

# Bhagalpur Silk City Intangible Legacy of Silk, Its Cultural Heritage, And Its Diminishing Contemporary Relevance in The Global Village

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**Abstract**—Bhagalpur city has an old legacy of the historical Anga region, and has changed with the changing times. Bhagalpur, which was opined as a Silk city because of the Silk production and its transformation and export of finished silk. It remained a city of silk and was a prosperous region due to the silk. It is two hundred years old traditional way of weaving Tussar Silk, changed with the spatio-temporal context. It has been centered in the regions of Champanagar and Nathnagar. It has been a direct source of revenue and livelihoods for about 35000 weavers. The silk industry, which should keep pace with modern times, has lost its momentum and has been diminishing its global relevance. Bhagalpur silk is not getting better infrastructure and a modern perspective has made it lose its sheen. The contemporary market, which runs on profit maximization and has reduced the value of handmade products, is a major truth behind the diminishing silk industry. Industrial mechanization is seen in the silk industry as power looms, better and fast yarn making machines, reeling and spinning centers and textiles mega parks of global order. These modern machines make the items cheaper and more demanding, but establishing these industries requires more resources. Lack of resources in the form of capital has made the Bhagalpur silk industry a falling entity and it must be taken care as silk is bread and butter for thousands of artisans and has remained a revenue generator for the Bhagalpur. The government has taken steps for the survival of the deteriorating condition of the Silk Industry, but a meager step is not enough for the silk industry. The Bhagalpur silk, which prospered during the British raj needs a new overhaul and modern approach.

**Index Terms**—Bhagalpur, Tussar Silk, Silk Industry, Nathnagar, Champanagar

## I. INTRODUCTION

Bhagalpur is also known as the Silk City. Bhagalpur has remained an important locus of the silk industry specially Tussar silk. Silk is mainly a natural protein fiber secreted by a caterpillar, known as a silk worm, which forms a shell of thin filaments around it, which is called as cocoons. It is naturally obtained from the cocoons of insect larvae i.e mostly from silkworms *Bombyx mori*. Silkworms are managed and fed on Mulberry leaves for the finest silk, while other plants are also used to feed silkworms. After 35 days of gorging on leaves, silkworms spin a protective filament layer and these layers are almost continuous 600 to 900 meters. Cocoons are then steamed and baked to kill the pupa and reeling is done. Reeling is mainly when cocoons are soaked in hot water to soften the sericin, which is gum for holding the cocoon; several filaments are twisted together to make the thread strong. Then this raw silk yarn is processed and knitted together and woven into fabrics known as silk. Silk fabrics are then turned into several wearable items after being dyed into attractive colors and printed with new demands. Silk is known as the Queen of textiles, especially known for its appearance, luxury and elegance. The discovery of silk is credited to ancient China around 2700 BCE to the Chinese Empress Leizu. Silk remained a mystery and a monopoly of China. It remained a valuable commodity of trade along the Ancient Silk route. Natural shine and vibrant colors over the silk and its light weight and excellent resilience and drape of silk make it very popular and attractive.

