



Fig. D: Saree weaving is undertaken in a niche in the household (Krauthausen 2015)

Transformation processes in the saree weaving industry in Madanpura, Varanasi

Keywords: Weaving industry, Trade, Craft, Modernisation, Sector of economic activity

1 Introduction

Since independence in 1947 the Indian weaving industry underwent deep processes of economic transformation (Wood 2013, 48, Raman 2013, Tanusree 2015). Modernisation, industrialisation and globalisation led to severe changes with different impacts on social, political and economic structures. Neoliberal policies implemented after 1991 affected especially small scale urban industries and the handloom weaving industry in India started to decline and lost its market due to industrialisation processes and consequences of trade and market liberalisation (Tanusree 2015, 48).

The city of Varanasi has been a centre of the silk weaving industry and a commercial capital since the late 1700s (Wood 2013, 46) and the saree weaving industry still forms an important economic base for the city (JNNUMR 2006, 28). Particularly the handloom weaving industry of Varanasi has a long tradition and the typical *Banarsi* saree is famous not only all over India but also worldwide. However, also in Varanasi this industry has undergone drastic transformation processes in the last decades, affecting the social and economic structures of weaving communities. Those suffered especially from the competition from new technologies in form of powerlooms, increasing yarn prices and decreasing wages.

This paper discusses the effects of these transformation processes within the handloom weaving industry of Varanasi with the objective to analyse and understand the outcomes of macro-level processes on the micro-level unit of the weaver household, exemplified by the saree weaving community in the city quarter of Madanpura as an important production centre of the local weaving industry. The fieldwork in Madanpura aimed to assess the current social and economic structures in the local weaving community and the impacts and influences that recent economic and political changes have had on these structures.

The paper proceeds by exemplifying the political and economic transformation processes and changes in the weaving industry since Indian independence to establish an explanatory framework, followed by the introduction of the research area and the presentation of the methodological approach of this study. In the subsequent parts the findings of the research are presented, discussed and finally summarised within the frame of the research questions.

2 Transformation processes in the weaving industry - historical and political framings

The historical and political causes of transformation in the small-scale weaving industry that developed in post-colonial India provide the background against which an analysis of the local situation in a Varanasi weaving quarter takes place. These essentially refer to the

macro policy environment and recent economic reforms governing social and economic relations in the weaving sector.

2.1 Macro policy environment - from handloom to powerloom

Transformation processes within small scale industries and artisanal groups were a worldwide phenomenon in the 19th and early 20th century caused by industrialisation and emerging technological innovations (Tanusree 2015, 48). In that overall context also the traditional handloom weaving industry in India experienced profound structural transformations. With the independence of India new economic policies were implemented leading to trade and market liberalisations that built the basis for increased industrialisation in the handloom weaving industry, causing an economic crisis affecting in the handloom sector (ibid.). This crisis of the handloom industry affected a huge number of workers as it constitutes the second largest sector of employment in the Indian economy next to agriculture (Raman 2013, 43, Tanusree 2015, 48). For Varanasi, with its centuries old tradition of silk weaving industry, such small scale industries form an important pillar of the urban economy too (JNNURM 2006, 28). It is estimated that the handloom industry is a source of livelihood for about one million people in and around Varanasi (Raman 2013, 43).

The first decade after the independence can already be considered as “[...] *a watershed in the growth of [the] silk industry [...]*”, forcing a multitude of [handloom] weavers to change their profession from weaving to e.g. rickshaw pulling or construction work (Jaiswal 2012, 89f). The government focus on economic progress through modernisation and industrialisation favoured the growth of the powerloom sector, leading to the decline of the handloom industry. It is estimated that today one powerloom displaces 14 handlooms (Raman 2013, 50) which had a severe impact on the livelihoods of handloom weavers (ibid, 46).

The ongoing crisis within the handloom saree industry was further reinforced through market orientated economic reforms during the 1970s and 1990s that led to increasing prices of raw materials, further sharpening of the competition from the powerloom sector and an overall lowering of wages (Raman 2013, 43ff). Hence, the government policy during the liberation phase has been identified as one of the “[...] *overarching reason[s] for the crisis*” (Raman 2013, 44).

2.2 Government policies and economic reforms

Since 1991 the Indian economy went through several episodes of liberalisation (Wadhva 2004, 260). As many other developing countries, India launched its market-orientated economic reforms with the aim to reshape the country’s economic policies based on more export-orientated and more globally connected strategies of development (Wadhva 2004, 259ff).

