

The Socio-Economic Conditions of The Benarasi Workers in Benarasi Palli: Present Scenario and Future Prospect

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Acronyms

PM- Prime Minister

FGD- Focus Group Discussion

NGO- Non-Governmental Organization

BRAC

SEEP-Social and Economic Enhancement Program

CDC- Center For Development Communications

RADDA MCH CENTER- Radda Maternity and Child Health Center

DPT-Diphtheria, Whooping Cough, Tetanus

OGSB- Obstetric and Gynochology Society of Bangladesh

TBA- Traditional Birth Attendant

TMSS-Thengamara Mahila Shobuj Shongho

1. Introduction

Bangladesh has a rich and ancient tradition of fabric-based cottage industry. Muslin, Jamdani, Benarasi, Khadi- these are few of the highly acclaimed handloom industries in this country. These industries have been bringing name and fame for our country for a very long time. Among them Benarasi was associated for bridal costume. Presently industry is not getting proper attention but it has a great demand in local and international market. Recently it has attracted large number of consumers in our country as a result of campaigning of the Boutique Houses marketing strategy for traditional style clothing which proved that the Benarasi still has great appeal among people. Our neighboring country is exporting Benarasi products. Bangladesh also has potential to export Benarasi product. As such it is important to know the present socio economic condition of the Benarasi workers and discover its future potential.

The study on “The Socio-Economic Conditions of The Benarasi Workers in Benarasi Palli: Present Scenario and Future Prospect” was undertaken by the Democracywatch with the support of Social Science Research Council, Planning Commission, Ministry of Planning to know the socio-economic condition of the Benarasi workers of Mirpur Benarasi Palli.

2. Background

The gorgeous and delicate piece of cloth which is known as Benarasi was not an indigenous craft of Bangladesh. Its origin can be traced to a northern city in India which is called Benaras. During the Mughal regime this industry flourished in the subcontinent.

By the 1930s Dhaka set up its own Benaras Silk Industry Centre in Becharam Dewry, in the old town. Sarees were priced at Rs.150 and a bridal saree fetched a princely price of Rs. 400. The main market outlets were in Sadarghat market, Islampur of the old town and by the 1960s the posh newly built New Market near Nilkhet. One significant stimulus was in the 1940's resulting from political changes, the movement for Independence from the British and finally the desire for a separate homeland for Muslims. The result of these factors brought about the migration of large populations from one region of India to another who packed up their looms in 1946 and came with high hopes to Dhaka to start a new life. Their second and third generation families are now residents in Mirpur.

According to the Bangladesh Handloom Board the migrant community set up the Benarasi industry in Mirpur and Mohammadpur areas of Dhaka city in 1950. These two areas still remain the hub of Benarasi producing activities in the country. However, the Benarasi industry is no longer limited to the geographical area of Mirpur. Now the villagers in Manikganj, Sirajganj, and Tangail etc are also producing Benarasi saris. Some of the producers are now willingly shifting their looms to impoverished areas of North Bengal like Rangpur and Dinajpur where the labor is cheap and abundant.

About 25,000 people are now involved in the Benarasi industry, where the number was one lakh, two or three years back. The number of handlooms has been reduced to 5,000 now from 20,000 in 2004. The number of outlets has also dropped to only 100 in Mirpur. (Research finding of the Study on Production of Benarasi in Benarasi Palli: Prospect of Developing Women Entrepreneurs).

The Benarasi loom which has been originally designed some hundred years back is composed of wooden, bamboo and small metal parts. These components are set on the earthen pit floor of the factory. The Benarasi workers still work with this age-old piece of tool. The only change that has taken place here was the introduction of jacquard (design card) after 1947.

The most commonly used thread for Benarasi saree, the Chinese silk, is finer in quality and has got a smoother texture than our very own *Rajshahi* silk. India is being used as the transit route for the import of Thai, Pakistani and Chinese silk. Some portion of these threads is also smuggled in Bangladesh through border areas. Benarasi producers procure these threads from the wholesale market at Chauk Bazar and the local market of Mirpur. (See annex 2)

A number of serious problems are threatening the existence of the unsung laborers who go through a tremendous procedure of physical labor and mental patience to produce a single piece of Benarasi in one week. Many of them are now abandoning the craftsmanship which they inherited from their forefathers. In this way an occupation based community is withering away. One of the members of Benarasi Palli Shop Owners Association said that the only factor that is still keeping Benarasi and Mirpuri Katan alive is that various fashion houses of the city is still promoting them. They are our major customers.

The Benarasi industry in Bangladesh is still dependent on handloom while the Indian Benarasi industry is power loom based. Newspaper reports claim that our local market is flooded with low cost, low quality Indian Benarasi products (weaved in power looms) with a design that suits the budget and taste of the customers of all levels of the society. Though the introduction of this technology is itself a threat against the traditional handloom based Benarasi production in India, in terms of export earning it gives Indian exporters an added advantage. This technological advancement gives India comparatively lower production cost benefits which the Bangladeshi industry does not enjoy. Moreover, better quality silk is becoming expensive day by day.

There are no publicity efforts to make the customers aware of the difference between genuine hand woven Benarasi and power loom replicas. There is also the problem of lack of awareness and understanding of the changing nature of taste of the customers. In this age of globalization customers have the opportunity to procure the latest and trendy products from any part of the world. Though as a fabric, Benarasi has its own appeal, the lack of training and creative indigenous designing is also causing much problem for the industry.

Present State of Benarasi Industry in Bangladesh

The Benarasi workers of Dhaka city are mostly concentrated at the section No-10, No-11, No-12 of Mirpur. According to the Benarasi Palli Owners Association at present there are total 999 owners, 11000 weavers, 25 designers, 25 color masters, 3000 support staff involved in this industry.

The work condition in this industry is also taking toll on the weavers and others associated with the occupation. These benarasis are made in small rooms with no ventilation support or proper lighting facilities. The work is hard, but the remuneration is low. So the craftsmen are becoming far less interested in pursuing the occupation which their ancestors held dear to their heart.

Recently government has been showing some concern for the small industries in the country. On different occasions it has pledged to "...improve efficiency and productivity of Bangladesh handloom Board. It also decided to organize training for weavers and others concerned, provide micro credit to them and extend all other help to make the prices of weaving products

competitive and promote those at home and abroad.” (New Age, Vol 4, Number 315, Sun, April 18, 2004/vol.4 PM invites big private investment in textiles and promises all-out government help to local, foreign investors/BSS, Dhaka). Besides, the then Textile and Jute minister Mr. Shajahan Siraj said that the government had been implementing a project of taka 24 corer 42 lakh at Mirpur, Dhaka and another of over 2 corers at Ishwardi for establishing Benarasi Palli.

However there has been no apparent reflection of these high sounding words and promises on the ailing Benarasi industry of Bangladesh. The price of raw materials is still soaring, government has no marketing policy to export Benarasi abroad and the workers are simply plunging into the black hole of poverty.

As mentioned by the Benarasi craftsmen, in 2006 Bangladesh *Tant* Board allocated Tk 45 lakh for 249 looms at nominal interest rate for distribution among the weavers. However, the fund did not reach the genuine Benarasi craftsmen. The government’s initiative basically benefited many non-craftsmen (internal migrants) who used the low-interest loan to set up looms there. There is no denying the fact that government on its part also faces problems like presence of middlemen or the lengthy beaurocratic process of implementation in executing its stated program. But if this situation continues it will be difficult to save this industry from ruin. Both government and non government sectors need to work hand in hand to improve this gloomy situation.

Lack of citizenship was one of the major problems faced by this community for which they were deprived of many facilities. Recently, a positive step has been taken by the Government. An organization called “Urdu Speaking People’s Youth Rehabilitation Movement” filed a writ petition at High Court in November, 2007 demanding their voting right. On May 18, 2008 the Court ordered the Election Commission that those born after 1972 should be enlisted as voters. Accordingly, 29,000 are enlisted as voters out of 71,000 residents of 29 camps of Mirpur. This means they have been accepted as citizen of the country. As such they can claim all the rights as citizen of the country. This citizenship status will solve many of the problems mentioned by the respondents during interview and FGD such as opening bank accounts, admission of children etc.

3. Rationality

Benarasi is an industry where skill and knowledge is community base, the reduction of craftsmen in the community will also blow the death sentence to the industry itself. The reason is simple. They will die with their knowledge without the scope of disseminating it to anyone outside the community because there is a lack of proper incentive to do so. So to preserve this age old knowledge, this work of art, this symbol of tradition, steps should be taken and they should be taken sooner than later.