II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

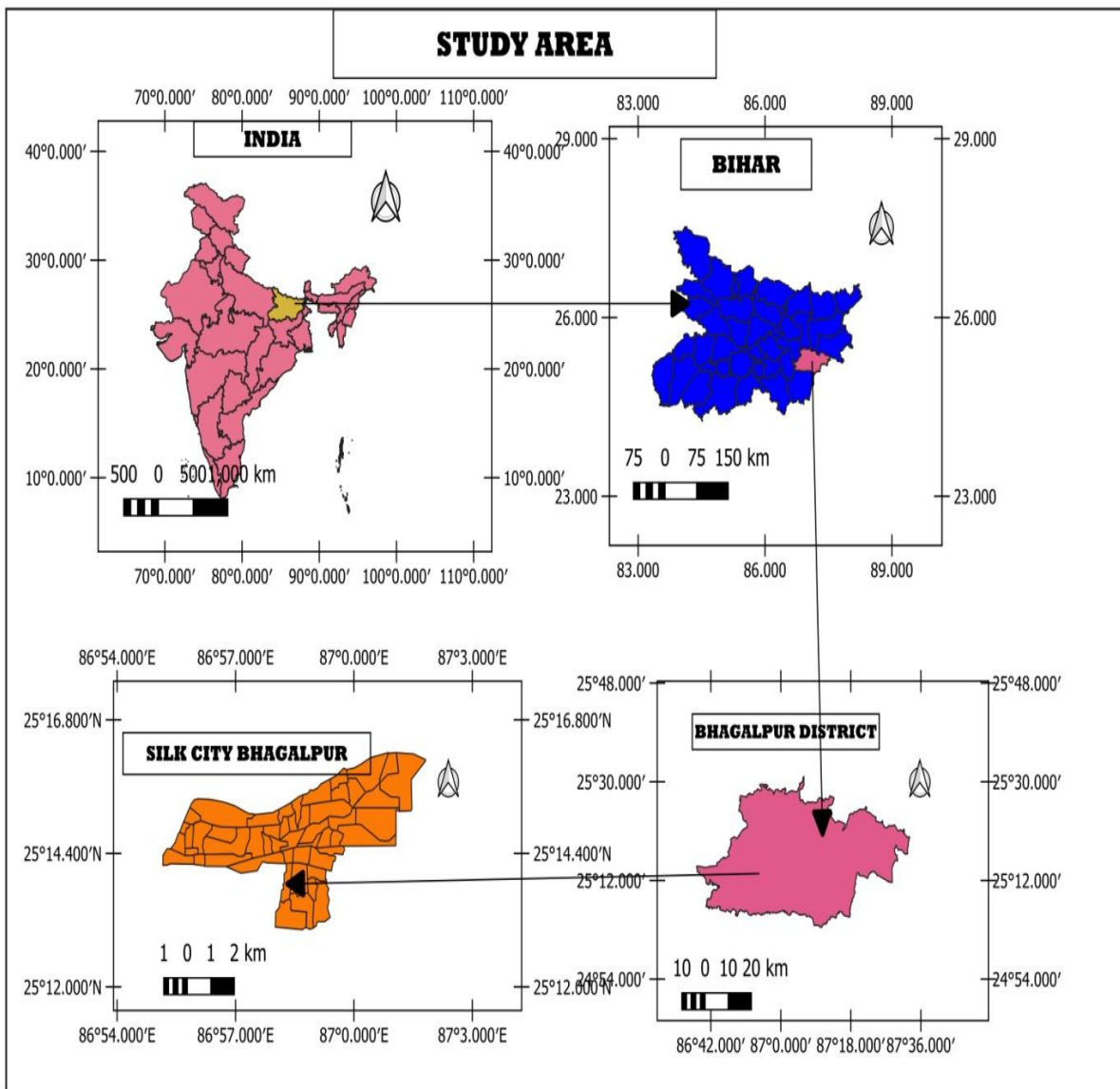
The objective of this study is to understand the spatial context of the silk industry of Bhagalpur. It will also focus on the production methods, their raw material sources and the market for sale. Major objectives can be jotted as follows: -

1. Silk industry and its competition in the global market with synthetic fibers and its quality control and branding.

2. Diminishing silk industry from Bhagalpur and its major causes
3. Raw material sources of the silk industry and its market extension.
4. Social and economic conditions of the silk weavers and other communities involved in the silk industry.

III. STUDY AREA

Map 1: - Location map of Bhagalpur city



Source: - Compiled by Researcher

IV. METHODOLOGY

The data of this research are from primary and secondary sources. The export, import, production and consumption data are collected from the secondary sources. The primary data is collected from the silk heartland of Bhagalpur through direct interaction with the respondents and they were mainly weavers, traders, artisans and small businessmen whose occupation is involved in the silk domain.

Interpretation

Silk is an insect fiber, with luster, drape and strength. Because of these unique features, silk is opined as the “Queen of Textiles” all over the world. India is the second largest producer of silk in the world and one of the largest consumers. India is the country that produces all four commercial varieties of silk, namely Mulberry, Tropical & Oak Tasar, Muga and Eri. The Indian sericulture industry has the unique distinction of high employment potential, low capital requirement and provides remunerative income to silk growers.

Table 1: Raw silk production in million tons over the years in India.