Policies working towards establishment of a liberalised market economy already played a significant role in the economic development of India during the leadership of Prime

Minister Rajiv Gandhi (1984-1989), as exemplified through the New Textile Policy (NTP) implemented in 1985 as part of a paradigm shift from a state controlled import substitution to an export-oriented growth (Raman 2013, 44). In contrast to the former emphasis on the generation of employment, social justice and equality in the textile sector, the new policy focused on modernisation, efficiency, productivity and market competition, thus providing several advantages and benefits for the powerloom sector (ibid.). In order to better compete with the international market within a globalising world, one of the principle objectives was the modernisation of the handloom weaving sector by “*shifting to powerlooms and computer aided designs*” (Raman 2013, 49f). Initiatives to protect the handloom sector from competition from the powerloom and mill sector such as the Handloom Act of 1985 were initiated, but not implemented after all, as they got challenged in court by powerloom and mill sector lobbies (Raman 2013, 45).

The ‘New Economic Policy’ in the course of the exchange crisis in 1991 intensified the problems that emerged with the NTP of 1985 through further neoliberal economic reforms in the Indian textile industry (Raman 2013, 48f, Panagariya 2003, 2). In this context the Indian government implemented an embargo for Chinese silk imports in 1996 to promote Bangalore silk being used for weaving the traditional *Banarsi* saree. This strongly affected the weavers of Varanasi, as until then approximately 60% of local annual silk usages were imports from China (Raman 2013, 51). However, in 2001 as per requirements under the World Trade Organisation regime, the government abolished the quantitative restrictions by a drastic reduction of import tariffs, leading to increasing imports of cheaper silk fabrics from China on the one hand and Chinese yarn, which was more expensive than Indian yarn at that time. That again worsened the situation of the handloom weaver in Varanasi (ibid.). A further major cause for the crisis of the handloom weaving industry was the enormous increase of the price for silk yarn between 2001 and 2010. In 1990 one kilogramme of silk cost around 100 Rupee and rose to 3.500 Rupee per kilogramme in 2010 (Tanusree 2015, 51). This trend hit the textile industry in general, but particularly the handloom weavers very drastically. The governments’ attempt to address the plight of the handloom industry by trying to increase the import tariffs for Chinese silk fabrics in 2003 was not realised because the WTO imposed to further liberalise manufacturing and industrial trade and aimed for the elimination of import tariffs, e.g. in the textile-sector (Raman 2013, 51f).

Although the weaver communities were and still are “[...] *struggling with direct threats to their occupations and livelihoods [...]*” caused by these transformations, the government refrained from implementing programmes and schemes to protect and support the handloom weavers adequately (Wood 2013, 43f). In addition, the weaving community appears to be highly unorganised and until today the weavers were not able to form permanent associations that work to support their own interests, neither on a political nor on an economic level (Wood 2013, 44, Rai 2014).

3 The Research area: Madanpura

Fieldwork for this study was conducted in Madanpura⁸, representing one of several weaving wards within Varanasi and mainly inhabited by a Muslims (Fig.2.1). The ward is located in the old part of Varanasi adjacent to the Ganga river (JNNURM 2006, 35f) and is supposed to be “[...] one of oldest locations of the weavers in Banaras” (Kumar 1988, 68). The long established history of Madanpura as a weaving quarter makes it a very suitable site for analysing the effects of transformation processes in the industry, both looking at the effects on social and economic structures within the local weaving community and on the localised spatial organisation of the industry inside Madanpura as a weaving quarter. Kumar states that (1988, 71) “Madanpura is officially one mohalla⁹ [...], but in everyday usage the name refers to a group of mohallas surrounding Madanpura proper”. She also describes that “it is described most succinctly by the occupation that predominates there [...]” (ibid.). In respect to the difference between administrative and subjectively perceived borders and keeping in mind that the borders of the official municipal wards are usually not congruent with a neighbourhoods as perceived by residents, the present study aims to describe Madanpura as a weaving quarter, and to portray its inherent structures with regard to the subjective perceptions of the resident community.