Benarasi workers also happen to be one of the most disadvantaged people of our society. Due to the stigma associated with their ethnic origin and the need to be concentrated in one single area for their occupation, these people cannot move out of the camps they reside in. Population in this community is increasing. But civic facilities like housing, water, sanitation, education, health care are not increasing proportionately. Day by day they are facing accommodation problem in these over crowded camps. Hygiene and sanitation condition is equally alarming and the rate of literacy among the children and the tendency to drop out also need to be taken care of. For these reasons, this research has been taken up to depict the present socio-economic conditions of the Benarasi workers in Mirpur as well as identifying and addressing their problems. It is

about highlighting the plight of a socially and economically marginalized community whose voice has been unheard for such a long time.

Another equally important reason for taking up this research is that the contributions of women in the production of Benarasi are unnoticed and largely unappreciated. Women constitute a very important segment of work force in the industry. Though they can not become weaver and entrepreneur for physical and financial problems, they are engaged in reeling bobbin, cutting loose thread and embedding beads and zari on Benarasi saree to make it more attractive. Although Even a number of women work as entrepreneurs or want to be one. So another reason for conducting this research is to understand and appreciate the contribution of women in this industry and to find out the gender specific problems faced by the women.

Last but not the least, it is hoped that this research will work as an important secondary source of data for the future researchers who would like to conduct research on the same or related topics.

4. Objectives

1. To know about present socio-economic condition of the Benarasi workers and if any change has occurred in the condition for the last few years.
2. To know about their present financial condition.
3. To find out their work condition.
4. To know if the women workers face any gender discrimination in the industry.
5. To understand respondent's own perception regarding the problems persisting in the industry at present.
6. To understand respondent's opinion about the measures that should be taken for the development of the industry.

5. Definition of Concepts and Terms

Benarasi Palli- Benarasi Palli is the area where Benarasi saree is produced and sold. In this study, section No-10, No-11, and No-12 of Mirpur (Pallabi) of Dhaka are defined as Benarasi Palli where workers are mainly engaged in producing and marketing Benarasi saree.

Benarasi saree- Benarasi saree is a fabric made out of silk and zari (gold thread) which is worn by women in the subcontinent especially women in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. Benarasi sarees are used mainly by affluent society during special occasions.

Benarasi Workers- There are various types of workers engaged in different stage of Benarasi production such as: designer, weaver, thread processor and dyer, loom maker and mechanic.

Charr or **birni** - Thin wire used to tighten threads.

Charka -hand spin or cycle wheel

Gulla or **baw of natawa-** Bamboo/wood spool.

Jacquard-cards perforated with holes for lifting needed threads

Karchupi- Karchupi is a special kind of intricate gold thread work, which is used to make dress materials more attractive. It is the process of embedding beads, zari and other decorative materials by means of a special needle as sharp as fish hooks.

Karga –pit

Katha or **shirki** -wood or bamboo flat instrument used to form floral patterns. Nowadays these are made of plastic.

Khalli -iron rods rotated to tighten threads.

Khuta-side posts

Lappa -horizontal wooden rods

Makri -upper/roof suspended rods

Makku or **dherki** -five inch long flat shuttle piece of buffalo horn used to push threads left or right as needed.

Phhana -bamboo read

Rooler -wood roller

Tana -steel plate

Turai / belun- roller-beam

Urdu speaking community- The people whose forefathers come from different states of India, mostly from Bihar and whose main language is Urdu are defined as Urdu speaking community. In this study, the people of Benarasi Palli at Mirpur are considered as Urdu speaking community.

Socio economic condition- Age, marital status, level of education, occupation, wage, occupation related health risk, working environment, total family income, family expenditure, access to loan, savings, work related problem etc are taken as the indicator of socio economic condition. It will also include their problem related to production such as raw materials, and tools.

6. Research Methodology

6.1. Methods

Both the qualitative and quantitative approaches were used to conduct the study. A good number of literatures on Benarasi workers and Urdu-speaking community were studied and reviewed to get an overview of the studies conducted in this discipline. These literatures were collected from both libraries and internet. Literature review has been incorporated in the Background of the report.

Besides, two focus group discussions (FGDs) and seven Case Studies were conducted with appropriate check lists. Non-participant Observations were also made by the members of the research team to get an in-depth view about the socio-economic conditions of the Benarasi

workers. Supplementary information was collected from various local level organizations and NGOs to validate the information received. Opinions of selected people associated with marketing and promotion of Benarasi have also been incorporated in this study.

During March-April 2008 a sample survey was carried out among Benarasi workers at Mirpur 10, 11 and 12 which now constitutes the Benarasi Palli. A semi-structured questionnaire was developed and finalized after pre-testing for sample survey. A total of 300 Benarasi workers were purposively selected and interviewed. Details of the respondents given below:

Category of respondents	# of respondents	
	Male	Female
Entrepreneurs	49	0
Designers	11	0
Weavers	168	0
Auxiliary workers	21	51
Total	249	51

6.2. Data Processing, Analysis and Presentation

Synthesize and analyze all data as inputs for designing a framework for analysis. Each of the information have been documented and finally analyzed and synthesized to make them meaningful. SPSS software was used for input, process and analysis data from sample survey. For presentation, Microsoft Office (MS Word and Excel) were used.

7. Limitations

The researchers faced the following limitations while conducting the research:

- Respondents often felt reluctant to answer some questions which they regarded as sensitive.
- Sometimes it was hard for the respondents to manage time to give in-depth interviews.
- Some of the respondents were reluctant to give interview because of their experience with previous research works in the area which, according to them, bore no benefit for them.
- Frequent power failure disrupted data processing and preparation of report.

8. Study Findings

8.1 Non-participant Observations:

Some of the observations made by the researchers are:

- Majority of families of the respondents reside in a single small room house. Some raised their beds so that others can sleep underneath. There is no privacy in such a living arrangement. Some of them (migrant) live with their domestic pet such as goat etc for security reason. This was supported by FGD findings where the respondents complained that the accommodation facility is really poor in the camp. Increase in the number of family members in a limited space makes it congested. Poverty even forces them to sublet part of their small houses. A few well to do families have extended their living space in to two storied building as they can not extend them as there is no extra land.

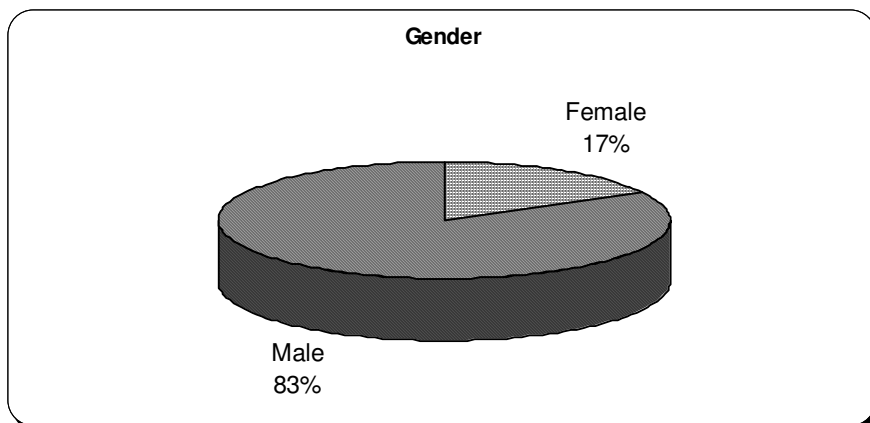
- FGD findings show that some of the families use curtain in their main door for privacy.
- The members of the families have to share community toilets. FGD findings show that men and women use separate toilets in some camp but some use common toilet also.
- Bathroom is separate from the toilet. Most of the houses have separate bathroom within their living place or boundary.
- Each of the family has to pay Tk. 5 per month to the toilet cleaner that cleans the community toilet.
- There is provision for public water facilities. The members have to stand in line to collect water from tube wells. WASA water supply is available and free of cost. But it is available twice a day only. FGD findings revealed that some solvent families have tap water in their house.
- The families of this area generally use earthen oven using fire woods (khorir chula) as they do not have gas facilities. Those who can afford use gas cylinder for cooking.
- The workplace is congested. There are not enough facilities of light and fresh air for the workers.
- There is no space in between the looms. The weavers have to cross over the looms to move from one place to another.
- Some of the families have loom within their house.
- Most of the families have *Karchupi* frames in their houses.
- All the families own T.V., CD player etc for recreation.

