, she had to sell her land to clear the debt. Even at the age of 63, she continues to work to support her family.

Case 5 is unmarried and lives alone. Handloom weaving is his only source of income. He only earns on the days he works. It is difficult to meet even medicine, food, and household expenses. With increasing age, health problems have increased, but he is forced to continue working for livelihood. The absence of anyone to help in emergencies is his major challenge.

### **5.2.3 AWARENESS ABOUT THE VOCATION**

#### **LONG TERM EXPOSURE TO THE JOB**

Most of the handloom weavers in Balaramapuram have been engaged in this occupation for decades. This prolonged exposure to repetitive, labor-intensive work highlights the physical and mental toll that traditional weaving demands, especially among economically marginalized

families. Despite health issues and low returns, they continue this job due to lack of alternatives and emotional attachment to tradition.

Case 2 has been working in handloom weaving for over 50 years.

“I started working on the loom when I was very young to support my family. Even now I weave daily”

(Case 2: Interviewed)

(Case 2: Interviewed on Dec 24th 2025)

His continued engagement shows how economic vulnerability traps individuals in physically demanding and low-paying traditional work. The long duration also points to a systemic failure in providing alternative livelihood options for traditional artisan communities in Balaramapuram.

Case started weaving at the age of 15 and is still working at 55.

“I learned from my mother. I have been doing this work for 40 years”

(Case 1: Interviewed)

The fact that she has spent most of her life in this occupation shows the intergenerational nature of handloom work. However, there is limited awareness about the long-term health risks like eyesight problems, back pain, and joint issues caused by prolonged sitting and detailed work.

Case 5 has been engaged in weaving for over 40 years.

“I have been doing handloom work for the last four decades”

\_(Case 5: Interviewed)\_

His long service reflects resilience, but also shows dependence on a single traditional skill with no retirement security.

## **NEGLIGENCE IN HEALTH AND ERGONOMIC CARE**

Despite the physical strain of weaving, most weavers do not take proper ergonomic precautions or regular health checkups. They continue working even with pain, citing financial necessity.

Case 2 and his wife work for long hours without breaks and have developed severe back pain and knee pain.

“We sit and weave the whole day. Now I can only work for 1 hour because of body pain”

(Case 2: Interviewed)

The absence of proper seating, lighting, and rest periods increases the risk of chronic health problems.

Case 4 worked from early morning till evening for decades with very low wages.

“Even with pain, I had to work because the family depended on me”

(Case 4: Interviewed)

Case 4: Interviewed on Dec 26th 2025)

This negligence reflects lack of awareness about occupational health and absence of welfare support for informal weavers. Unlike workers in cooperative societies, self-employed weavers have no access to health camps, insurance, or ergonomic training. This shows the inequality between organized and unorganized handloom workers.

## **HEALTH RISK**

The health of handloom weavers is at constant risk due to the nature of their work. Long-term exposure to poor posture, dim lighting, dust from yarn, and continuous eye strain can lead to serious health problems.

Most cases show limited awareness about occupational health risks.

Case 1 suffers from deteriorating eyesight and severe body pain due to long hours of weaving. She also has complications after hysterectomy.

Case 3's mother experienced back pain, neck pain, and finger problems due to years of weaving.

Case 5 suffers from leg pain and eye pain due to sitting in the same position and doing detailed thread work.

Although they are aware of basic issues like body pain, there is underestimation of long-term effects. This lack of awareness is linked to low education levels and no access to occupational health education. There is an urgent need for health education, regular medical camps, and ergonomic support for handloom workers.

## **5.2.4 SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY DYNAMICS**

### **SOCIAL DYNAMICS**

#### **1. Social Recognition and Changing Perception**

Unlike sanitation work, handloom weaving is generally respected as part of Kerala's cultural heritage. However, it is still considered a "low-income" profession by younger generations.

Case 1 says:

"I am proud to continue this traditional occupation. I feel I am protecting Balaramapuram's handloom heritage"

(Case 1: Interviewed)

Case 3 mentions:

"Today's youth respect handloom and Kasavu, but they don't want to do the work because of low income"

(Case 3: Interviewed)

Case 3: Interviewed on Dec 24th 2025)

This shows a generational shift. Society values the product but not the profession. Weavers are respected during festivals and temple events, but face stigma regarding financial status.

## **2. Gendered Nature of Work**

Handloom weaving is done by both men and women. Case 1 and Case 4 are women who became primary breadwinners due to family circumstances. Their role reflects how women in artisan families take on economic responsibility despite physical challenges.

Case 2's wife also works alongside him, showing family-based labor where both spouses contribute to sustain the household.

## **COMMUNITY DYNAMICS**

### **1. Family Support and Pressure**

Family support is a key strength. Case 2's son repaid the housing loan. Case 1's sons are educated and support her now.

But there is also pressure from family to leave the profession. Case 5's relatives advise him to stop due to old age and health issues.

### **2. Community Identity**

Balaramapuram is known for its unique Kasavu tradition. During festivals, people from different places come to buy handloom products. This gives weavers a sense of pride and cultural connection.

Case 3 says:

“Balaramapuram is still known for unity and traditional values. People respect our handloom during festivals”

(Case 3: Interviewed)

However, community support is limited to cultural appreciation. There is very little economic or institutional support from the local community or panchayat for improving weavers' livelihood.

## **5.2.5 SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY DYNAMICS**

### **SOCIAL DYNAMICS**

#### **1. Factors leading to Marginalization**

Unlike sanitation work, handloom weaving is not openly stigmatized, but it is still undervalued economically and socially. The profession is seen as “traditional” and “low-income”, which leads to lack of respect and limited social mobility for weavers. This perception, combined with limited education and market dependence on middlemen, contributes to their marginalization.