RAW SILK PRODUCTION STATISTICS IN INDIA					
(Unit: Million Tons)					
Years	Mulberry	Tasar	Eri	Muga	Total
2000-01	14,432	237	1,089	99	15,857
2001-02	15,842	249	1,160	100	17,351
2002-03	14,617	284	1,316	102	16,319
2003-04	13,970	315	1,352	105	15,742
2004-05	14,620	322	1,448	110	16,500
2005-06	15,445	308	1,442	110	17,305
2006-07	16,525	350	1,485	115	18,475
2007-08	16,245	428	1,530	117	18,320
2008-09	15,610	603	2,038	119	18,370
2009-10	16,322	803	2,460	105	19,690
2010-11	16,360	1,166	2,760	124	20,410
2011-12	18,272	1,590	3,072	126	23,060
2012-13	18,715	1,729	3,116	119	23,679
2013-14	19,476	2,619	4,237	148	26,480
2014-15	21,390	2,434	4,726	158	28,708
2015-16	20,478	2,819	5,060	166	28,523
2016-17	21,273	3,268	5,637	170	30,348
2017-18	22,066	2,988	6,661	192	31,906
2018-19	25,344	2,981	6,910	233	35,468
2019-20	25,239	3,136	7,204	241	35,820
2020-21	23,896	2,689	6,946	239	33,770
2021-22	25,818	1,466	7,364	255	34,903
2022-23	27,654	1,318	7,349	261	36,582
2023-24	29,892	1,586	7,183	252	38,913

Source: - Central Silk Board Bengaluru

Table 2: - Export Value of Silk items from India in crores of rupees over the years.

EXPORT VALUE OF SILK
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Items	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024	2024-2025
	Crore rupee	Crore rupee	Crore rupee	Crore rupee	Crore rupee

	s	s	s	s	s
Cocoons	0.01	6.94	-	0.13	-
Raw Silk	1.43	11.27	1.79	15.32	25.42
Silk Yarn	27.93	34.41	36.95	34.69	42.17
Fabrics & Made-ups	729.50	837.41	973.49	1119.13	1443.98
Readymade Garments	449.56	671.13	489.61	443.79	486.31
Silk Carpet	107.56	79.12	92.34	96.84	99.21
Silk waste	150.61	208.67	179.19	317.66	264.66
TOTAL	1466.60	1848.96	1773.38	2027.56	2361.75

Source: - Central Silk Board Bengaluru

Table 3: - Import Value of Silk items from India in crores of rupees over the years.

IMPORT VALUES OF SILK					
Items	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024	2024-2025
	Crore Rs	Crore Rs	Crore Rs	Crore Rs	Crore Rs
Raw Silk	570.56	819.68	1713.68	1254.96	1002.03
Raw silk weight	(1804 MT)	(1978 MT)	(3874 MT)	(2650 MT)	(2036 MT)
Silk Yarn	61.98	88.79	204.75	171.78	186.82
Fabrics & Made-ups	106.21	215.18	334.71	434.10	323.85
Readymade Garments	15.59	13.63	22.42	18.80	36.17
Silk Carpet	2.45	0.34	0.25	0.63	0.32
Silk waste	2.95	5.96	8.79	14.17	12.58
TOTAL	759.75	1143.59	2284.59	1894.44	1561.77

Source: - Central Silk Board Bengaluru

Table 4: -State-wise Raw Silk Production during 2014-15 to 2022-2023 ((n Million Tonnes)

State	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023
Karnataka	8219	8574	9645	9576	11592	11143	11292	11191	11823
Andhra Pradesh	6550	6912	6485	6558	7481	7962	8422	8834	9312
Bihar	22	52	53	46	55	56	64	56	48
Jharkhand	1090	2003	1946	1807	2375	2402	2185	1052	874
Tamilnadu	1185	1120	1602	1776	2072	2154	1834	2373	2589
West Bengal	2070	2079	2500	2687	2394	2295	872	1632	1966
Assam	2068	2766	3222	1859	5026	5316	5462	5700	4237
Manipur	418	487	516	314	464	504	327	462	454
Mghalaya	517	644	656	555	1187	1192	1213	1234	1168
Nagaland	324	606	619	518	620	600	264	315	350
Jammu & Kashmir	145	136	138	151	118	117	80	99	100
Maharashtra	97	122	221	274	519	428	428	523	620
Uttar Pradesh	157	188	236	246	289	309	316	355	373
Madhya Pradesh	190	195	248	324	100	61	47	33	22
Chhatisgarh	391	391	234	337	349	480	300	224	223

Source: Annual Report, Central Silk Board, Bengaluru (2017-18) and (2022-2023).