During FGD, the members present claimed that they have good relations with the mainstream Bangladeshi. They socialize with them and do not face any kind of discrimination or problem from the mainstream community. The respondents said that some members of the community do move away from the camps to live outside. But not too many people can afford it. Those who move outside do keep in touch with the camps since they continue with their Benarasi related jobs and business here. Some respondents during the FGD mentioned that young generation does not want to live here because they are uncomfortable with the environment of this area.

8.2. Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Out of 300 respondents interviewed majority (83%) are male.

Gender of the Respondents (Figure: 1)



Age of the respondents varies between 11 and 64: among male respondents 18 to 64 and female respondents 11 to 50. 47% of the respondents are in the age group 25-34 which is followed by 15-24 (26%) and 35 to 44 years (17%). Nearly half of the female respondents are in the age group 15 to 24. 63% of the respondents are married. All the respondents are Muslim (Sunni).

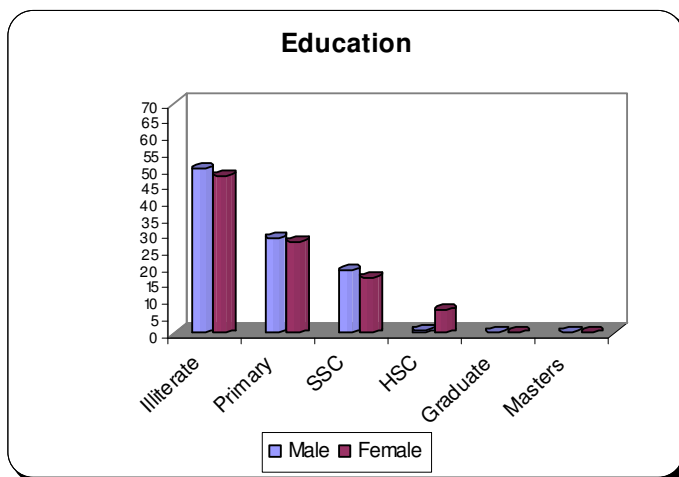
Around two-third (62%) of the respondents belong to nuclear family and rest to joint and extended family (Annex 1). Three-fourth (75%) cases family size ranges from 4 to 9 and 15% have family members ranging 1 to 3. Only one respondent living in joint family has 25 family members.

8.3. Social Condition

8.3.1. Education:

Eighty eight percent are 15 years and above. Among them 47% are illiterate. Since this is urban population corresponding national figure is 43% (Population Census 2001). Female illiteracy rate is 35% as against national figure of 43%. This shows that although over all illiteracy rate is slightly higher than the national average, female illiteracy rate is lower than the national average. Among the illiterate adults 82% are in the age group of 25 years and above.

State of Education (Figure: 2)



28% female have completed primary level education as against 29% male respondents and 17% female completed SSC level as against 19% male. This shows that there is not much difference in male and female education level. FGD findings show that the Benarasi community does not discriminate among boys and girls regarding education. In fact they have shown much interest for education of their children. This may be because of:

1. They are becoming aware of the benefits of education.
2. Their children do not want to continue their parents business and go outside for work. Outside job market is not available without education.
3. Their children are now meeting mainstream Bengali children in schools and colleges. So they understand the importance of education as education is a big medium for them to communicate with general people.

Among the adult respondents 49% are illiterate as against national average of 36% (Census 2001) Sixty seven percent of the respondents are interested to study in night school (Annex 1.E). FGD findings show that, even some fairly well off elderly respondents have private tutors who teach them at their home. This shows that there is a demand for Adult Education Program.

Although a large number of respondents are illiterate or semi-literate, most of them are sending their children to schools. Eighty eight percent of the families of the respondents send their school going children (1-3 children) to schools More than half (52%) of the respondents send their children to non-government schools including NGO managed schools and 40% send their children to government schools. 4% respondents send the children to *madrasa* and rest study at home attended by house tutors .

FGD findings also revealed that the respondents send their children to local NGO run schools such as BRAC, SEEP, CDC (Run by Al-Falah), Plan International because these schools are also located close to their vicinity and these schools provide books, exercise copy up to class five. Among these schools CDC take a small amount of monthly fee in the savings accounts of the disadvantaged student to help them continue their secondary level education. The relative distance of government schools makes it inconvenient for the parent to send their children to those schools. The respondents informed that most of the children drop out after class five. There is also two Open University for the students of this area. Only 2%-3% student go to Vocational school namely German Technical School and a NGO run school at Mirpur-10 to learn tailoring, mobile servicing etc.

FGD findings also report that the school going children assist in the family business. They help their parents in works like *karchupi* or other tasks. The families some time prevent their children to attend the schools because of need for their assistance in the Benarasi work. As such there is high amount of drop out of the children after primary level of education or non attendance during peak season. However, the respondents unanimously said that they do not want their children to join the Benarasi Industry as future profession. The reason is plain and simple. This profession does not offer sufficient income to live a decent life. The respondents don't want their children to suffer the same fate. That might be one of the reasons for them to send their children to schools.

More than half (52%) of the respondents prefer vocational training for their children. One third (31%) of the respondents favor general education and 16% prefer religious education (Annex 1.F).

8.3.2. Health:

The workers suffer from various work related health hazards such as pain in different parts of the body (hand, waist, shoulder, neck, head and eye sore, weakness etc.) due to long hours of working in a particular position. There is no space in between the looms. 84% mentioned that they get ill due to excessive hard work, lack of proper nutritious diet, lack of knowledge about health care etc.

Ninety two percent of the respondents said that they have immunized their babies. National figure shows that national child immunization rate is 81%. FGD findings show that they can mention the names of the vaccinations such as DPT, Polio, Measles etc. Record (January to December 2007) from Radda MCH Center show that children generally suffer from Cough and cold, Influenza, Pneumonia, Diarrhoea and Dysentery, Skin disease, Anemia and Malnutrition. Mothers usually suffer from Anemia and Peptic Ulcer.

Eighty four percent of the respondents use modern medicine when they are sick. In addition, some use other forms of medications such as *homeopathy* (2%), Unani (*Hakimi*) (1%). Only 8% mentioned that they use *Jharfuk* (exorcism). It is interesting to note that one third of the respondents said that children are born in the private clinics/government hospitals/health centers. 53% percent said that children are born at home attended by trained midwife. A substantial number of traditional midwives from the area were trained by Radda MCH (Maternity and Child Health) Center. As part of the training these midwives were placed in Azimpur Maternity Center and OGSB (Obstetric and Gynochology Society of Bangladesh) Maternity Center as interns. Besides skill this internship has given them the opportunity to acquaint themselves with services and professionals of these MCH Centers. These TBAs (traditional birth attendant) have easy access to the health professionals and services when they take any women there with risk pregnancy. However, 14% said that in case of complexity the pregnant mothers are taken to the hospitals. (Annex 1.K)

FGD findings show that this community has regular contact with the Radda MCH Center and Marie Stopes for MCH services and during last one year there were no maternal or child death. National figure shows that maternal mortality ratio is 570 per 1, 00,000 live birth and infant mortality rate 54 per 1000 live birth in Bangladesh. In addition, health education program conducted by the field staff of Radda MCH Center might have made the community more health conscious. They usually go to private hospitals for medical treatments because they do not prefer government hospitals because of maltreatment. Respondents replied that even in the government hospitals they have to buy their own medicine. So it is better to go to the private hospitals where they get better services.

FGD findings also show that WASA water is being used for all purpose including drinking by all the families. However, only a few families have their own bathroom. Most of the families use community latrines. But they mentioned that they keep their latrine clean through a cleaner.

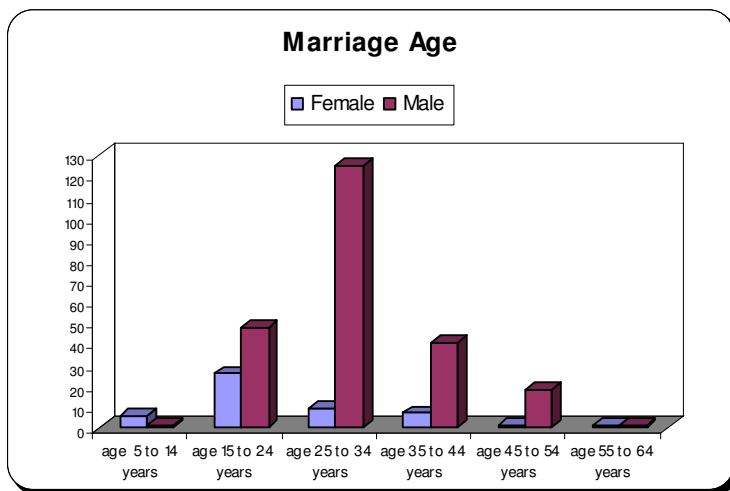
This shows that in general the people in the Benarasi Palli are not only conscious about mother and child health but also conscious about general health.