Despite government schemes and cooperative policies intended to support handloom workers, Case 3's family continues to face financial struggles.

“My grandmother and mother were weavers. But they had to stop due to health issues. Even with insurance schemes, the income is too low to survive”

(Case 3: Interviewed)

The inability to earn a stable income, despite skill and tradition, reflects how artisan communities are still left out of mainstream economic growth. Young educated members prefer other jobs due to income insecurity.

Despite multiple appeals to handloom development corporations and panchayat, many weavers have not received timely financial aid or housing assistance.

“The condition of our house is very poor. We applied to panchayat but got no support till now”

(Case 3: Interviewed)

This lack of response shows institutional neglect toward self-employed weavers who are not part of large cooperative societies.

Unlike many others, Case 5 has not faced direct social discrimination. He maintains that “every job has dignity”. His pride in continuing the family tradition has helped him avoid social devaluation.

“Handloom work is not just income. It is part of my life and family tradition”

(Case 5: Interviewed)

Case 5: Interviewed on Dec 28th 2025)

## **2. Gendered Nature of Work**

Handloom weaving in Balaramapuram was traditionally a family-based occupation involving both men and women. However, women bear a disproportionate burden as they manage both household work and weaving.

Case 1’s involvement highlights this gendered reality. She started at age 15, took full responsibility after marriage, and continued even after her husband’s death.

“I took full responsibility for my family. Providing education to my two sons was my biggest goal”

(Case 1: Interviewed)

Despite physical challenges like eyesight problems and body pain, she continues to weave because the family depends on her income.

Case 4 also reflects this burden. Married at a young age, she managed the household with 3 children on limited weaving income.

“Working from morning till evening, yet the wages were very low. But I had to continue for my family”

(Case 4: Interviewed)

Women in marginalized weaving communities often take on labor-intensive work to ensure family survival. This places them in physically straining conditions with minimal support, reinforcing that economic vulnerability disproportionately affects women in traditional sectors.

Moreover, women weavers also face the challenge of balancing dignity with economic need.

Case 3 notes:

“Young people respect handloom products, especially Kasavu. But they don’t want to do the work because it is hard and pays very little”

(Case 3: Interviewed)

Her statement reflects how the dignity of the craft is acknowledged, but the labor behind it is undervalued.

## **COMMUNITY DYNAMICS**

### **1. Objection from Family**

Some families discourage younger members from continuing weaving due to financial instability and health risks.

Case 5 faces this situation.

“My family says I should stop working because of my age and health. But I have no other income”

(Case 5: Interviewed)

The objection comes from concern for health, but also reflects the lack of faith in weaving as a sustainable livelihood.

Case 1’s family supported her in educating children out of weaving, showing a desire to move to more secure jobs.

“Education and secure employment are the greatest assets today. That’s why I worked hard for my children”

(Case 1: Interviewed)

## **2. Community Engagement**

Within Balaramapuram, handloom weaving is still culturally accepted and respected. Most community members understand its importance to local identity.

Case 3 mentions:

“Balaramapuram is known for unity and tradition. During festivals, people from outside come to buy our handloom”

(Case 3: Interviewed)

The community takes pride in Kasavu and handloom as symbols of Kerala’s heritage. This local acceptance helps weavers maintain social dignity even while facing economic hardship.

However, this acceptance does not extend to economic support. The larger market and society value the product, but not the weaver’s labour and struggle.

## **3. Support from Co-workers and Networks**

In the past, weaving was done collectively in households and small groups.

Case 2 and his wife run two looms together near their house.

“We work together after finishing household work. We take pride in continuing our family occupation”

(Case 2: Interviewed)

Case 1 learned by observing her mother and assisting her.

But over time, collective work has reduced. Many younger weavers have left, leaving older weavers isolated. There is no strong union or collective bargaining for self-employed weavers like Case 1, 4 and 5. Without cooperative membership, they lack access to bulk orders, raw

material subsidies, and social security. This absence of a support network leaves them vulnerable to market fluctuations and exploitation by intermediaries.

## **5.2.6 OCCUPATIONAL RELATED CRISIS**

### **INHERITED JOB**

For most of the Cases, handloom weaving is an occupation passed down through generations. It is not only a hereditary skill but also closely tied to the traditional artisan communities of Balaramapuram. The deeply ingrained nature of this work has made it difficult for families to seek alternative employment, creating a cycle where descendants are expected to continue the same profession.

The weaving work performed by Cases 1, 2, 4 and 5 appears to be a traditional family occupation. Such hereditary occupations often confine individuals to a specific livelihood that offers limited upward mobility. These jobs are culturally valued but economically undervalued, trapping families in low-income work for generations.

The transmission of this skill from generation to generation reflects a vicious cycle. Families involved in weaving often lack higher education, capital, and access to other job markets necessary to break free from this pattern.

As Case 1 mentioned,

“My children studied well and got other jobs. But I had no other option. I started working at 15”

(Case 1: Interviewed)

This shows how early entry into weaving limits opportunities for education and alternative careers.

The nature of the job is often not by choice but out of compulsion. The lack of viable alternatives and family responsibility pushes families like Case 4 and Case 5 to continue weaving despite low returns.

Even with awareness of pension schemes, weavers remain bound by tradition and economic necessity.

Case 2's children pursued education and moved to other professions, but he and his wife continue weaving to preserve the family tradition.