The Silk Industry had grown over the years as production of raw silk was 15,857 million tons in

2000-2001, which had grown to 38,913 million tons in 2023-2024. It reflects expansion in government

initiatives, improved techniques and demand domestically and internationally. India, with the production of 38,913 MTs of silk, is the second largest producer of silk in the world after China. Among the four varieties of silk produced, Mulberry accounted for 76.82%, that is 29,892 million tons, Tasar 4.08% as 1,586 million tons, Eri 18.46% as 7,183 million tons and Muga 0.65%, i.e., 252 million tons. If we observe the trend of growth of Mulberry silk, which was about 14,432 million tons produced in 2001 and we see the trend of its growth over the years and upto 29,892 million tons in 2023-2024. Similarly, growth is seen in the table for Eri silk and Muga silk. Among the non-mulberry silks, Eri silk has exhibited the most dramatic rise, increasing more than sixfold from 1,089 tons in 2000-01 to 7,183 tons in 2023-24, boosting its contribution to roughly 18% of the total and highlighting its appeal as an affordable, "peace silk" option often promoted in northeastern states. But in the context of the growth of Tassar silk over the years has shown a ripple effect. Tasar silk growth peaked in 2016-2017 but again has started lapsing and showing a falling trend. Bhagalpur, which is famous for Tassar silk, has shown a falling trend have a strong connection to the diminishing Tasar industry. In the Bhagalpur Tasar industry, which was thriving well, has shown a tragic shift towards cotton and other handloom industries, leaving the silk just a historical and cultural legacy. Tasar silk, which is derived from semi-wild silkworms have shown more volatile trends and is a premium golden variety of silk. These silk shows more contrast and have dark appearances noticeable and are mainly used in modern and fancy clothing. Muga silk is also a premium silk of golden variety with more luster. This diversification underscores the resilience and evolving nature of India's sericulture sector. People have benefited from expanded mulberry plantations, technological support, and policy measures aimed at rural employment and export growth. Recent reports confirm that the 2023-24 figure of 38,913 tons from the table marks a consistent increase in prior years, positioning India as the world's second-largest silk producer and largest consumer.

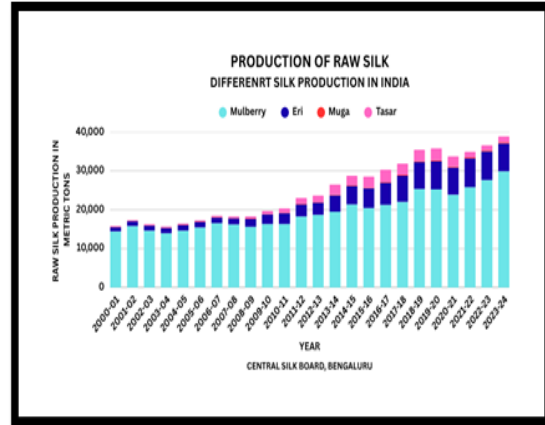
India's silk Import comprises majorly Raw silk and Fabrics and made-ups. If we observe the Import table of silk, we see that in 2023-2024, raw silk was

imported for about 1,254 crore, fabrics of 434 crore were imported, making it approximately 90 percent of the total value. A similar trend is seen in the table, which describes the image of the Indian market devoid of its own silk thread making. India is suffering because of very low production and import dependence for raw materials. Raw material making is cheaper in Vietnam and China, making them major exporters. This raw silk, which is turned into garments, becomes costly on taxation and also remains under the control of China and other countries. The costly silk industry and its materials compete with nylon and other artificial textiles, making this Industry to hard to flourish. The near absence of cocoons imports confirms that India's silk trade is oriented towards the processing stage and less agricultural output. Silk yarn imports increased from ₹61.98 crore in 2020-21 to around ₹186-205 crore in recent years, while Fabrics and Made-ups saw the most consistent upward trajectory among finished items from ₹106.21 crore to a high of ₹434.10 crore in 2023-24 before dipping slightly to ₹323.85 crore in 2024-25, reflecting growing imports of value-added silk textiles