8.3.3. Marriage:

Seventy eight percent male respondents got married at the age ranging from 18 to 26 years. Fifty eight percent of the married female respondents got married at the age of 12 to 17 out of which 71% got married at the age of 12 to 14. This shows that child marriage among the girls is common in this community. The boys also got married early. (Annex1.d)

Out of total married respondents only 16% respondents reported that they took or gave dowry. Demand for dowry includes cash money, motorcycle, expenditure for building a unit in the second floor of the house, fund to start business including a grocery shop, travel and other cost for a job outside the country etc. However, FGD findings revealed that giving or taking dowry is a common practice in the community although they call it gift which is embedded in their culture. The bridegrooms' family (relatives, friends and neighbors also instigate) expect that the brides' family will give as gift furniture (at least bed with beddings, wardrobe, showcase etc.) dress, watch, ring and gold chain for the bridegroom, five sets of new dress for the bride and dress for the immediate in-laws. Based on the financial condition of the bridegroom's family they also expect television, CD player, fridge etc. Amount of dowry also depend on gold ornament and number of members accompanying Bridal Party (*Bor Jatri*). If the dowry is high, the bride side demands for more gold jewelry and less number of *bor jatri* in the occasion. Although the close relatives often share the cost of dowry or gifts this is definitely an economic burden on the family.

Respondents' Marriage Age (Figure: 3)



The respondents reported that amount of mohrana fixed during their marriage varies from Tk. 400 to Tk. 3, 50,000. A little more than one third of the respondents who are relatively young reported that their mohrana varies from Tk.50, 000 to Tk. 1, 50,000. During FGD, participants reported that older generation had less amount of mohrana than younger generation. However, the total amount is not given to the bride on marriage day. Respondents said that those who can afford it, they pay the full amount of money on the day of marriage. FGD findings show that there is no relation between amount of Mohrana and income levels of the family.

Most of the marriages are arranged marriage which is considered to be more respectable for the family. In arrange marriages generally a negotiator (Ghatak: Either professional or relatives, friend, neighbors) work as intermediary agent to negotiate marriage contracts. Even if the boy or girl selects their partners, family comes forward and arranges the marriage to make it appear like arranged marriage.

In selection of groom priority is given on job security and income (19%) which is followed by behavior and character especially not drug addicted (14%). Some of them mentioned about family status (7%) and education (6%) as desired qualities of a groom. Economic condition of the family, good look or age does not get much preference.

In selecting bride, qualities such as skill in household work including cooking (10%) and character, behavior (15%) is given preference. This is followed by beauty including long hair, feet (there is a belief that bride with a flat feet is more patient and adjustable, where as the girl with a little bit high hill (Khuro pa) is generally impatient), education and good family connection. Economic condition of bride's family, ability to give dowry, religious education and age of the girl are not being considered much.

Marriage expenses vary from Tk.20, 000 to Tk. 1, 00,000.00 and above. Twenty seven percent of the respondent's expenditure during marriage was 1, 00, 000 and above. Their marriage expenditure is relatively higher than their income. Cost for marriage was less for the older generation because of lower cost of living. However, even among the older generation marriage expenses were higher for relatively well to do families. Relatives and community people often

share the marriage expenses. This shows that family bondage and community feelings are very strong.

Marriage ceremonies include *Panchini* (engagement), *Lagan* (holdi) ceremony, marriage reception arranged by the bride's family, marriage reception (*walima*) arranged by the groom's family, Feruni (returns from girl's parents house).

During Panchini they bring with them dress for the bride including pink bridal dopatta (a veil over the dress), gold ring, handkerchief, flower garland and sweets. The girl's family initially serves Sharbat (drink made of milk, sugar, cardamom, pistachio, saffron, rosewater etc). After drinking, the guest is expected to put some money in the empty glass. The Guests are served with dinner. Lagan (Holdi) Ceremony was held mainly in the bride's house. The bride along with young unmarried girls of the family and friends eats boiled fragrant rice and card served in a big plate. Common belief is that this will expedite marriage of these young unmarried girls. Benarasi is preferred as wedding sari by the bride. All marriages are registered by the Kazi (marriage register) of the locality. On arrival to bride's house after Walima reception the groom is served with rice pudding (Khir). This is another occasion when the groom take this opportunity to request more gifts before taking the rice pudding (usually gifts to be asked and given is settled before hand via the Ghatak).

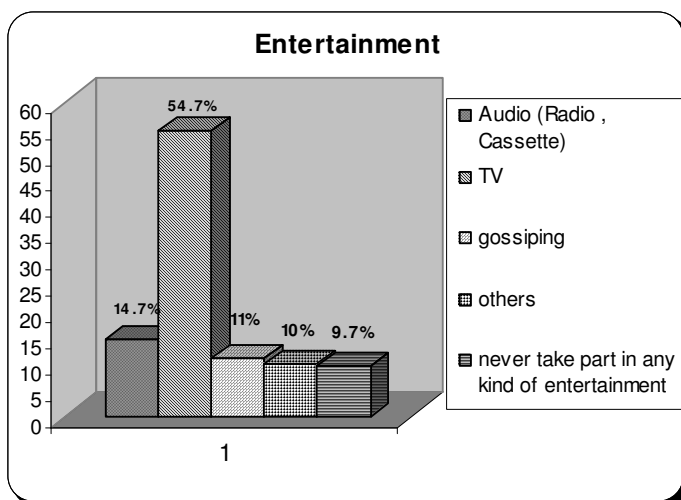
Rate of divorce is very low which may be due to negative attitude towards divorce. Respondents reported in the FGD that separation is more common than actual divorce. It is also observed that polygamy is common in the camp, but the respondents feel cautious to talk about this issue.

Majority (76%) of the respondents said there is no domestic violence in the area. Among 24% who reported about domestic violence, around one third (31%) of the respondents reported beating and verbal abuse as violence especially for dowry. Other incidents reported are altercation, family dispute due to economic crisis, clash due to drug abused husband etc which some time ends up in wife beating. During FGD some respondents denied any knowledge of the occurrence of domestic violence in the community. They do not consider beating or slapping as violence against women. Women of this community contribute economically in their family so in case of any disagreement they retort. However, a few of the participants did not agree with the others. One of them said that "if you come in the morning you will hear screaming coming from different households".

8.3.4. Entertainment:

Fifty five percent of the respondents reported that they spend their off time watching television, going out with family, spending time with family at home, resting etc. 15% respondents spend their time listening to radio/tape recorder. Eleven percent of the respondent's entertainment is gossiping. Recently annual family picnic has been added as entertainment. (See annex 1.J)

Mode of Entertainment (Figure: 4)



8.3.5. Festival:

Religious festivals such as Eid, Moharram, Shab-E-Barat, Shab-E-Meraj, Shab-E-Qadar etc are being observed by the respondents. In addition, they also observe Eid-A-Miladunnabi, Morga Fateha (Fateha Yajdaham), Akheri Budh (Akheri Chaha Shomba), Kawali (traditional Urdu song) performed in different occasions at *Majar* of Khaja Moinuddin Chisti situated in the area. The FGD participants mentioned that Mohorrom is the only occasion where Shia sect of the community performs different rituals. The respondents present at the FGD were Sunni but they also celebrated Mohorrom in a different manner, more for fun than as religious rituals.

Social ceremonies on the occasion of wedding, birthday, Akika (ceremony of naming a new-born Muslim child), circumcision etc are also celebrated by the respondents. 80% of the respondents reported that they regularly participate in all these festivals.

8.4. Economic Conditions

8.4.1. Types of work:

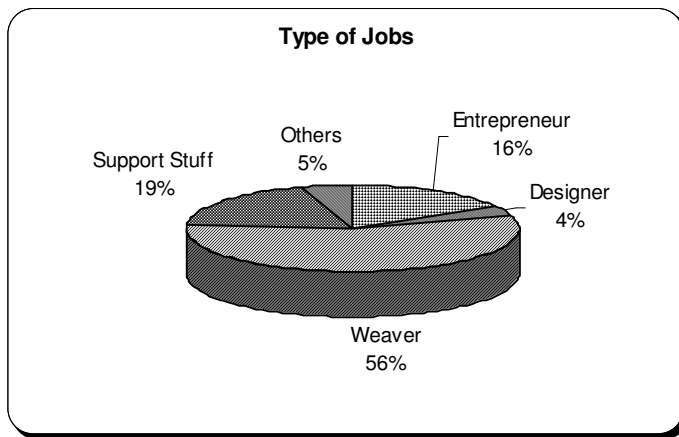
Fifty six percent of the respondents of the survey are weavers and 16% entrepreneurs. Only 3% are designers. All these professionals are male. But FGD findings revealed that there are 4 women entrepreneurs in the area who are active in their business.