Figure 2.1: Location of Madanpura (Source: own design, based on Open Street Maps)

The majority¹⁰ of the handloom weavers in Varanasi belong to the *Momin Ansari* community, which is represented as a ‘low-ranked’ or ‘backward’ Muslim community. (Wood 2013, 43). The *Momin Ansaris* constitute the bulk of Varanasi’s Muslim minority (Wood, 2010, 15). Besides being an occupational group, the *Ansaris* also represent a ‘caste’ group¹¹ (Wood 2010, 14). Most *Ansaris* are weavers and one major characteristic of the *Momin Ansari* community, especially if compared to other artisanal communities, is the important role of solidarity and social cohesion in the community, which used to be based on the home-based production process and the family acting as a production unit (Raman 2013, 28). However, with the macro policy changes in the weaving industry during the last decades the community has undergone drastic changes, leading to the emergence

⁸ Administratively Madanpura comprises one of Varanasi’s 90 wards (Municipal Corporation of Varanasi 2015)

⁹ Mohalla is a Hindi term meaning street or neighbourhood (Raman 2010)

¹⁰ Data from informal estimates range between 60% and 90% (Wood 2013: 43)

¹¹ „While Islam is supposed to be a ‚casteless‘ religion, Muslim communities in India have over several centuries developed something like a caste system“ (Wood 2010: 14)

of new social classes (Raman 2013, 27). Today, the *Ansari* community is stratified with different actors fulfilling specified tasks and possessing different power: the *Gaddidars* are wholesalers being mainly in charge of the selling and business processes and are often described as the economically and socially powerful elite of the *Ansari* community (Wood 2014, 55). *Girhastas* act as intermediaries between the *Gaddidars* and the weavers and are mainly responsible for managing and controlling the different steps of production and the work of weavers and other occupational groups involved in the production processes. Weavers are responsible for the actual weaving process and economically often highly dependent on *Gaddidars* and *Girhastas*. Compared to the more successful weavers who “[...] moved up the economic ladder by [investing in] powerlooms [...]” and entering the business market, the handloom weavers can be described as an “*extremely poor and marginalized*” group (Wood 2010, 14).

The production process of handloom woven sarees in Madanpura can be subdivided into pre-weaving (designing of pattern, design card preparation, purchase of raw material, colouring or bleaching of yarn and preparation of the loom), weaving and post-weaving processes (cutting, colouring, cleaning, washing and ironing of the sarees, embroidery work and packing of the sarees). Finally the finished products are sold. These separate steps are managed by different actors in a hierarchy of economic relations, which will be further described within this study.

4 Researching a local weaving industry: the methodological framework

With the aim to gain a broader understanding of the transformation processes in the context of industrialisation and modernisation and its impacts on the weaving industry in Madanpura, three analytical dimensions were identified to structure the methodological approach: the spatial dimension, the dimension of power relations and hierarchical structures within the local weaving industry and its occupational structures and social roles.

In a first step, the spatial and socio-economic settings within Madanpura were analysed through interviews and observations. This went along with mapping the main structures related to weaving within the research area in order to get an overview about the spatial distribution and patterns of the production units and households (Fig.2.2). In addition, 26 semi-structured interviews were conducted on a household level, focusing on the main actors of the handloom saree weaving industry: handloom weavers, *Gaddidars* and *Girhastas*, supplemented by twelve short interviews with further actors involved in the processes of saree production and marketing. 17 out of the 26 interviews were conducted in weaver households, four in households of *Gaddidars* and six in those of *Girhastas*. In the interviews it was aimed to assess how weavers themselves experience and perceive changes in the production process and what possible coping strategies they developed in that context. An interview with Mr. Ajay Kumar Pandey who is a professional research assistant based in Varanasi and highly experienced on the issues of *Banarsi* weavers places the findings gained on a local level in a broader context.

5 Madanpura as a microcosm of weaving

The map of the research area gives an overview about the spatial concentration of all actors, production units and products related to the weaving process within Madanpura as a weaving quarter (Fig.2.2).