This intergenerational continuation highlights both cultural pride and economic compulsion.

## **LACK OF ALTERNATIVE EMPLOYMENT**

In addition to weaving, Cases 1, 3 and 5 have tried other forms of work to supplement income.

Case 1's family depended on her husband's salary along with weaving.

Case 3's brother works as an auto driver and her small income from weaving supports the household.

Case 5 has no other skill and depends entirely on weaving.

These alternative forms of employment provide only temporary relief and lack regularity and benefits needed for sustainable livelihood. Their reliance on multiple sources shows the unstable nature of handloom income.

The hereditary nature of the job makes it extremely difficult to find alternatives. The skill is so specialized that transitioning to other sectors requires training, capital, and social networks which most weavers lack.

To cope with financial instability, Case 3 focuses on studies and hopes for a stable job. But for older weavers, the limited education and age make it nearly impossible to switch careers.

The need to start working at an early age, like Case 1 at 15 years, limits their opportunity to seek higher education and other employment. This reinforces their dependence on weaving despite low income.

## **JOB COMPOSITION**

The work of a handloom weaver involves much more than just weaving cloth. It includes yarn preparation, dyeing, warping, loom maintenance, and marketing of products.

Case 2 and his wife operate two handlooms installed near their house. After completing household responsibilities, they continue weaving.

“We find pride in preserving our family’s traditional occupation”

(Case 2: Interviewed)

Case 1 follows a strict daily routine: household chores, temple visit, and then weaving from early morning.

Case 4 worked from early morning till evening to meet family expenses.

“Despite working all day, the wages were very low”

(Case 4: Interviewed)

The diversified nature of the job highlights that weaving is not just production but also managing orders, dealing with middlemen, and handling seasonal demand. During festival seasons like Onam and Vishu, the workload increases, but for the rest of the year work is scarce.

## **RISK FACTORS**

Handloom weavers are highly vulnerable due to physical strain, low wages, and lack of institutional support. Without proper intervention, they remain exposed to occupational health hazards.

### **1. Exposure to Physical and Environmental Hazards**

Prolonged sitting, repetitive hand movements, and poor lighting lead to chronic health issues.

Case 1 suffers from deteriorating eyesight and severe body pain.

Case 2 has severe back pain and knee pain, forcing him to reduce work to 1 hour per day.

Case 5 suffers from leg pain and eye pain due to long hours of detailed work.

Exposure to yarn dust and textile fibers can cause respiratory issues. Continuous close work affects eyesight. The physical dangers are compounded by lack of ergonomic seating and healthcare access.

## **2. Economic Vulnerability**

While not physical death, the profession faces “occupational death”. Low wages of ₹7,000 - ₹8,000 per month are insufficient for basic needs.

The death of traditional demand due to machine-made textiles has led to loss of livelihood for many families, similar to how mechanization displaced artisans.

## **3. Unhealthy Work Practices**

Most weavers work for long hours in cramped spaces with inadequate ventilation and lighting.

Case 4 worked from morning till evening with no breaks to meet household expenses.

Case 5 continues working even with health problems because “if I don’t work, I don’t eat”.

The absence of rest, healthcare, and ergonomic support makes the work physically unsustainable, especially in old age.

## **4. Mental Stress**

The irregularity of orders and financial vulnerability causes immense mental stress.

Case 3 says:

“Young people don’t want to do this job because income is low and there is no security”

(Case 3: Interviewed)

Case 4 faced severe emotional distress when the bank initiated proceedings to seize her house due to loan default.

The uncertainty about future orders, combined with responsibility for family, contributes significantly to anxiety and depression among weavers.

## **5. Illness and Injuries**

Case 1 has complications post-hysterectomy and worsening eyesight.

Case 2 has chronic back and knee pain.

Case 3's mother had back pain, neck pain, and finger problems due to years of weaving.

Case 5 has leg pain and eye strain.

These health issues are direct consequences of prolonged, repetitive labor without medical support or insurance.

## **IRREGULARITY OF JOB**

Most weavers' employment is unstable and seasonal. The demand for handloom products peaks only during festivals like Onam, Vishu, and wedding seasons.

Case 2 states:

“Good prices for dhotis are received only during festivals. Financial uncertainty is constant”

(Case 2: Interviewed)

Case 1 earns ₹7,000 - ₹8,000 per month depending on orders. The remaining months bring severe financial difficulty.

Self-employed weavers like Cases 1, 4 and 5 rely on middlemen and have no guaranteed orders. This irregularity places them in constant financial precarity.

A positive contrast is seen with weavers under cooperative societies who get some stable orders. But for independent weavers, there is no guarantee of regular work, pension, or insurance.

This situation of multiple vulnerability includes: traditional skill with low market value, aging workforce, rising raw material costs, and lack of direct market access.

## **IRREGULARITY OF JOB**

Most of the weavers' employment is unstable, and the frequency of available orders is low. Most of them are self-employed, relying on household production and supply to intermediary shops. However, these orders are inconsistent and seasonal, as demand for handloom products is not daily.

The irregularity of work places Case 1 and her family in financial precarity, as weaving is one of the main sources of income along with her husband's salary. Despite her 40 years of experience, there is no guarantee of regular orders.

Case 2 also faces financial uncertainty.

"The income from handlooms is not stable. Good prices for dhotis are received only during festivals"

(Case 2: Interviewed)

There is a situation of multiple vulnerability for weavers which includes: aging workforce, rising raw material costs, seasonal demand, and lack of direct market access.