FGD findings also show that the most of the entrepreneurs do not get much time to be directly involved in the production of Benarasi. They are mostly busy collecting raw materials or supervising workers. They claimed that they have to work 12-14 hours a day. They complained that due to lack of capital, they can not buy enough raw materials needed to meet the demand for required number of Benarasi sarees and other materials. They also need capital to store spare parts for machines. As such they have to make several trips to buy raw materials and/or spare parts, which is a waste of time and cost more money.

Among the auxiliary workers two third (64%) are women. They are engaged in thread cutting, dyeing and *Karbhupi* work. However, FGD findings indicates that since the Benarasi business is a

family business women in substantial number are engaged Benarasi work including decision making.

Type of Jobs (Figure: 5)



8. 4.2. Income:

The table below shows family income of the different category of workers. The average weekly income of the designers is highest i.e. Tk.850.00. Average weekly income of entrepreneurs is Tk.634.00 and weekly earning of most (96%) of the weavers is Tk.581.00. There is not much difference in the weekly income level of the auxiliary staff which is average Tk.520.00. 50% respondents mentioned that besides them there are 2-3 other earning members who are engaged in earning activities other than Benarasi. 30% respondents mentioned that she or he is the only earning person and engaged in Benarasi production. Only a few of the respondents have reported higher level of income probably because of higher number of earning members. (Annex)

Average Weekly Income

	No. of Respondents	Average Weekly Income	No. of Respondents	Average Weekly Income
Entrepreneurs	47	634	1	2500
Designer	09	850	0	0
Weaver	157	581	6	11833
Support Staff	74	520	6	3240
Others				

FGD findings show that the respondents were unable to give any accurate or even approximate information about their monthly income or they may not want to disclose. They said even one or two years back they used to keep regular track record of their income. But recently things have changed for worse. Now the whole community is going through a phase of economic hardship. FGD findings with women group indicate that women get less wages than men for same kind of work.

Nearly three fourth (72%) of the respondents reported that their level of economic solvency is not so well (often need to borrow money). 28% respondents mentioned that they are economically more or less solvent.

The respondents borrow money for investment in the business and/or take consumption loan to meet family expenses. They take loan from various sources such as NGOs (ASA, BRAC, SEEP, Shakti, Urban etc.), Bangladesh *Tant* Board, Krishi Bank etc.

They also borrow from their relatives, friends, neighbors and shop-owners. Moreover, they have their individual cooperative society called *Lottery Society*. Sixty seven percent of the respondents said that they have to payback borrowed money with interest. Among them 79% borrow money with fixed rate of interest. (Fixed by money lender) and 8% pay compound interest.(Annex 1) Others borrow money on a lump sum interest basis such as on a loan capital of Tk.10, 000, after one year/one season the loanee had to pay back Tk. 5,000 in addition to loan capital of Tk.10, 000.

FGD reveals similar findings that entrepreneurs usually borrow money from relatives or friends. Those who borrow from NGOs like ASA or SEEP have to pay high interest on the borrowed money. Respondents claimed that they have to pay 15% interests for the money borrowed from these NGOs. This high interest rate actually raises their production cost which ultimately increases the price of the sarees.

Around one fourth (24%) of the respondents reported that they have no savings/they cannot save money. Among the rest twenty eight percent reported that they save their money in the cooperative society. Other options are bank (22%), at home (21%), at different NGOs (27%) such as ASA, BRAC etc.

8.4.3. Reason for Continuing this Occupation

More than three fourth (76%) of the respondents had a number (5 to 24) of years of work experience on different areas of Benarasi productions.

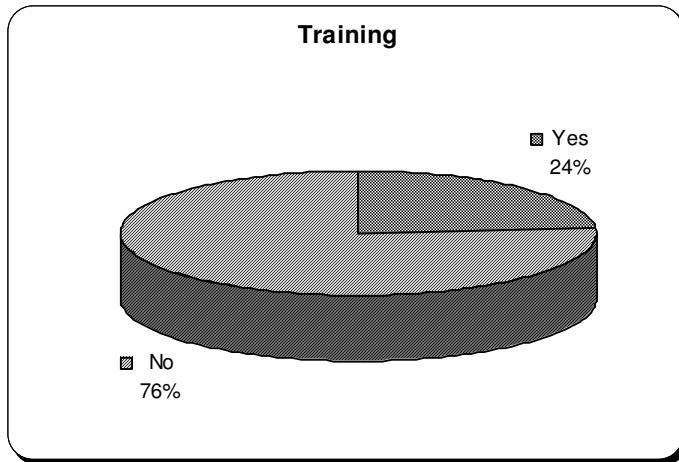
Thirty one percent reported that they chose this profession since they do not have any other skills. 27% of the respondents said that they are continuing with this profession since they do not have any other options. Other responses include; economic condition was good when they joined the profession and they are still hoping that condition will improve, other work requires more labor, advantage of combining economic work with household work or working within the housing area, opportunity to learn and work *Karchupi* work during leisure time and earn additional income.

FGD findings show that respondents have deep passion for their profession but at the same time expressed their grievances as day by day it is becoming difficult to hold on to this age old craftsmanship. They have little incentive to carry on this profession. They are ready to change their profession if they find any better alternative which would provide sufficient income to improve their standard of living.

8.4.4. Training:

Seventy six percent of the respondents have no institutional training related to their job. 58% reported that they need training. A little more than two third (64%) of the respondents opined that, if necessary training programs are imparted, they will be able to produce other products like scarf, wall-mat, three-piece for Shalwar Kamiz, bed-cover, pillow cover, cushion cover, purse etc.

Need for Training (Figure: 6)



FGD findings show that the participants want to have training in design, marketing and entrepreneurship rather than just on how to improve the skill in weaving, dying, *karchupi* work etc.

Sixty percent of the respondents said that they work 10-12 hours a day which of course varies according to demand of the product.

Case 1:

Mohammad Nadim (32) is an inhabitant of Mirpur Muslim Camp. He passed HSC and enrolled for a BA degree, but could not continue due to financial problem. He was married at the age of 25 and has one son who is studying in a local kindergarten school. He works as a designer. Initially he learnt the skill of designing from other designers of the Camp. In Bangladesh no training facility is available for the designers. Nadim took training from a person who came from Banaras (India) to visit his relative. Later on Nadim went to India with this person and took training over there. In India, there is high investment on training and continuous improvement of designs. He finds infiltration of illegal Indian product as a major challenge to the local industry and hence he wants increased government surveillance and attention on the issue. He also suggested that more media coverage for promoting the product of Mirpur Benarasi Palli is required to boost up this handicraft industry.

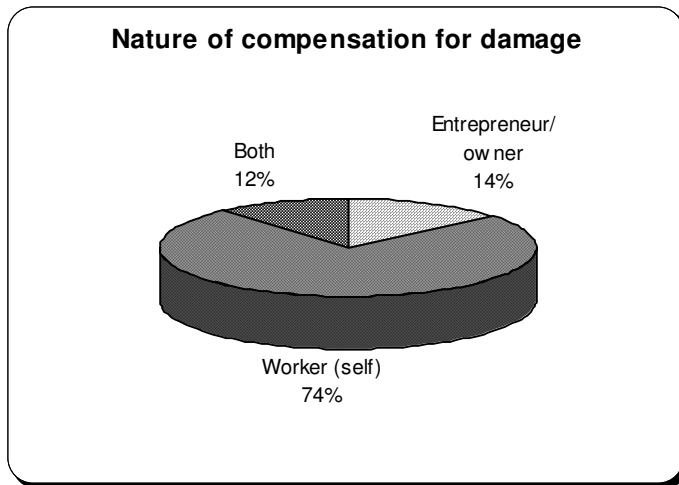
Fifty six percent of the respondents get their payment on piece work basis. 39% of the respondents reported that they get their wages on weekly basis. Workers work for six days a week from Saturday to Thursday and get their wages on Friday. More than three fourth (77%) of the respondents reported that they get their wages on time. 92% of the respondents reported that their current wage is not sufficient for them. **graph**

FGD findings show that they get their wage on time but they get irregular work order from the shop owner. Women get fewer wages than men for same piece of work. Designers work on contract basis, paid on the basis of quality and demand for the design. Generally they earn more income.