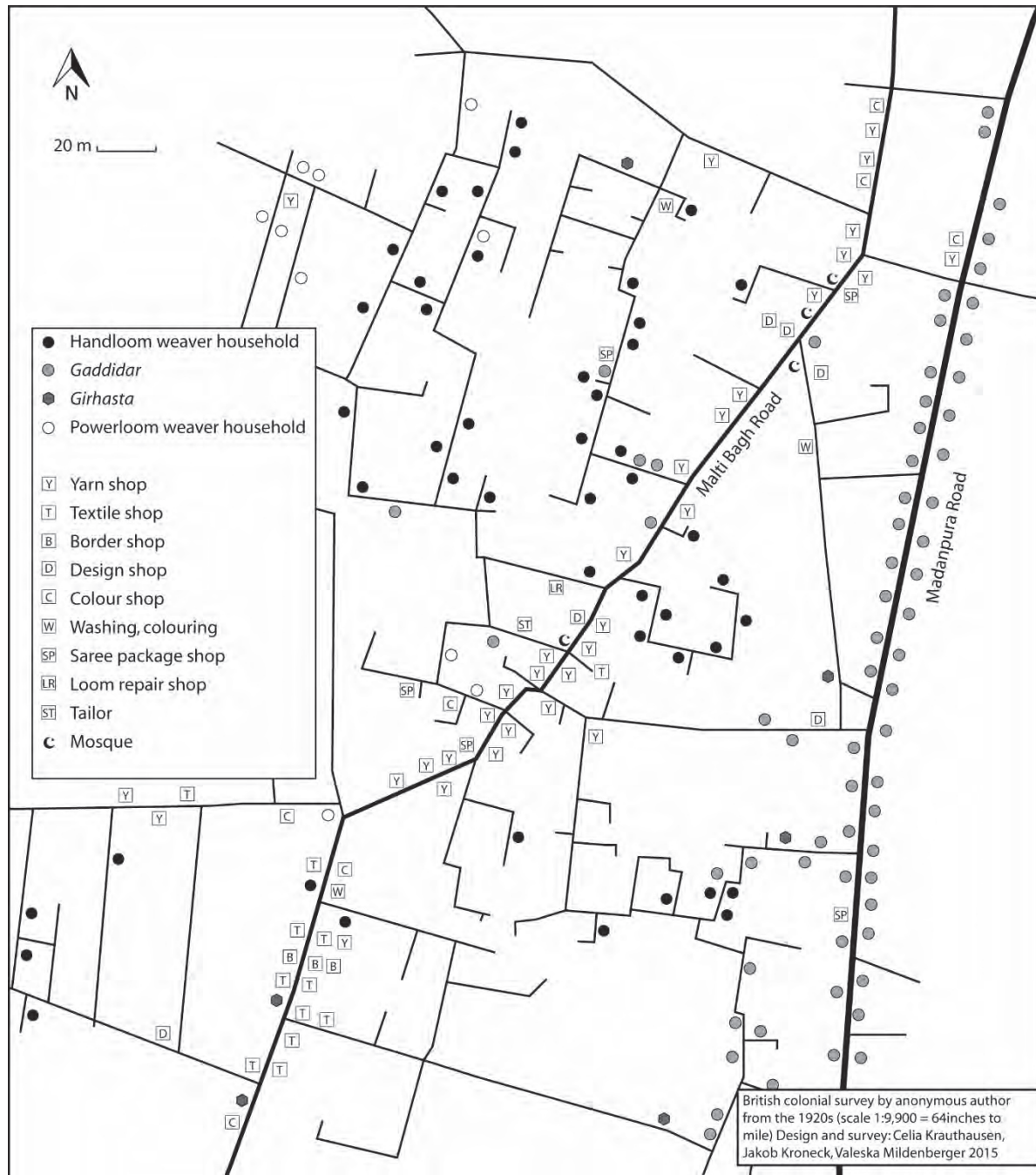


Fig. 2.2: Spatial pattern of the weaving industry in the research area (Source: own design, based on Murray 1907)

All main actors of the saree production and selling processes are present in Madanpura: *Gaddidars*, *Girhasthas* and the actual weavers themselves. The weaver households are mainly located in the narrow side streets and distributed across the whole research area. The majority of weavers in Madanpura still weave on handlooms. The households of *Girhasthas* are evenly distributed across Madanpura. In contrast, a significant number of

saree shops and showrooms of *Gaddidars* concentrate along Madanpura Road as the main street passing through the city quarter. In large part the sarees produced in the neighbourhood by handloom weavers are sold in these shops. The high concentration of *Gaddidars* and their businesses is a particular characteristic for Madanpura.

Along the second main street Malti Bagh Road there are located many shops for raw material such as yarn, design plates and borders as well as textile and colour shops. All of the interviewed weavers stated that they obtain all necessary raw materials for weaving from Madanpura itself. Furthermore, all required services defining the pre- and post-weaving processes take place in the research area.

The pre-weaving process starts with the designing of patterns. This activity is rarely done by the weaver himself. In special design shops at Malti Bagh Road design cards for the handlooms are prepared and sold. After the purchase of raw material and the preparation of the yarn and the loom the weaving process itself takes place in either the handloom weaver households or the households or production facilities of specific *Girhastas* or *Gaddidars*. Afterwards, the nearly finished sarees pass through different post-weaving processes, such as cutting, colouring (likewise the dyeing of yarn can be a step within the pre-process), ironing, washing and cleaning (Fig. 2.3). Even the production of saree boxes and services for broken handlooms and tattered sarees are provided and done in the neighbourhood itself.