One positive aspect for weavers under cooperative societies is the stability it provides through bulk orders and advance payments. But most of the Cases here are independent weavers. Case 3 notes that while insurance schemes exist, the low and irregular income makes it difficult to sustain the family.

"Our family still faces financial difficulties due to limited income"

(Case 3: Interviewed)

## **COMPETITION FROM MACHINE-MADE TEXTILES AND POWERLOOMS**

Case 2 faces increasing competition from powerloom and machine-made garments sold in markets at much lower prices. These products are produced faster and in bulk, which has reduced the demand for traditional handloom products.

“The younger generation prefers machine-made clothes. They are cheaper and easily available”

(Case 2: Interviewed)

Local residents and shops prefer powerloom products because they are affordable and produced in large quantities. This has directly reduced orders for traditional weavers.

Case 3 mentions that intermediaries and big textile shops buy machine-made Kasavu look-alikes and sell them as “handloom”, creating confusion in the market.

“When machine products come at low cost, people don’t check if it is real handloom. In the end, weavers like us lose orders and face blame for high prices”

(Case 3: Interviewed)

The unhealthy competition and imitation by the powerloom sector puts traditional weavers like Case 1, 4 and 5 into an economic crisis. They cannot compete with the price or speed of machines, yet their products require more time, skill, and labor.

## **LIMITED AREA OF MARKET**

Case 2’s market is confined to local buyers and festival seasons in Balaramapuram and nearby areas. The limitation to this specific area restricts earning potential and subjects them to local economic fluctuations.

The small pool of buyers means they must compete not only with powerlooms but also face declining interest among younger consumers. Dependency on local festivals and temple events increases vulnerability, as any change in consumer preference directly affects income.

Case 1 also has limitations as she mainly supplies to intermediary shops who pay very low rates.

“So there is lack of stable income and limited access to direct marketing”

This restricts their ability to get fair wages for their products.

## **USE OF ERGONOMIC AND HEALTH SUPPORT**

Most of the handloom workers like Case 1, 2, 4 and 5 lack access to ergonomic support, healthcare, and welfare measures, which are crucial for their protection.

“I am aware of pension schemes for handloom workers, but I prefer to continue working and be self-reliant”

(Case 1: Interviewed)

Additionally, government schemes and support are primarily available to registered cooperative members, leaving many self-employed individuals without benefits.

Case 5 takes personal precautions but has no institutional support.

“I manage my health on my own. The income is only enough for daily food and medicine”

(Case 5: Interviewed)

As Case 2 is an older weaver with pension, he has some support. But for daily health issues like back pain and eyesight problems, there is no medical assistance provided.

## **AWARENESS ABOUT OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH MEASURES**

Case 3 is well aware of the health risks involved in weaving. She mentions back pain, neck pain, eye strain, and respiratory issues from dust as major problems.

“Proper healthcare facilities and support systems are essential for weavers”

(Case 3: Interviewed)

Case 1 is aware of health issues like body pain and eyesight deterioration but continues working due to financial need.

Case 2 knows about age-related health problems but reduces working hours instead of stopping.

Case 4 worked for years without awareness of long-term health effects, leading to health deterioration with age.

Case 5 acknowledges that sitting for long hours and detailed work has increased his health problems, but he has no alternative.

There is low awareness and access to ergonomic training, health camps, and insurance among self-employed weavers.

### **5.2.7 SOCIAL SUPPORT**

#### **GOVERNMENTAL SUPPORT**

Most of the Cases have not received adequate financial assistance or benefits from government schemes, as these are often limited to cooperative members or require complex procedures.

The absence of direct support for self-employed handloom weavers leaves individuals vulnerable.

“I am not particularly interested in joining cooperative societies, but I am proud to continue the traditional occupation”

(Case 1: Interviewed)

Case 1's statement highlights that even when schemes exist, accessibility and trust are issues.

Case 3 mentions the need for increased government support.

“More benefits and support systems should be provided for handloom workers”

(Case 3: Interviewed)

Case 4 applied to panchayat for housing assistance but received no support.

The absence of marketing support, subsidies for raw materials, and healthcare combines to create a cycle of vulnerability.

### **BENEFITS FROM INSURANCE AND WELFARE SCHEMES.**

Case 2 depends on old-age pension as his main income now, as weaving income has reduced due to health issues.

Case 1 is aware of pension schemes for handloom workers but chooses to work for self-reliance.

For Cases 3, 4 and 5, there are no significant benefits from government health insurance or welfare schemes. This is due to the informal nature of their work and lack of registration under cooperative societies.

Case 4's family struggled with medical expenses and had to take loans.

“Meeting healthcare needs was a major financial challenge, and we frequently had to borrow money”

(Case 4: Interviewed)

Case 5 has no family support or insurance and uses his limited income very carefully for medicine and basic needs.

The lack of comprehensive health insurance, accident coverage, and pension for self-employed weavers leaves them unprotected in old age and during health crises. Institutional support remains limited, and gaps remain for those outside the cooperative system.

### **5.3. RESEARCH QUESTION WISE ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION**

#### **5.3.1 To examine the present status and working conditions of the handloom weaving community in Balaramapuram.**

The case studies reveal that the present condition of handloom weavers in Balaramapuram is characterised by economic insecurity, heavy physical labour, and occupational uncertainty. Most respondents entered the profession at a very young age due to poverty and limited educational opportunities. Handloom weaving remains a family-based traditional occupation that has been passed down through generations. Although the respondents expressed pride in preserving this cultural heritage, they continue to face low wages, irregular employment, seasonal demand, increasing production costs, and deteriorating health conditions. Long working hours have resulted in health problems such as back pain, neck pain, knee pain, eye strain, and other age-related illnesses. Despite these hardships, the respondents continue weaving because of their emotional attachment to the profession and the lack of alternative employment opportunities.