Seventy nine percent of the respondents reported that the pressure of work is not same all through the year. During the occasion of Eid, Wedding, Durga Puja, Moharram etc their work pressure is more and after these occasions and during rainy season they have less work.

About three fourth (74%) of the respondents said that in case of any damage in the products they have to bear the expense. 12% said that both owner and worker jointly share the loss. Only 14% reported that the owners bear the damage expense.

Nature of compensation for damage (Figure: 7)



Fifty three percent said that worker-owner relationship is good. 46% of the respondents said worker-owner relationship is moderate.

A little more than half (51%) of the respondents among the 300 are not a member of any association for different reasons. 28% of the respondents are members of different association such as SEEP, Shakti, TMSS, SAVE, ASA, Owner's Association, *Tanti Shamity*, Lottery Shamity, Bihari Shamity etc. 21% said they have no organization, association or cooperative society around the community.

Seventy percent of the respondents are not involved in any other job except Benarasi production. Rests are involved in other jobs such as *Karbhupi* work (not on Benarasi), handicraft, business, driving, working as cook (9%), mason (9%), furniture maker (9%) etc.

FGD respondents said that they do not face extortion or *Chanda baji* or rent seeking problems. However, they said that since the show room owners have the monopoly for marketing the products, they fix low purchase rate of the sarees from the producers and sale at a much higher prices.

8.5. Issues Related to Female Workers

The reason behind less scope for women to work as entrepreneurs or weavers are: the society considers that it is a matter of dishonor for woman to work outside or work on the loom, male members get irritated, women cannot operate machines as operating loom is hard work it is tough for women, lack of skill, pressure of household work, physical weakness, low wages, etc.

Forty six percent of the respondents reported that their wage is lower than that of the male workers.

Ninety six percent of the female respondents do not face any resistance from the family or community for the work they do relate to Benarasi. 42% of the respondents reported that their work load was not reduced during pregnancy. (Annex 1)

As mentioned earlier, women are mostly involved in Benarasi related auxiliary activities. There are only a few women entrepreneurs in this community.

Case Studies show that in both the cases family members especially husbands are providing not only moral support but also different kinds of business support to these women in order to establish themselves as reasonably successful entrepreneurs. They are confident enough even to go for procurement of raw materials and marketing of the products in case husband is unable to support.

FGD findings reveal that women's economic involvement to Benarasi is familiar to their community. Women and children do the work (Karchupi, embroidery, cutting thread etc) in their home; one room house, small, narrow and congested. It is difficult for the family members to move around. Their work is also hampered due to insufficient light, particularly during cloudy weather. In some cases water enters the houses during rainy season when rain water submerges the area.

Most of them mentioned that, they were engaged in this profession to support their family. Some of them are the main earning members of the family, as they do not have any adult male earning member or their male members are not capable of supporting the family.

Women generally work 5/6 hours daily besides household works. Sometimes they have to work 8-9 hours per day especially during pick business season. In some emergency cases they work even at night. Their children often help them in their work. In some cases the male members of the family help them in household work when they are busy in *Karchupi* work.

Case 2:

Among the entrepreneurs of Mirpur Benarasi Palli Guria is one of the female entrepreneurs in the business. Twenty five years old Guria is married with one girl child of 3 n half yr. She joined this business independently ten years ago, but is in this profession from childhood as her entire family is involved in this business and presently they are helping her.

She owned two Benarasi looms, one is in her house and the other is rented outside the house. She gets tk. 400 from that loom. She has started the business with the loan taken from SEEP. She had no capital besides this loan of tk. 5,000, which she has to pay tk. 270 per week. She repaid the loan in one year. She mentioned that she want to extend her business.

Her brother in law assists her in buying raw materials, collect rent from loom user. Although she has mobility to go outside for raw material shopping, but she usually feel reluctant to go for raw material shopping as she has a daughter of 3yr at home.

She preserves raw materials at her home, but she mentioned that she does not have to keep this thing for more than one week. Both Guria and her brother in law mentioned that their business was better during Ershad (Ex-President) regime, but currently their business is not well.

Guria's monthly income is tk. 4,500 (app.) as she get loom rent tk. 400, tk. 50 per sari and tk.10 per saree for karchupi work. She mentioned that in one week one to two saris can be produced from one tant. She also reported that she and her mother can do Karchupi on 5/6 sari in a day. She can save money after all her expenses. She saves her money in their local Lottery Shamity.

When asked about problem, she mentioned that the shop-owners do not want to share profit. They buy saris only if it has good color and design. She also mentioned that all the shop-owner follow the same policy when it comes to buy sari from them. The entrepreneurs and weavers do not have the unity like the shop owner that's why they can not fight for their rights.

She recommends that if Benarasi sari could be exported, the demand of Benarasi will increase with demand.

Case 3:

Nurjahan, wife of Mohammad Nasim both have separate identity as entrepreneurs. Nurjahan, mostly known as Malo apa has started her own business in the year 2002. Before that she assisted her husband in the business. She has 4 children, two girls and two boys and all of them are students. She lived in a one storied building (paka house), has a bed made of rot iron, wardrobe, fridge, television, showcase etc. She has electricity in her house. She also has separate kitchen and bathroom in the house which is covered with curtain. They use common toilet outside the house. She and her husband had built a banker over the bed where the girls sleep at night and in the day they use this space for Karchupi work.

Nurjahan has started her business with capital from her savings and bought two looms. Later she took tk. 5,000 loan from Bangladesh Krishi Bank and bought another two looms. She has appointed eight weavers to work for her. She mentioned that in a week 3/4 sari can be made through one loom. She pays a wage of tk.300 to each weaver per week. She bought designs from the design master cost of which varies from tk.150 to tk. 5,000. Finished products then taken to the showroom owners for sale. Nurjahan mentioned that showroom owners give them a profit of tk.50 per sari. She reported that showroom owners do not want to give more than tk. 50.

She explained that generally her husband buy raw materials from the local market but if needed she can go and buy raw materials too. She reported that at a time they buy threads for 10 saris. Per kg thread costs tk. 180. They used to buy pure silk threads before which now costs tk.3, 000. That's why they buy Chinese (Polyester) threads rather than silk threads. They call it Dengu Tana.

Regular servicing of the looms is generally done by the weavers, but Nurjahan and her family participate in it on the day of *Fateba* (A religious rituals). She also earns tk 200 per day from Karchupi work. Her children help her in the Karchupi work. She can save some money after household expenditure, children's education expense and paying her employees. She wants to extend her business but due to shortage of place she can not do it.

Women embed beads, zari, other decorative materials not only on Benarasi, but on cotton and georgette sarees. The current wage rate of the female workers is TK. 80 per saree (who work part time in addition to household work). Due to the declining demand of Benarasi their wage rate has declined from Tk. 200 to Tk. 80 per sari. Some female workers are the main earning members of the family who work full time. They get Tk. 160 per day for working on two sarees. They also mentioned that if they have capital to buy raw materials themselves, they can earn more. (Tk.150 instead of Tk.80)

The female workers generally save money in co-operative society like ASA or SEEP, they take loan with 15% interest rate against their savings and invest the loan in *Karchupi* work. They want to have low interest rate. A few of them invest the savings in insurance. Some of them use their money on their children's education. They also mentioned that if they have capital to buy raw materials themselves, they can earn more. (Tk.150 instead of Tk.80). Most of the respondents wish to become entrepreneur if they get necessary support.

FGD with women reveals same findings regarding health, education, festivals, marriage and government support as mentioned in the previous sections.

8.6. Future Prospect

More than half (54%) of the respondents wish to continue with this profession in the future if the working condition including reasonable price of the raw materials and procurement process, marketing, scope for training, policy to stop import of Benarasi from neighboring countries and promotion of export of local products to other countries etc. improves. (Annex 1.b) Rest of the respondents are more or less not interested due to low wage, increase expense of raw materials,

hard work (Benarasi work is much laborious than other work), declining business etc. If there is opportunity, 29% of them want to go for business, 22% respondents want to undertake professional work or in other cottage industry depending on if they get reasonably higher wages.