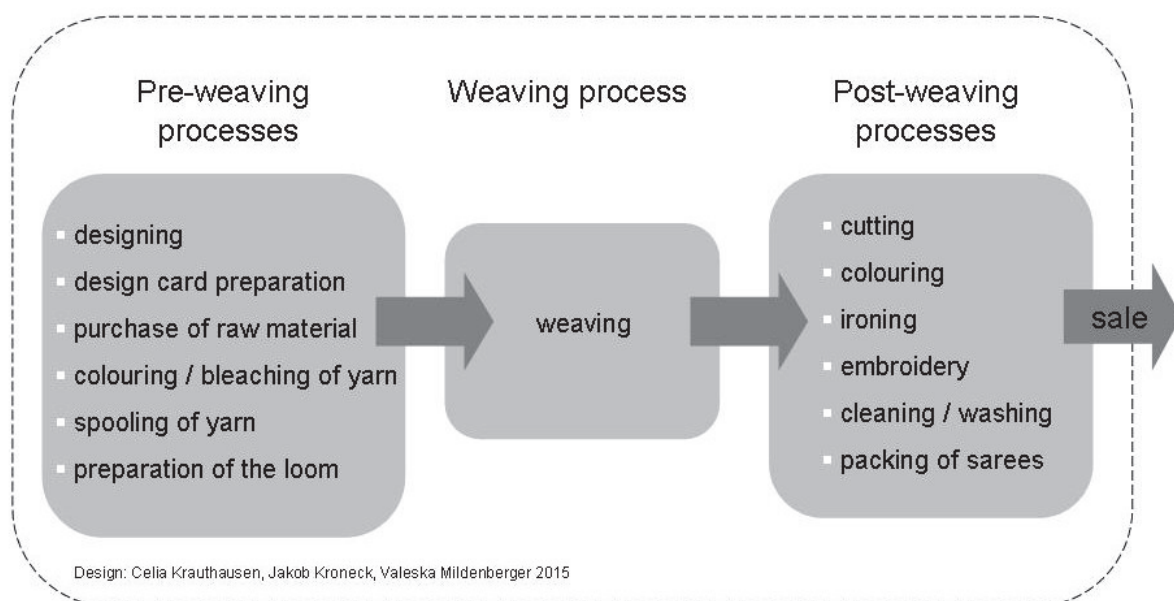


Fig. 2.3: Handloom saree production processes in Madanpura (Source: own design)

Madanpura can be considered as a ‘microcosm of the weaving industry’ because all necessary production units, products and stakeholders related to the weaving process are concentrated in the quarter, joint by a significant accumulation of saree shops and trading centres. Additionally, the dominant number of handlooms and only a negligible number of powerlooms gives Madanpura a rather special role in comparison to other weaving quarters of Varanasi where powerlooms dominate. This points to the fact that the recent transformations in the weaving industry might have different impacts on this quarter and

its resident weaving community in comparison to other places and weaving communities. The local impacts of these broader transformations are described over the following.

6 Transformation processes within the weaving community of Madanpura

The diverse transformations in the weaving economy that occurred over the past decades led to drastic changes within the weaving community of Madanpura. Increasing raw material prices, competition from a rising number of powerlooms and powerloom products in the city, a shrinking demand for traditional handloom-woven sarees all lead to a decline of real wages with severe impacts on the economic situation of the handloom weavers. These impacts are further aggravated by a rigid social hierarchy. The local transformations pertain to the evolvement of certain hierarchical patterns, transitions in power relations and dependencies, changes in occupational structures, as well as impacts on social structures within the weaving community of Madanpura.

6.1 Changing power relations and hierarchical patterns

Traditionally, the production of a saree has been a family enterprise, conducted home-based by a weaver using his own handloom (Wood 2014, 49). There used to be a direct connection between the weavers and the (mainly Hindu) merchants or investors, called *Mahajans* (Jaiswal 2012, 94). With the gradual growth of the powerloom saree industry after India's independence and especially during the 1980s and 1990s when the industry reached its economic peak point, new business opportunities for weavers led to a new upward social mobility within the weaving communities (Jaiswal 2012, 90). The weavers who possessed sufficient capital and market-knowledge were able to take the opportunity to invest in powerlooms and benefitted from the flourishing business. With the gradual growth of the silk industry in post-independence India, they became *Girhastas*, a group newly emerging during that period, acting as intermediaries between the weavers and the *Mahajans* and controlling the production activities (Jaiswal 2012, 94, Wood 2014, 49). Later on some *Girhastas*, while gradually controlling the production process, moved further up to the position of *Gaddidars* by establishing contacts to buyers from outside Varanasi and becoming wholesalers themselves (Jaiswal 2012, 95). This new group emerged within the last three or four decades, finding that trading directly with retailers is much more profitable than sale through *Mahajans* (Jaiswal 2012, 95). While the *Mahajans* were slowly pushed out of the market, the *Gaddidars* were not more generous with the weavers than the *Mahajans* (Wood 2014, 49). The increasing number of hierarchically placed actors within the weaving communities led to drastic changes especially with regard to the division of work and power relations. This transition and its impacts are clearly visible in Madanpura, where the groups of *Gaddidars*, *Girhastas* and weavers are placed in a hierarchy of power. The roles and tasks of these groups within the weaving community of Madanpura and the relationships between them will be described in the following.