#### **5.3.2 To analyse the livelihood strategies and socio-economic conditions of handloom weavers in Balaramapuram.**

The findings indicate that handloom weavers adopt various strategies to sustain their livelihoods. Most families depend on multiple sources of income, including the earnings of spouses, children, pensions, and other occupations such as driving or government employment. Several respondents prioritised their children's education so that the younger generation could obtain secure jobs outside the handloom sector. Financial hardships forced many respondents to borrow loans, mortgage or sell property, and reduce personal expenses. Family support played a significant role in helping respondents cope with financial crises, medical expenses, and old age. The study also shows that self-reliance, hard work, and perseverance remain the major survival strategies among the weavers.

#### **5.3.3 To assess the changes in income, market access, and employment opportunities among handloom weavers in recent years.**

The study found that income from handloom weaving has become increasingly unstable. Most respondents reported earning only approximately ₹7,000–₹8,000 per month, with higher demand occurring mainly during festival seasons such as Onam, Vishu, and Chingam. The increasing cost of raw materials, low wages, exploitation by intermediaries, competition from machine-made textiles, and limited marketing opportunities have significantly reduced profitability. Respondents also highlighted the decline in employment opportunities and the decreasing number of skilled workers. They emphasised the need for improved marketing facilities, online sales platforms, fair pricing mechanisms, financial assistance, and stronger government intervention to ensure the sustainability of the sector.

#### **5.3.4 To explore the influence of social and cultural factors on the handloom weaving sector.**

The findings demonstrate that handloom weaving continues to hold significant cultural and social value in Balaramapuram. The occupation represents family tradition, community identity, and Kerala's cultural heritage. Traditional Kasavu garments continue to be widely used during weddings, temple festivals, and religious celebrations. However, changing lifestyles, modern fashion preferences, and concerns regarding social status have reduced the younger generation's willingness to continue the occupation. Respondents suggested introducing modern designs, fashionable colours, digital marketing, social media promotion, and awareness programmes to make handloom products more attractive while preserving their traditional identity.

#### **5.3.5 To examine the contribution of the handloom industry to the well-being, social cohesion, and community unity of the people.**

The study reveals that the handloom sector contributes significantly to the cultural identity, social cohesion, and collective well-being of the Balaramapuram community. Although the occupation does not provide adequate financial security, it strengthens relationships among families, preserves traditional knowledge, and promotes a shared sense of cultural pride. Respondents believe that protecting the handloom sector is not only important for the livelihood of weavers but also essential for safeguarding Kerala's traditional heritage. They emphasised that better government support, improved welfare schemes, healthcare facilities,

employment security, and youth participation are necessary to ensure the long-term sustainability of the handloom industry and improve the quality of life of handloom workers.

#### **5.4 DISCUSSION OF THEORETICAL PROPOSITIONS**

The findings of this study are closely related to several social science theories, particularly the Sustainable Livelihood Theory, Social Capital Theory, and Resilience Theory.

According to the Sustainable Livelihood Theory, individuals and families utilize the available resources, skills, and capabilities to sustain their livelihoods. The findings of this study show that handloom weavers continue to survive despite low wages, economic insecurity, and unstable employment by relying on family support, hard work, their children's education, and additional sources of income. These findings support the principles of the Sustainable Livelihood Theory.

The Social Capital Theory emphasizes the importance of social relationships, family support, and community networks in improving people's well-being. The study reveals that support from family members, relatives, neighbours, and the local community plays a significant role in helping handloom weavers overcome financial difficulties, health problems, and other life challenges.

The Resilience Theory explains how individuals adapt to and recover from adversity. The findings indicate that most handloom weavers continue their occupation despite poverty, debt, declining income, health problems, and personal losses. Their determination, perseverance, and ability to cope with challenges demonstrate a high level of resilience, thereby supporting the assumptions of this theory.

Furthermore, the study reveals that handloom weaving is not merely an economic activity but also an important means of preserving cultural heritage, community identity, and social cohesion. Therefore, the findings highlight the need for stronger government interventions, better marketing opportunities, fair wages, healthcare facilities, and greater youth participation to ensure the sustainability of the handloom sector and improve the quality of life of handloom weavers.

## **CHAPTER 6: FINDINGS, SUGGESTIONS AND CONCLUSIONS**

## **6.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter presents the key findings of the study titled “Challenges and Survival of Handloom Weavers in Balaramapuram, Kerala” based on the analysis of primary and secondary data collected during the research. The findings highlight the major economic, social, occupational, and health-related challenges faced by handloom weavers, as well as the various survival strategies they adopt to sustain their livelihoods and preserve the traditional handloom industry. The findings are organised according to the specific research questions and objectives of the study.

## **6.2 FINDINGS**

### **1. Perceptions and Attitudes of Handloom Weavers Towards Their Occupation and Challenges**

The findings of the study reveal that handloom weavers in Balaramapuram are fully aware of the numerous challenges associated with their occupation, including low income, irregular employment, health problems, competition from power loom and machine-made products, and the declining interest of the younger generation. Despite these challenges, they continue in the profession due to economic necessity, emotional attachment, and a strong commitment to preserving their traditional occupation.

Most weavers perceive handloom weaving not merely as a means of livelihood but as an integral part of their cultural identity and family heritage. Case 1, despite facing financial hardship, health problems, and the death of her husband, continues weaving because she believes that work provides both economic security and emotional strength. Similarly, Case 2 continues weaving even though his old-age pension has become his primary source of income. His commitment to preserving the family tradition motivates him to remain engaged in weaving despite severe physical pain and declining health.