9. Problems Faced by the People Engaged in this Industry

As mentioned by the respondents during survey the Benarasi industry seems to be plagued with a number of serious problems which needs urgent attention. Owners, weavers, supporting staff, designer- all have a story to tell about the particular problems they face. Following are the problems identified by them:

1. Low wage has been identified as the single biggest problem faced by the weavers and auxiliary workers.
2. Unhealthy work environment is another issue about which the workers in general are very dissatisfied. There is not sufficient ventilation or lighting facilities for the workers which affects on the health of the workers who have to work for long hours. During pick season weavers have to work on an average 12 hours a day, 6 days a week. Weavers have to work in small congested rooms.
3. Some of the respondents have complained that the work itself is very hard. Operating a handloom requires strength and physically it is very exhaustive task.
4. Owner-worker relationship is also not very pleasant. Some of the workers have even accused the owners of not paying fair wages. Owners sell their product at a much higher price. Workers said that only the entrepreneurs and the shop owners enjoy lion share of the profit from the business. The workers hard toil doesn't ensure good remuneration.
5. There is a classic problem of middlemen. These middlemen deprive the weavers from their due share of the profit. Those in the lower chain of the production activity of their due share of the profit. They buy the products at a much lower price from the weavers and/or entrepreneurs and sell them to the shop owners for the products
6. Some of the respondents stated that work opportunity for them is not the same all over the year. Sometimes they have to go without any work for certain periods. This lack of guarantee of an income earning option is another problem.
7. Workers don't even have a trade union or co-operative society of their own. As a result there is no authority which can raise its voice against the injustices done to workers on their behalf. It also greatly diminishes their bargaining capacity regarding price fixation of the product, wage or working hour.
8. The respondents are concerned about lack of variation in design. They said that the taste of customers change over time but the Benarasi industry in Mirpur has failed to keep pace with the change. Also fashion of the day is Karchupi work on Georgette sari. As such Benarasi sari does not have that much demand to the customers. Some others said that these days Benarasi sari is losing market to the more popular Katan and cotton sarees of Tangail due to cheaper price.
9. Respondents have also grievances about the apathy of government to promote this industry. According to them government support regarding Benarasi production is very limited. The number of artisans is also reducing day by day creating problem of skilled labor shortage.

10. The increasing prices (yearn price shot up to Tk. 28,00 to Tk. 32,00 per kilogram from Tk. 16,00) of raw materials are making the Benarasi product expensive.
11. The availability of cheap Indian Benarasi Saris with better design in the market. They complained that the show room owners and customers prefer the novel design and less costly Indian products. According to them these Indian products are cheap because they are produced in power looms which reduce labor cost. Besides, Indian producers use indigenous raw materials which save them from added cost of import duty. During FGD the participants appreciated government policy to control the influx of Indian products. The problem of copying Benarasi design on cheap Tangail materials is also threatening this already ailing industry and damaging its reputation.
12. Due to tariff barriers imposed upon Bangladeshi Benarasi products easy access of these products to Indian market is limited.
13. Women workers have their own gender specific problems. Benarasi production is still largely a male dominated industry. Though women do a lot of important supporting works from reeling the bobbin to embedding beads and zari, their work is not appreciated and under valued. Some Women also complained of receiving lower wage than male auxiliary workers for the same piece of work. So there is gender discrimination when it comes to the question of wage.
14. The Benarasi industry is no longer limited to the geographical area of Mirpur. Now the villagers in Manikganj, Sirajganj, Tangail, Ishwardi etc. are producing low quality, low cost Benarasi saris with reduced labor cost and sub standard fabric. Benarasi products of Mirpur cannot compete with those products.
15. The show room owners' sell the Benarasi products to the customers at a much higher prices than what they pay to the producers. During FGD the participants said that they want the right to regulate the mode of operation of the show room owners.
16. The lack of a settlement for Benarasi producers has been identified as the most persistent problem for the community. The respondents opined that if the craftsmen were placed in a single area, it would be easier for government and craftsmen to deliver the services. Respondents want a territory of their own which will help in getting loan. Government allocated land for the Benarasi Palli at Bhashantek. The families of Benarasi Palli organized Tant Shilpa Samity to collect installments for the land allocated to each of them. Some of the residence even paid certain amount of money as installment but management of the samity defrauded the money. No action has yet been taken against them. The price of the land has gone up which now they cannot afford. Presently, these plots are being allocated to government and non-government agencies. The respondents identified the failure of successive governments to ensure that only weavers get plot allocation in the proposed Benarasi Palli in Vashantek. They complained that corruption is prevalent in the allocation procedure as rich people with no background of Benarasi work are getting the allocation using bribe. The chairperson of the Bangladesh Bihari Rehabilitation Centre said that without any permanent rehabilitation program by the government they are not going to move out of this camp.

Case 4:

Masrur Ahmed Munna (nick name Munna Mahajan) is an entrepreneur living in Muslim Camp of Mirpur- 10. He is 58 years old and is illiterate. He has seven members in the family. He earns around Taka seven thousand per month from various Benarasi related activities (weaving, selling). He is involved in this profession following family tradition. When he was young he left the camp and did various other jobs for ten years but could not do well. He returned to the camp and got engaged in Benarasi activities. Like most other of the Benarasi Palli he does not have formal training on this skill, just learned the skill as apprentice.

Though the demand for Benarasi is increasing, the workers and most of the entrepreneurs of Mirpur Benarasi Palli do not make much money. In the last few years a number of factories have been closed down. Traditional weavers are taking up other odd jobs for living.

According to Masrur the problems in Mirpur Benarasi industry are: high price of raw materials and competition with cheap Indian goods in the market. The control of business is in the hand of new capitalists who are not traditionally involved in Benarasi production. So they tend to focus mainly on profit. They have no interest to preserve the product as traditional craft, neither they are concerned about labor welfare. He also added that there is long bureaucratic procedure in securing loan and the amount of loan money is not enough as the borrowers don't have much to mortgage to the bank.

However, he thinks that ensuring soft loan facilities to marginal, small and traditionally engaged entrepreneur, reducing the price of raw materials, controlling the illegally imported Indian products can save the industry.

Case Study 6.

Emdad Haque designer and proprietor of “Banglar Mela” has made western clothing and household things such as drape with Benarasi which is very much adorable to Europeans. Benarasi made product can be an export item, he mentioned.

He said that countrywide expansion of Benarasi industry is a positive improvement. However he showed his concern over the condition of workers in Mirpur area. Due to difference in culture, language, lifestyle they keep themselves isolated from the mainstream population.

Lack of professionalism has lead to the tendency to be irregular at work, breaching the commitments espoused in the contracts, not following the ordered designs to save money, no effort at experimenting with the fabric, lack of creativity in designing and piracy.

Mr. Haque recommends some point in order to hurdle this barriers and contribute to the Benarasi industry. The Benarasi entrepreneurs, weavers as well as the shop-owners should give proper information about the product such as what materials have been used, what proportion of silk threads have been used, what type of zari have been used etc. The shop-owners should fix price ranges for all groups of customers. Weaving patterns should be changed for example-Tanchoi, Brocade, Jute katan or fusion with any of this two type etc.

Indian Benarasi market can be followed to develop our market. Because Indian Benarasi shops sell saris in different price range, they mention the proportion of silk thread and synthetic thread; they display the technique of washing saris. They also attach the silk mark by the silk board on their products.

Mr. Haque also suggests that a governmental visit in India can be organized to observe the pattern of Indian weaving. If our government can manage the way of conversation between the two countries it will help our private initiative as well as Benarasi industry.

Benarasi has a great prospect in abroad specially in Europe. They use Benarasi as decoration materials. This niche product can earn foreign currency if Bangladesh Handloom Board, EPB etc support this industry. Mr. Haque believes that a proper research on Benarasi industry can improve the fate of the people involved in this profession, the consumers and the industry also.

While talking about the social condition of the Benarasi workers Mr. Haque appreciates the growing practice of education among the people of Mirpur Benarasi Palli. He considers Benarasi industry as family industry, because the whole family is involved with the business. He mentioned that he does not believe that weaving is a men’s job. It can be performed by the women also. But he also told that certain type of loom can be harmful for the women like the back strap loom. He firmly believes that she or he who is better will do the job. No work is gender biased. Child labor is allowed in the Benarasi Palli and his analyze it positively. He said that these children help their family besides their schooling. They are not taking drugs or gambling outside. So their work should be appreciated.

Mr Emdad Haque has a future plan. He wants to organize show in collaboration with other designers from different boutiques. This show will only exhibit Benarasi sari and product made with Benarasi.

Case Study: 5

Ms. Munira Emdad, Proprietor, Tangail Saree Kutir started working with Benarasi since 1985. At that time Mirpur Benarasi Palli was not developed. The area as well as the Benarasi industry flourished with the course of time. According to her Benarasi industry has improved but the Benarasi workers of Mirpur could not change their status. She mentioned various reasons behind their misery. The main reason is lack of permanent living place of the workers of Mirpur as said by Ms. Munira. People of Mirpur have to think of the price of threads and other raw materials. She said that people of Tangail have managed to progress their condition because they live in village in their own home. Other reasons are their irregularity, laziness, indiscipline life style. They are not committed to their work and very unprofessional. Moreover, the price of raw materials fluctuates.