The *Gaddidars* are the most powerful actors within the saree weaving and selling processes in Madanpura. They possess good knowledge about the handloom weaving process and the traditional handicraft itself. In their role as wholesalers they are mainly engaged in the marketing and selling of the finished saree products and profit from business connections

to retailers. They are in the position to give orders to either *Girhastas* or weavers directly and set the type of raw material, designs and the number of products to be woven. Above all and most important, they themselves define the price they pay for the finished product. According to the results of the survey *Gaddidars* realise a profit margin of 20% up to 40% for one saree. All respondents of *Gaddidar* households stated that their families are involved in the saree selling business since two generations. In all cases the fathers still learned the profession of handloom weaving and managed to establish a business during the 1980s and 1990s. In contrast the younger generation of interviewed *Gaddidars* still have the basic knowledge about the weaving processes but never learned how to weave themselves. Hence, the high presence of the *Gaddidars* in Madanpura can be considered as a phenomenon directly related to the macro-political changes that took place since the 1980s.

The *Girhastas* can be described as middlemen, acting as intermediary between weavers and *Gaddidars*. In literature they are also referred to as *Master Weavers* (Tanusree 2015, 49, Wood 2014, 49, Jaiswal 2012, 94). *Girhastas* accomplish the orders of *Gaddidars* by managing and controlling the different steps of production. Often *Girhastas* own several looms and employ contract weavers to work at these looms. Besides controlling the actual weaving process they are often in charge of managing the different pre- and post-weaving processes, such as the provision of raw material and design or the cutting, colouring and ironing of the woven product. Several among the interviewed *Girhastas* or members of their households are also still involved in weaving.

The weavers are the actual workers and responsible for the saree weaving processes itself. Almost all interviewed weavers stated that they felt not earning enough money, especially considering their long working hours and the filigree work involved in the weaving process. Average working hours of the interviewed weavers are up to eleven hours per day. The earnings for one silk-saree vary depending on the quality of the material, the fabric thickness, the complexity of patterns and embroidery, and the time needed for weaving (between seven up to 30 days). While the weaver may get 1.000 rupees for a simple light saree, which takes seven to ten days they might get 2.500 Rupees for a heavy and labourious saree.

The weavers of Madanpura can be differentiated between *contract* and *independent weavers*. *Independent weavers* are financially capable to buy their own raw material and designs and are not dependent on *Girhastas* or *Gaddidars* for supply of materials. Some are even able to afford several handlooms and hire other weavers themselves. However, due to the changed and increasingly difficult economic situation of the industry the number of independent weavers in Madanpura is decreasing. Approximately 60% of the interviewed weaver households were households of *contract weavers*. *Contract weavers* weave for wages typically on piece rate, either on their own looms or on those of an employer. This means that they are neither responsible for the choice of the design or the quality nor for price making decisions. The raw material is provided by either *Girhastas* or *Gaddidars* directly and the contractors financially depend on the suppliers.

Overall, the rising raw material prices and low wages have led to a worsening of the economic situation of handloom weavers. As a consequence they often cannot afford to

purchase raw material or designs by themselves anymore. Their increasing reliance on *Gaddidars* or *Girhastas* for the provision of raw materials and designs forces them into relationships of dependency. One interviewed handloom weaver who is owner of two looms explained that he would prefer to sell his finished saree to a *Gaddidar* directly, but is not in a position to do so. This is because *Gaddidars* only buy bigger stacks of sarees and often only pay after the sarees were actually sold in the shop. Therefore weavers like him depend on *Girhastas* who pay immediately, but less.

This example illustrates how weavers are forced into relationships of dependency due to their weak economic situation giving them only restricted room for manoeuvre. Accordingly, the different steps of the production and selling of sarees are nowadays almost always controlled and organised by *Girhastas* and *Gaddidars*. As a consequence the *contract weaver* has become the weakest and most vulnerable actor within the hierarchy, endowed with the least power and voice.

