

Changes in the Saree Weaving Industry in Chiraigaon Village

Makoto MURAKAMI*

チライガオン村におけるサリー織布業の変容

村 上 誠*

CONTENTS

Preface	III. Type and cost of weaving
I. Weaving family	IV. Management of weaving business
II. Hand loom and weavers	V. Conclusion

Preface

This paper firstly aims to report the changes in the saree weaving industry in Chiraigaon Village for the quarter century since the intensive survey in 1967. Secondly the changes in the socio-economic circumstance of weaving in and around this village for the same periods is also the theme of this study.

The changes in the handloom industry in Chiraigaon Village during the last 24 years have occurred in the fundamentals of the socio-economic conditions. Agriculture, employment and the family system can be considered as the fundamental elements for the study of traditional hand loom industry in the village. However, the diversification of employment chances and the nuclearization of joint families are considered mainly.

I. Weaving family

The total number in of households of Chiraigaon Village increased from 225(1967) to

* Faculty of Integrated Arts and Sciences, Hiroshima University ; 広島大学総合科学部

471(1991), but this change occurred by the separation of old joint families.

The weaving families in 1967 were forty–five. But as one family had been separated into four new families at that time, forty–two families were accounted on old family base.

During the next twenty–four years, fifteen families, (thirteen families on the old family base) closed their works. Out of the remaining twenty–nine families, seven have continued their business without separation of their big families. But twenty–two families have become seventy nuclearized families. After the death or old age of the boss, sons who became the new head of each nuclear family chose their ways to get income. There were many possibilities in their choices; for instance the first son sometimes succeeded the business, or two sons did, or all of the sons did. There were variations in the process after succession, too. As a result, forty–one sons (new families) succeeded their family's business, but twenty–nine sons got other jobs.

Particularly in those cases, twenty–one families (seventeen on old family base) opened newly. Total weaving families in 1991 are sixty–nine.

The relationship between weaving and agriculture especially land holding, is as follows: Out of the thirteen families that closed weaving businesses, seven families have

Table 1 Changes in of weaving families 1967 – 1991

			joint family base
1. Number of weaving families in 1967	116*	45**	42
2. Case of giving up no new families succeeded	39*	15**	13
3. Cases of succession			
Number of families that succeeded	33		29
Number of families that opened works after some one of family members had succeeded	15		(8)
Number of families that did not succeed	29		
4. Cases of new opening			
Number of families that opened newly	21		17
Number of other families except newly opened families	23		
5. Number of weaving families in 1991	69		46

* conversion in 1991

** Number in 1967

large cultivated land holdings and some of the family members take jobs in Varanasi City. The other six families have small land or no land and they take other jobs such as fruit and vegetable sellers in this village and Varanasi City.

Among the twenty–nine families that have continued weaving six families have cultivated land but the other twenty–three families have no land. The former do weaving as a side job have decreased their weaving scale and the latter are full–time weavers who have increased their weaving scale.

Most of the twenty–one families that began weaving newly have no land, so they are the full time weavers.

The relationship between cultivating and weaving can be summarized as follows : agricultural families that do weaving as a part–time job are shifting to urban jobs from weaving, and families with no land have been becoming full–time weavers.

As it has become more difficult to get young labourers, agricultural families have not maintained both their agricultural and weaving activities.

With the increased nuclearization of joint families, the managing base of the handloom industry has changed from large families to small ones in Chiraigaon village.

II. Handloom and weavers

1. Size of weaving unit

Most of the weaving product in this village are traditional silk saree made by hand looms, but power looms have also been introduced recently. Although wool carpet weaving is also done by three families, an analysis at this chapter is limited to silk saree weaving.

The total number of hand looms for the twenty–four years period from 1967 to 1991 has not changed very much. (Table 2) The number of hand looms per one weaving family changed from 2.64 looms to 1.86 looms. As a whole the size of each weaving unit became smaller. Concerning the size structure and its changes of weaving units

Table 2 Number of looms

	Number of Hand looms	Number of Power looms	Number of Hand looms per weaving family
1967	119	0	2.64
1991	126	2	1.86*

* including power loom

(family), some points are picked up on table 3. First, one loom weaver changed from sixteen families (35.6%) to forty-five families (65.2%). This means that two-thirds of the weaving families today are one loom owner-weavers. Next, two loom families declined from eighteen (40.0%) to fourteen (20.3%). Regarding large weaving businesses, a Moslem family that had twenty-five looms in 1967 continued to weave with sixteen looms in 1991. The size of a weaving business is generally determined by its funds, number of weavers and weaving space. But another major consideration is the relationship between the size of the weaving business and the family system.