Ms. Munira basically works on Benarasi sari, but recently she is making two pieces for salwar kamiz. She works with the Benarasi workers directly and works on regular payment. She made her own designs, but say that she has to keep strict eye on the workers to prevent design piracy. She wants to made original Benarasi exclusively, but could not do so as there are only 4/5 Benarasi workers who knows the art of pure Benarasi sari.

She wants to work with Benarasi sari only in future. However, she does not want to export sari directly. Though people buy sari from her shop and send them abroad.

She recommends that government should rehabilitate the Benarasi workers of Mirpur Benarasi Palli immediately. If they get a permanent place to live they will automatically get other training. Stable supply of raw materials will also affect the cost of sari. She firmly believes that Benarasi workers of Mirpur have capacity to capture the market both in the country and abroad.

Case Study 7:

Mohammad Aslam Hossain (28) is a shop-owner of Mirpur Benarasi Palli. His grand parents migrated from India to Bangladesh when his father was just a kid. He started working after the death of his father due to financial crisis. In the beginning, he worked for other entrepreneurs. He then took loan from Krishi bank in the year 1996. He took over the possession of their rented shop and started his own business. Right now 20 loom workers work under him. He provides design for his entire sari. Aslam think that present condition of Benarasi industry is good than before.

He said that he pay the workers for per sari. The price rate is fixed by him. He mainly produce sari, but presently he is also producing three pieces for Salwar Kamiz.

According to Md. Aslam the state of Benarasi business deteriorate because the people of this area are unprofessional, greedy, lazy, and irregular to their work. They take loan but do not return it timely. They do not follow the instructions of the designers and entrepreneurs properly. Some times they compromise with the quality of the sari by using less *sari*, decreasing length of the sari but they demand more wage for per sari. Many of them invest large amount of money in the business by putting more looms. But they could not manage to earn expected profit. Another problem is bank loan provided by Krishi Bank. The problem is that people take loan on the basis of fake loom. The bank authority does not verify the ability of the borrower. As a result they pay back from their loaned money or they do not pay and end of the contract the bank seized their looms, send notice etc. Other problem is the internal migrants who come from all over the country for more profit. Basically these people have entered in the business suddenly. They recruit more workers in the loom, they even use the helpers/ support staff as worker (Tanti) by giving them more wage. These types of entrepreneurs are selling their products in a lesser amount of profit (tk. 50 per sari) to recollect their capital. Thus they are destroying the status of Benarasi industry. Moreover, some entrepreneurs are migrating to then villages of Tangail due to cheap labor cost.

When asked about giving only tk.50 profit he questioned the attitude of the workers. He mentioned that the workers want money immediately after completing the sari. They should wait for a while to get more profit. They should make good quality product and then the shop-owners will automatically buy sari and give them more profit.

He is interested in exporting Benarasi saris. He said that if he gets opportunity will send his product to international market and different fairs.

10. Recommendations

To address the problems and ensure the promotion of the Benarasi industry, the respondents made a number of recommendations. These are as follows:

1. The government should allocate an area for Benarasi production in the country rather than spreading this industry all over Bangladesh.
2. As low wage had previously been identified as the single biggest problem, the increase in the wage was considered to be the most important task ahead.
3. Protectionism was identified as the second important factor. It was important to stop the smuggling of Benarasi products from India to save the local industry.

The Government policy and program to export of Benarasi products will expand their market and increase their demand. Government should negotiate with the Indian Government to remove tariff barriers imposed upon Bangladeshi Benarasi products to promote easy access of these products to Indian market.

4. Promotion of marketing of indigenous Benarasi products in the local market is also necessary to give the industry a necessary boost.
5. The Government subsidies to Benarasi product would help in promoting the Benarasi industry.

The government should provide loans with low interest rate to the workers for the procurement of loom. The interest rate for loans should be decreased to 5%. They also pointed out that the present amount of loan that they get from different banks or financial institutions is not enough for the smooth operation of the business. Presently they get Tk. 20-25 thousand as loan. But they need at least taka one lac for business purpose.

6. Government monitoring on the fare price of the raw materials was considered to be another important factor.
7. The price of the Benarasi should be fixed by the cooperative society.
8. Continuous review and revision on design to meet the varied test of the customers is required for increase demand for the product.
9. Better training was identified as a necessary step to improve the design and entrepreneurship skill.
10. It is also important to improve the relation between the owners and workers in the industry.
11. Providing salary on time, establishing cooperative society for the workers, concentration of Benarasi production only in Mirpur, approving debt holiday, preventing piracy of design, increasing involvement of NGOs in this sector for training, funding, supply of raw materials, marketing etc., creating more employment opportunities and ensuring regular work inside the industry, fixing fare price of Benarasi products, ensuring better

work environment, establishing more schools, eliminating middlemen- all these were viewed as important for the over all development of the Benarasi industry in Mirpur.

12. Government and/or NGOs should assist in marketing of their products so that they are saved from the exploitation of show room owners. Increasing involvement of NGOs in this sector for training, funding, supply of raw materials, marketing etc

11. Conclusion

During survey with different stakeholders (designers, entrepreneurs, weavers, and boutique shop owners) a number of challenges facing the Benarasi industry in Bangladesh have been pointed out. Lack of citizenship has been identified as one of the major problems for which they are segregated and isolated from the mainstream community. They do not have any permanent place to settle which is an issue regarding their business. Both the workers and proprietor have mentioned that a permanent living place can reduce many problems of Benarasi industry. Throughout the research it has been observed by the researchers that their economic condition is not satisfactory according to their living style. However, they have lots of cultural aspect and they invest a lot in these festivals even curtailing their primary needs. If they reduce these social costs and invest them in their essential requirement it will improve their living standard.

Although they are illiterate they are very education conscious. The adult members send their children or younger one's to schools for learning. The people of Benarasi Palli have started understanding the necessity of education and if they reply their learning to their profession they can improve their status as well as their business.

The people of Benarasi Palli are very conscious about maternal and child health even though their living spaces are narrow, water and sanitation condition is poor.

Creating and sustaining a market for our Benarasi product overseas and instituting some government incentives and initiatives to promote export have been highlighted by a number of interviewees. The owners of renowned boutique houses of the city pointed out that there is tremendous potential for this industry in Bangladesh if proper government attention was received. They are of opinion that quality Benarasi product from Bangladesh has high demand outside the country. But exporting these products on a large scale requires government sponsorship. To capture market for these products-domestic or overseas, quality control and standardization are must.

During the field visit, researchers found out that there is a large variation of Benarasi products of the same category. Consumers also complain about the deteriorating quality of the Benarasi sarees. Entrepreneurs have a story to tell in their defense. The rising cost of raw materials is forcing them to compromise with the quality of saree. For example one entrepreneur said that one pound of better quality Chinese silk cost them taka 3,200 whereas they can buy lower quality Chinese silk at only taka 180. They claim that the shop owners do not want to pay more for better quality Benarasi. So investing the same amount of energy, effort and labor for less remunerative quality saree is not a wise business option for them.

When it comes to expanding the overseas market for Benarasi another important revelation needs to be made. The industry people here in Bangladesh do not have any clear idea or plan about exporting their products outside the country. All they can understand and relate to is that

during *Ersbad* regime foreign delegations to this country used to procure a lot of Benarasi sarees from Mirpur. Those golden days are over for them now.

But those who want to work on this niche of fabric and those who dream of spreading its magic worldwide think that Benarasi has lots of potential to attract international market. They think that we can tap on this emerging market of exotic, intrinsic art of clothing if we get appropriate government sponsorship. Government can subsidize this sector by providing credit, building necessary social, economic and financial infrastructure, arranging marketing campaigns worldwide, negotiating with interested buyers. In this age of free market economy total and absolute government intervention in any sector of the economy is neither possible nor welcome. The policy intervention to support and encourage private sector investment in this area is urgently needed. At the same time a minimum level of government support is necessary to give the entrepreneurs the much needed guarantee of their investment in this new endeavor to export Benarasi products. All that entrepreneurs are asking for is the smoothening of their way ahead. A little government recognition of the importance of the sector and the establishment of a healthy environment for business can make a big difference. As it has been mentioned earlier quality control and standard setting are the two important issue areas which the government has to address. The example of Indian Benarasi industry can really help our policy makers a lot in this respect.