The study also found that economic necessity is the primary reason why most weavers continue in this occupation. Case 5, who lives alone without family support, depends entirely on handloom weaving for his daily livelihood. Although he suffers from leg pain and eye strain, he continues working because weaving is his only source of income. Likewise, Case 4

continued weaving throughout her life despite low wages and financial crises, as her family depended entirely on the income generated through handloom work.

Another important finding is that most respondents recognise the declining future prospects of the handloom sector. Case 3 observed that the younger generation prefers higher education and secure employment rather than entering the handloom profession. The respondents believe that low income, lack of job security, and the physically demanding nature of weaving discourage young people from continuing this traditional occupation.

The findings further indicate that weavers experience a sense of pride in preserving the cultural heritage of Balaramapuram despite the occupational challenges they face. Case 2 and his wife continue operating two handlooms because they consider weaving a family tradition rather than merely an occupation. Similarly, Case 1 expressed pride in contributing to the preservation of Balaramapuram's handloom heritage, even though she has little interest in joining cooperative societies.

The study also reveals varying levels of awareness regarding welfare schemes and occupational support. Although some respondents are aware of pension schemes and government assistance, many continue working because they believe in self-reliance or have limited access to institutional support. Most independent weavers reported that government schemes primarily benefit members of cooperative societies, leaving self-employed weavers with inadequate assistance.

## **2. Socio-Cultural Factors Influencing the Occupational Practices and Survival of Handloom Weavers**

The findings of the study reveal that socio-cultural factors play a significant role in influencing the occupational practices and survival of handloom weavers in Balaramapuram. Poverty, family tradition, cultural identity, educational opportunities, and changing social aspirations strongly influence whether individuals continue or leave the handloom profession.

Economic hardship remains one of the primary reasons for continuing in handloom weaving. Most respondents entered the occupation at a young age because of poverty and limited educational opportunities. Case 1 discontinued her education during childhood due to financial difficulties and began weaving at the age of fifteen to support her family. Similarly, Case 2

studied only up to the fifth standard before entering the handloom profession to contribute to his family's livelihood.

The study found that handloom weaving is largely a hereditary occupation passed down through generations. Cases 2, 4, and 5 belong to families traditionally engaged in handloom weaving. The transfer of weaving skills from parents to children reflects the strong cultural roots of the occupation. However, this hereditary nature also limits opportunities for occupational mobility, particularly among older generations with limited education and vocational training.

The findings also indicate a significant generational shift in occupational preferences. Unlike their parents, the younger generation increasingly prefers higher education and secure employment in the government or private sector. Case 3 observed that low wages, lack of job security, and physically demanding working conditions discourage young people from entering the handloom profession. Case 1 also considered education the greatest asset and worked hard to ensure that both her sons obtained better employment opportunities outside the handloom sector.

Women play a vital role in sustaining the handloom industry. Cases 1 and 4 shouldered both household responsibilities and weaving activities throughout their lives while ensuring the education and well-being of their children. Their experiences demonstrate the dual burden carried by women weavers, who balance domestic responsibilities with physically demanding occupational work.

The study further reveals that despite economic difficulties, handloom weaving continues to be regarded as an important cultural heritage. Case 2 and his wife continue operating two handlooms because they consider weaving a family tradition rather than merely an occupation. Similarly, Case 5 believes that handloom weaving represents not only his livelihood but also the cultural identity of his family and community.

The respondents also expressed concern regarding the gradual decline of traditional weaving practices. Most participants believe that the increasing popularity of machine-made textiles, changing consumer preferences, and declining youth participation threaten the future of Balaramapuram's handloom tradition. At the same time, they expressed hope that government support, improved marketing opportunities, and greater public awareness could help preserve this valuable cultural heritage.

### **3. Challenges and Issues Faced by Handloom Weavers**

The findings of the study reveal that handloom weavers in Balaramapuram face numerous economic, occupational, health-related, and social challenges that threaten both their livelihoods and the sustainability of the traditional handloom sector.

One of the major challenges is low and irregular income. Most respondents stated that earnings from handloom weaving are insufficient to meet basic household expenses. Case 1 earns approximately ₹7,000–₹8,000 per month depending on the availability of orders and seasonal demand. Similarly, Case 2 explained that better prices for handloom products are received only during festival seasons, while the remaining months are marked by financial uncertainty.

The study also found that competition from power loom and machine-made textiles has significantly reduced the demand for traditional handloom products. Most respondents believe that consumers increasingly prefer cheaper machine-made products, making it difficult for handloom weavers to compete in the market. The dependence on intermediaries further reduces their income, as they receive only a small share of the actual market value of their products.

Another major issue is the declining interest of the younger generation in the handloom profession. Respondents stated that young people prefer higher education and secure employment in government or private sectors because handloom weaving requires intensive physical labour while offering very limited financial returns. This has created uncertainty regarding the future sustainability of the traditional weaving sector.

The findings further indicate that health problems are common among handloom workers due to prolonged working hours and repetitive physical activities. Case 1 suffers from deteriorating eyesight, severe body pain, and health complications following a hysterectomy. Case 2 experiences chronic back pain and knee pain, forcing him to reduce his working hours. Case 4 developed several age-related health problems after decades of continuous weaving, while Case 5 suffers from leg pain and eye strain due to prolonged sitting and detailed weaving work.