It has to be remarked that it is not easy and sometimes impossible to clearly classify an actor as *Gaddidar*, *Girhasta* or weaver, because they often hold several tasks and responsibilities within the production and selling processes. An independent weaver, for example, can still weave himself, employ other weavers as contract weavers and act as a middleman between other weavers and a *Gaddidar*. He could also be seen as a transitional form between an *independent weaver* and a *Girhasta*. Furthermore, there are many variations of the chain of command. Sometimes there is no *Girhasta* linked between the weaver and the *Gaddidar* and in some cases the *Gaddidar* himself can directly employ contract weavers and fulfil tasks of a *Girhasta*. Obviously, the borders between the various social and economic roles in the weaving industry are fluid.

6.2 Transformations in occupational structures

Several of the transformations in the weaving industry have led to a severe crisis among the handloom weavers. The rising yarn prices, the competition from cheaper fabrics from China due to lower tariffs on imported silk fabrics, competition from powerloom products and a consequential decreased demand for the traditional *Banarsi* saree can be seen as the major factors leading to shrinking incomes and wages and a deteriorated economic situation among the handloom weavers of Varanasi (Wood 2014, 48). It is estimated that as of 2013 around 100.000 looms have been abandoned within a 15 km radius of Varanasi (Raman 2013, 68).

The results of the survey show that the crisis also hit the handloom weavers of Madanpura quite drastically. As a consequence, many gave up handloom weaving because it ceased being profitable and attempted to change their occupation within the saree production chain, now specializing on pre- and post-weaving services like ironing, washing or colouring. In consequence of this trend various specialised saree colouring-, ironing- and washing-centres were established and are now visible in Madanpura. These pre- and post-weaving processes were traditionally part of the weaving-production process itself and conducted home-based by the actual weaver and his household members (Kumar 1988, 15 ff.). However, today these tasks are almost always outsourced and not in the responsibility

of the actual weaver anymore. With this growing diversification the number of actors in the saree production process has increased and the concept of the *independent weaver* responsible for almost all steps of production rarely exists in Madanpura anymore. Even the interviewed *independent weavers* were outsourcing most steps of pre- and post-weaving processes.

Another strategy to escape the difficult economic situation in Madanpura is labour migration. In the past 20 years many local weavers left their homes and migrated to other states of India, especially to Gujarat where they found employment in large textile factories. A prominent destination for weavers is the fast growing city of Surat where incidentally a new neighbourhood also called Madanpura has been established by the migrant population from Varanasi.

The technological transition from handloom to powerloom weaving can be observed in many parts of Varanasi, where powerlooms dominate and handlooms are an exception. Madanpura appears to be one of the few locations where the otherwise prominent shift to powerloom is much less notable and the weaving process is still dominated by handlooms. This suddenly came to advantage as with the decreasing number of handlooms the market for the remaining handloom-products seems to have improved and a more or less profitable niche for traditional handloom-woven products has emerged. Many *Gaddidars* and *Girhastas* from Madanpura seem to have benefited from these market conditions. In contrast, almost all weavers interviewed stated that they felt threatened by the competition from powerloom products and would change to powerloom weaving if they were able to afford it. This demonstrates that the weavers themselves as being financially dependent on *Girhastas* and *Gaddidars* do not seem to benefit from the improved market conditions for handloom woven sarees.

6.3 Impacts on social structures

Formerly daily life structures and routines in a weaver household were shaped by the weaving process. Women (and children) of the family used to be in charge of the pre- and post- weaving processes, combining those with domestic labour and childcare. In fact, the work of women and children used to be an important part of the saree production (Raman 2013, 33). According to survey results, with many of the pre- and post-weaving processes having been outsourced, tasks and work structures within weaver households of Madanpura have changed. In addition, many weavers who worked as independent weavers before and engaged the whole household in the weaving process are now contracted by *Girhastas* or *Gaddidars* and often not work at their own looms and in their own houses anymore. This also reinforces the transformation of family and social structures. With the decline of this traditional division of labour, many women in Madanpura today work separately in embroidery, sewing or cutting of the saree and get orders and payments for these tasks from *Girhastas* or *Gaddidars* directly. As a consequence, the already existing dependency-relations are even more intensified.

7 Conclusion - winners and losers of economic restructuring

The study aimed at analysing the social and economic structures that shape the weaving community in Madanpura in the context of external political and economic changes.