The traditional joint family has entirely changed into single nuclear families as mentioned above. The operating base of weaving works has also changed from joint family to single family. Through the change in the family system, the number of families that use two or three looms has not come to operate with its own family members. The situations of each family in the new family system of this village are similar. Each family is living in a house together, cultivating cooperatively their land that is not separated actually, and sharing the harvested crops that are divided roughly. But the cash expenditure is done by each cash income.

Another change is the availability of young employees for weaving. With the progress of urbanization and the development of the regional economy in this area, village people have begun to get urban style jobs in the city in spite of being agricultural labourers and hand loom weavers traditionally. As the younger generation especially has developed this tendency, it has become especially difficult to employ them in

Table 3 Number and percentage of weaving families by the number of operating hand looms, 1967-1991

Number of hand looms	1967		1991	
	Weaving families	Percentage	Weaving families	Percentage
1	16	35.6	45	65.2
2	18	40.0	14	20.3
3	3	6.7	3	4.3
4	2	4.4	4	5.8
5	5	11.1	1	1.4
7	-	-	1	1.4
16	-	-	1	1.4
25	1	2.2	-	-
Total	45	100.0	69	100.0

villages. The biggest two workshops mentioned below adopted the urban style in village side.

2. Employment of weavers

In the case of the saree weaving by one hand loom, it requires one weaver and one assistant. Then husband and his wife are set for one loom in general. At present ten workshops have forty – five employed weavers in total. (Table 4) Among them the full season weavers are less than twenty – five persons in 1991. This number is about one – fifth of 1967's one.

Table 4 Total number of employed weavers by size (1991)

Number of hand loom	Number of families that have employed weavers	Total number of employed weavers
2	3	4
3	1	2
4	4	14
7	1	5
16	1	20
Total	10	45

III. Type and cost of weaving

There are two types of weavers in this village from the viewpoint of the ownership of hand loom. One is the self – sustaining weaver who has own loom and the other is the sub – contract weaver who borrows looms from the contractor. Many of the self – sustaining weavers are those who took over their father's business or who purchased loom by Government loan, and sub – contract weavers are those who began weaving newly. In the weaving business in general the self – sustaining weaver who has long experience and high weaving technique can choose the quality, size and pattern of saree at wholesale shops in Varanasi City. So the weaver can change his product as the needs of the market demands. On the other hand, the sub – contract weaver is subordinate in his weaving to the specific contractors.

Varanasi silk saree may be divided into two classes, by quality: medium quality saree (*kela*) and high quality saree (*bana*). And there are two types of size. The popular size

saree is 6 meters long by 36 inches wide. The wide size saree that was introduced to village recently is 5.5 meters long by 40 inches wide. In this analysis only the ordinary size saree is considered. The processing cost of each saree is formed through the next process. (Table 5)

By the way, it takes two persons and one week to weave a sheet of *kela* while it takes two persons and three weeks to weave a sheet of *bana*. If the weaving charges of the two kinds of saree, *kela* & *bana* are compared, the charge to weave a *kela* of Rs. 220 per a saree is equal to that of weaving a *bana* of Rs. 660 per a saree. If a weaver wants to get more charge, he needs to weave the higher quality saree. Then the weaving technique becomes an important factor in the weaving charge. Because the weaving charge of each weaver depends on becoming skilled in the weaving techniques. It takes more than two years before a weaver masters the technique for *kela* saree and more years for the *bana* saree.