The respondents also experience psychological stress arising from financial insecurity, debt, and uncertainty regarding future employment. Case 1 faced emotional distress following the death of her husband but returned to weaving because work provided emotional strength and stability. Case 4 experienced severe emotional stress when the bank initiated proceedings to seize her house due to loan default. Case 5, who lives alone without family support, experiences anxiety regarding his health, financial security, and the future of the handloom occupation.

The study also highlights limited institutional support as a major challenge. Most respondents reported inadequate access to government welfare schemes, healthcare facilities, marketing support, and financial assistance. Independent weavers, in particular, receive fewer benefits than members of cooperative societies, increasing their economic vulnerability.

Another important challenge identified is the rising cost of raw materials and production expenses. Increasing prices of yarn, dyes, electricity, and healthcare have significantly reduced the profitability of handloom weaving. Climate-related factors, such as increased humidity, also affect yarn drying and the weaving process, making production more difficult.

#### **4. Coping Mechanisms and Coping Strategies Adopted by Handloom Weavers**

Handloom weavers in Balaramapuram adopt various coping mechanisms to survive despite low income, irregular employment, health problems, and increasing competition from power loom and machine-made products. Their strategies reflect resilience, family support, diversification of income, and adaptation to changing socio-economic conditions.

Many weavers continue in the profession despite financial hardships because handloom weaving is not only their livelihood but also an inherited occupation and a symbol of cultural identity. Case 1, who entered weaving at the age of fifteen, continues working even after the death of her husband and despite serious health problems. She considers weaving a source of emotional strength and self-reliance, helping her cope with personal loss and financial responsibilities.

Several respondents rely on family support as an important coping strategy. Case 2 continues weaving with the assistance of his wife, and together they operate two handlooms near their home. Their cooperative effort helps reduce production costs and maintain the family occupation despite declining income. Similarly, Case 4 depended on her husband and later received support from relatives when the family faced severe financial crises, including the threat of losing their house due to unpaid loans.

Many households supplement weaving income through alternative sources of livelihood. Case 1 managed household expenses with the support of her husband's salary before his death. Case 3's family depends on her brother's income as an auto driver along with the small earnings from weaving. These additional income sources help families cope with the seasonal and irregular nature of handloom work, although they do not provide complete financial security.

Education is another significant coping strategy adopted by weaving families. Several respondents emphasized providing better educational opportunities for their children so that they could obtain stable employment outside the handloom sector. Case 1 successfully educated both her sons, who are now employed in different professions. Case 2 also ensured that his children completed their education, believing that education offers a pathway out of economic hardship.

Some weavers adapt to changing market conditions by recognizing the need for modernization and improved marketing. Case 3 suggested introducing contemporary designs, attractive colours, online marketing, social media promotion, and customized products to attract younger consumers. These adaptive strategies demonstrate the willingness of weavers to preserve their traditional occupation while responding to changing consumer preferences.

Most respondents cope with occupational health problems through personal endurance rather than institutional support. Case 2 reduced his working hours because of severe back and knee pain, while Case 5 continues weaving despite leg pain and eye strain because it remains his only source of income. Financial necessity forces many elderly weavers to continue working even when their health deteriorates.

Many respondents also depend on government welfare measures, although the support remains limited. Case 2 relies on his old-age pension after reducing his work due to health issues. Case 1, despite being eligible for pension benefits, prefers to continue working to maintain self-reliance. However, most respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the limited accessibility of welfare schemes, healthcare facilities, and financial assistance.

Emotional resilience is another important coping mechanism observed among the respondents. Despite repeated financial setbacks, loan burdens, declining demand, and health challenges, the weavers continue their occupation with determination. Case 4, who experienced severe debt and was forced to sell family property, continued weaving to support her family. Case 5, despite living alone and facing old age without family support, continues working independently and remains committed to preserving the traditional handloom occupation.

### **6.3 SUGGESTIONS**

Based on the findings of the study, the following suggestions are proposed to improve the livelihood, working conditions, and sustainability of handloom weavers in Balaramapuram:

## **1. Improve Income Security and Fair Wages**

- Ensure fair remuneration for handloom products by introducing minimum wage standards for handloom weavers.
- Reduce the exploitation of weavers by intermediaries through direct procurement and fair pricing mechanisms.
- Introduce income support schemes during periods of low demand and off-season production.

## **2. Strengthen Marketing and Market Access**

- Promote direct marketing channels that enable weavers to sell products without depending on middlemen.
- Encourage online marketing, e-commerce platforms, and social media promotion to expand market reach.
- Organize national and international handloom exhibitions, trade fairs, and tourism-based marketing initiatives to increase product visibility.
- Develop a strong brand identity for Balaramapuram handloom products to improve competitiveness.

## **3. Enhance Government Support and Welfare Measures**

- Expand government welfare schemes to include all handloom weavers, including independent and self-employed workers.
- Simplify procedures for accessing pensions, financial assistance, subsidies, and welfare benefits.
- Increase subsidies for raw materials such as yarn, dyes, and other production inputs.
- Provide housing assistance and financial support for economically vulnerable weaving families.

## **4. Improve Occupational Health and Healthcare Facilities**

- Conduct regular health check-ups for handloom workers to identify and treat occupational illnesses at an early stage.
- Provide free or subsidized healthcare services, including treatment for musculoskeletal disorders, vision problems, and other work-related health conditions.

- Establish health insurance schemes that adequately cover medical expenses for weavers and their families.
- Create awareness regarding ergonomic working practices to reduce physical strain.