The gradual growth of the powerloom saree industry after India's independence led to new business opportunities for weavers and a new upward social mobility within the weaving communities with the consequent emergence of the groups of *Girhastas* and (since the 1980s) *Gaddidars*. At the same time rising yarn prices, the competition from cheaper fabrics from China, due to lower tariffs on imported silk fabrics, competition from powerloom products and a consequential decreased demand for the traditional *Banarsi* saree led to decreasing incomes and wages and a deteriorated economic situation among the handloom weavers. The macro political and economic transformations and changes in the Indian weaving industry had and still have big and diverse impacts on the handloom weaving community in Madanpura. With the neoliberal reorganisation of capitalism the mode of organisation and control over labour processes has altered strongly (Tanusree 2015, 48). This is obvious in Madanpura too, as the increased number of actors within the production and selling processes is one of the most drastic changes in the context of this study. The formerly typical and common concept of the independent weaver being able to work independently and with the assistance of his family was difficult to find in Madanpura. The emergence and rise of the two classes *Gaddidars* and *Girhastas*, gradually taking over control of production and selling processes had severe impacts on many structures, relations and processes in the weaving community. It led to a rigid hierarchical differentiation of the weaving community in Madanpura. Due to low incomes and their deteriorated economic situation handloom weavers are forced into unequal relationships of dependency with *Girhastas* and *Gaddidars*. These dependencies make the weaver, and especially the contract weaver, the most vulnerable actor within that hierarchy. Also spatially the consequences of transformation are evident. Although the transition from handloom to powerloom appears to be omnipresent all over Varanasi, the example of Madanpura represents a notable exception. *Gaddidars* and *Girhastas* profit from the subsequently developing niche for traditional handloom saree products, while the weavers themselves are left out. The diversification of occupations within the saree weaving processes can be interpreted as a strategy to cope with the decline of the handloom weaving sector and the loss of employment. Due to the externalisation of pre- and post-weaving processes a new allocation of social roles within weaver households and thus the weaving process itself has developed.

The findings of this study show that the overarching macro-political and economic changes led to severe and dramatic consequences for small scale industries like the handloom weaving industry of Madanpura. The political and economic changes had multidimensional impacts on economic and social structures within the weaving community of Madanpura and changed production and selling processes, the division of work, power relations as well as modes of social organisation. This case study demonstrates how political and economic decisions and strategies of governments and international organisations affect structures of daily life at the local level. It also exemplifies that industrialisation and globalisation processes have enlarged the gap between winner and losers of economic restructuring. To

prevent an even further decline of the handloom saree industry the plight of contract weavers should find more attention in politics, and public and scientific debates.

References

- Jaiswal, A. (2012): The changing occupational structure and economic profile of textile industry of Banaras, Uttar Pradesh. In: *Journal of Social Sciences*, 30:1, 89-98.
- Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM) of the Ministry of Urban Development Government of India (2006): *City Development Plan for Varanasi, Final Report*. Municipal Corporation, Varanasi.
- Kumar, N. (1988): *The Artisans of Banaras: Popular Culture and Identity, 1880-1986*. Princeton, N.J.
- Municipal Corporation of Varanasi (2015): *Nagar Nigam Varanasi*. Varanasi. <http://www.nnvns.org> (Date: 25.06.15)
- Panagariya, A. (2003): *India in the 1980s and 1990s: A Triumph of Reforms*. Maryland.
- Raj, P. (2014): *Weavers in Varanasi: A diary of dying craftsmen*. <https://www.saddahaq.com/weavers-in-varanasi-the-diary-of-a-dying-craftsmanship> (Date: 29.06.2015)
- Raman, V. (2010): *The Warp and the Weft: Community and Gender Identity Among the Weavers of Banaras*. New Delhi.
- Raman, V. (2013): *Entangled Yarns: Banaras Weavers and Social Crisis*. Shimla.
- Tanusree, S. (2015): A Study of the Present Situation of the Traditional Handloom Weavers of Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, India. In: *International Research Journal of Social Sciences* 4:3, 48-53.
- Wadhva, C. (2004): *India Trying To Liberalise: Economic Reforms Since 1991*. In: Rolfe, J. (ed.) (2004): *The Asia-Pacific: A Region in Transition*. Honolulu, 259-284.
- Wood, J.M.F. (2010): *White-collar Agitation, No-collar Compliance: The Privilege of Protest in Varanasi, India*. Dissertation at The University of Texas, Austin.
- Wood, J.M.F. (2014): *Weavers Unravelling: Comparing Associationalism among Handloom Weavers and Boatmen in Varanasi, India*. In: *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 37:1, 43-59.