The next issue concerns the contractor's role and his commission. The contractor prepares and offers hand looms and weaving work to the person who wants to begin it afresh. As a saree wholesalers and a yarn merchants both hold the role of a contractor on many occasions, they sell yarn to and purchase sarees from the self-sustaining weavers in the village occasionally. The commission for a contractor to rent looms to weavers is usually about 10 percent of the weaving charge. When his weaver is engaged in *kela* weaving, the commission per a saree is Rs. 25–30. Sometimes the contractor becomes a money-lender to continue the profitable contract for him when his weaver is pinched for money, for instance, because of a family member's illness or

Table 5 The cost of silk saree weaving in 1991
(Rs. per a saree)

	Medium quality saree (<i>kela</i>)	High quality saree (<i>bana</i>)
yarn	700 – 800	1,000 –
weaving charge	220 – 230	450 – 800
contractor's commission	25 – 30	25 – 80
purchasing price of wholesaler	1,000 –	1,400 –
retail price	1,000 – 1,200	1,500 – 3,000

* including gold and silver yarn

daughter's marriage. In the village, there are some village contractors who have a few looms.

The relationship between the village contractor and his weavers is connected within the rural community. So they are co-operative weavers under the traditional system.

IV. Management of weaving business

The monthly income of a weaving family that has one loom may be estimated as follows. The subcontract weaving family that weaves *kela* by a rental loom bring in Rs. 750 – 900 per month. In the case of a self-sustaining weaving family, the gain is Rs. 900 – 1,000 for *kela* and Rs. 1,100 – 1,300 for *bana* that costs about Rs. 2,000 at a wholesale shop. When the weaver has the Government loan for the loom, Rs. 50 is taken from his monthly income.

On the occasion when the weaving family employs a skilled weaver, the family pays Rs. 150 per sheet of saree. But for assistant weavers the payment is very little.

Against the traditional piece-based wage system, a few big works in this village adopt the daily allowance system. In this case payment for a weaver is about Rs. 20 per day. If a weaver gets a government loan for the loom, and most cases of the loom loan are Rs. 5000 in value, then he has to return about Rs. 50 per month.

Finally, weaving families of this village get Rs. 750 – 1,300 monthly per loom. But because of payments to the employed weavers, the profit per loom does not increase in proportion to the number of the looms. In the case of most weaving families in Chiraigaon Village, all of their income can not but be expended for their living. Although their income and living standard has gone up a little, their living way has hardly changed in these twenty-four years.

Another major issue is weaving as a subsidiary business of agriculture. For these twenty-four years, agriculture in this village has developed a tendency to commercial crop cultivation; it has moved from grain and vegetable cultivation to fruit production. This change arose because of the development of food production in this area and also because of the progress of urbanization in the suburbs of Varanasi. Because of these changes village people, especially the young people, sought to be engaged in the modern industries of the urban area and sought to get cash income. The agricultural families have come to get cash income by selling their vegetables and fruit

in earnest. The amount of income from one *bigha* land (about 25 ares) is about Rs. 1,000 – 1,500. In proportion to the changes in suburban agriculture, the families whose agricultural income is not enough for their living have increased. Part–time saree weaving is one of the side businesses they choose in this village. There are cases in which only one of the family members is engaged in an urban job in the city. This type of saree weaving operates well only when the family has the necessary family members and space for weaving. The weaving families that had large land holdings and many employed labourers have closed their weaving business for the last twenty–four years indeed. There are few weaving families that are making a good showing in side businesses.

There are two directions for change in traditional hand loom weaving in this village now. One is in the direction of mass production by power looms, although this way is limited to the *kela* class saree. One person introduced a power loom at a price of Rs. 12,000 in 1986 after training for four years at Varanasi, and has recently ordered one more loom. He obtained the initial financing for it from the Government (loan), relatives and the contractor. Although his expense was very much, power looms can weave two *kela* sarees per day. They have about fifteen times the efficiency of hand looms. The only difficulties in operation are the frequent power failures and the shortage of weavers for power looms in this area.

The other direction for change is in the improvement of efficiency in the hand loom weaving of the *bana* class saree by setting many looms in a factory. The manager expects to eliminate the wastefulness of weaving in each daily living.

V. Conclusion

The area including Chiraigaon Village has kept the conditions for the location of the saree weaving industry even now, because the numbers of weaving families and looms did not change largely for these twenty four years. But the hand loom saree weaving as the traditional village industry has begun a bipolar disintegration. One pole is the modern workshop system and the other is the small scale domestic industry system under the commission of agency. The background of these changes is 1) the spread of the production system of modern industry, 2) the progress of urbanization and 3) the nuclearization of the joint family system.