## **5. Modernize the Handloom Sector**

- Introduce improved handloom technologies and ergonomic equipment that reduce physical effort while preserving traditional weaving techniques.
- Encourage innovation in product design, colour combinations, and fashion trends to attract younger consumers.
- Promote research and development for improving productivity without compromising the authenticity of handloom products.

## **6. Encourage Youth Participation**

- Introduce vocational training programmes for young people interested in handloom weaving.
- Conduct awareness programmes in schools and colleges highlighting the cultural and economic importance of the handloom industry.
- Offer financial incentives, scholarships, and entrepreneurship support for young individuals entering the handloom sector.
- Encourage young designers and entrepreneurs to collaborate with traditional weavers.

## **7. Strengthen Cooperative Societies**

- Improve the functioning of handloom cooperative societies by ensuring transparency, timely payments, and equitable distribution of work.
- Encourage independent weavers to join cooperatives by providing attractive benefits and easier registration procedures.
- Strengthen institutional support through better coordination between government departments, cooperatives, and marketing agencies.

## **8. Promote Skill Development and Capacity Building**

- Organize regular training programmes on modern weaving techniques, digital marketing, business management, and financial literacy.

- Provide design development workshops in collaboration with fashion institutes and textile experts.
- Encourage product diversification to meet changing consumer preferences and international market demands.

## **9. Preserve Cultural Heritage**

- Promote Balaramapuram handloom as an important part of Kerala's cultural heritage through tourism, exhibitions, museums, and cultural festivals.
- Increase public awareness about the uniqueness and authenticity of traditional Kasavu products.
- Strengthen Geographical Indication (GI) promotion and certification to protect genuine Balaramapuram handloom products from imitation.

## **10. Improve Financial Security**

- Provide low-interest loans and easy credit facilities for weavers to purchase raw materials and modernize equipment.
- Introduce emergency financial assistance for families affected by illness, natural disasters, or economic crises.
- Strengthen old-age pension schemes and retirement benefits so that elderly weavers are not compelled to continue physically demanding work due to financial necessity.

## **6.4 CONCLUSION**

This study examined the socio-economic conditions, life experiences, and challenges faced by handloom workers in Balaramapuram through five case studies. The findings reveal that the lives of handloom workers are characterized by hard work, financial insecurity, health problems, family responsibilities, and a strong commitment to preserving a traditional occupation that forms an integral part of Kerala's cultural heritage.

A common finding across all the case studies is that poverty and financial hardship forced most respondents to enter the handloom profession at an early age. Due to financial constraints, they were unable to complete their education and had to work to support their families. Despite their own educational limitations, they made significant sacrifices to ensure that their children

received quality education. They strongly believed that education and secure employment are the keys to achieving a better future and economic stability.

The study also highlights the unstable nature of income in the handloom sector. Earnings are largely dependent on seasonal demand, particularly during festivals such as Onam, Vishu, and the Malayalam month of Chingam. During the rest of the year, workers experience severe financial difficulties. Rising raw material costs, low wages, exploitation by intermediaries, increasing living expenses, electricity charges, healthcare costs, and market uncertainties further worsen their economic condition. Consequently, many respondents have faced debt burdens, housing loan repayments, and persistent financial insecurity.

Health-related problems emerged as another major concern. Long hours of weaving in the same posture have resulted in chronic back pain, neck pain, knee pain, finger-related disorders, eye problems, and other age-related illnesses. Although some respondents receive welfare benefits and medical treatment, these are often insufficient to meet their healthcare needs. Due to financial necessity, many continue working despite declining physical health.

The findings also indicate that the younger generation is increasingly reluctant to enter the handloom profession. Low income, lack of job security, limited social recognition, and better educational and employment opportunities in other sectors discourage young people from continuing this traditional occupation. If this trend continues, the traditional skills and knowledge associated with Balaramapuram handloom weaving may gradually disappear.

Despite numerous hardships, the respondents demonstrated remarkable resilience, determination, and self-reliance. They devoted their lives to fulfilling family responsibilities and securing a better future for their children. Beyond economic necessity, they continue weaving because they consider it their responsibility to preserve a tradition inherited from previous generations. Thus, handloom weaving represents not only a means of livelihood but also a symbol of their cultural identity and heritage.

The study further suggests several measures to strengthen the handloom sector. These include ensuring fair wages, employment security, improved healthcare facilities, pension benefits, financial assistance, better marketing opportunities, digital promotion, product diversification, modern designs, skill development programmes, and stronger government support. Encouraging young entrepreneurs and promoting handloom products through educational institutions, tourism, fashion events, and online platforms can also help increase demand and ensure the sustainability of the sector.

In conclusion, the Balaramapuram handloom industry is not merely a source of livelihood but also a valuable cultural heritage that deserves protection and promotion. Sustaining this traditional industry requires the collective efforts of the government, cooperative societies, non-governmental organizations, designers, marketing agencies, and society as a whole. Improving the socio-economic conditions of handloom workers while preserving their traditional knowledge and skills will contribute significantly to safeguarding Kerala's rich handloom heritage for future generations.

## **REFERENCES AND ANNEXURES**

## REFERENCES

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## **ANNEXURE I – INTERVIEW GUIDE**

1. Historical and Cultural Significance
  - Heritage
  - Tradition
  - Health
  - Cultural identity of Balaramapuram handloom.
2. Changes in the Handloom Sector
  - Transformation in production
  - Employment
  - Market trends
3. Socio-Economic Status of Weavers
4. Challenges Faced by Weavers
5. Market Demand and Competition
6. Government Schemes and Welfare Measures
7. Impact of Modernization and Technology
8. Youth Participation
9. Community Wellbeing and Social Development