India's silk Export mainly comprises fabrics, made-ups, and ready-made garments. In 2023-2024, fabrics of 1,119 crore, Readymade garments of 443 crore and silk waste of 317 crore were exported. Silk Industry, which have presence all over the country, with much prevalence and presence in a few states such as Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh. Exported items of readymade goods are majorly exported to America, U.A.E, China, Britain, France, Australia and Canada. Major items of export comprise finished silk fabrics, carpets and natural silk. Export value is increasing unevenly and slowly and this vulnerability is due to a lack of diversification in the finished goods.

Major raw silk producing states are Karnataka with 11,823 million tons, Andhra Pradesh with 9,312 million tons and Assam with 4,237 million tons of raw materials in the year 2022-2023 as per the Annual report of Central Silk Board. If we compare Bihar having production of 48 million tons of raw material, which is 0.406 percent of Karnataka's production, or 2308 times less than the leading producer, Karnataka. Bihar, which has remained a

major player since the British period, has lost its sheen. Bhagalpur is the one and only producer of silk in Bihar, while the silk industry is labour intensive industry, but when compared to smaller states such as Meghalaya and Manipur producing 1,168 and 454 million tons of raw materials. This gives a better image of the Bhagalpur silk industry, which is majorly dependent on the raw material from other states or other nations. Bhagalpur, if seen in the table of state-wise ranking of raw silk, we observe from 2014-2015 that raw silk production has increased from 22 million tons to 64 million tons in 2020, but again shown volatile change to 43 million tons.



Graph: -Trend of Production, Export and Import of silk in India.

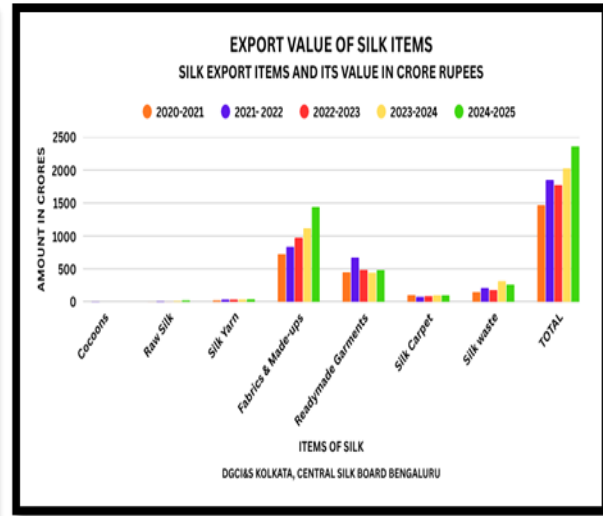
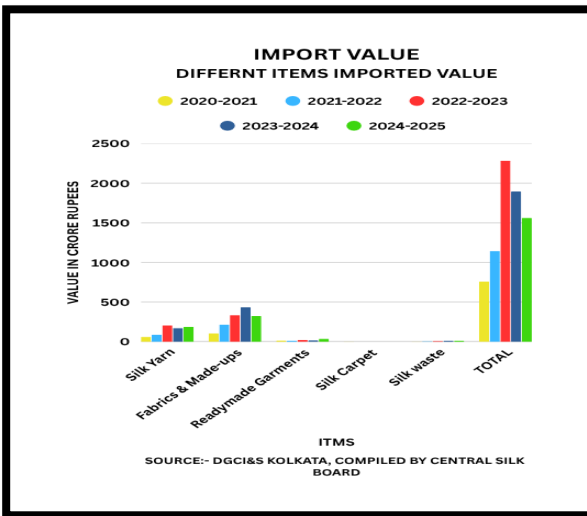


Table 5: - Clusters with Estimated Production and Workforce Involved (as on 2019-20)

Name of the Cluster	Estimated Production MT	Estimated workforce involved	Name of the Cluster	Estimated Production MT	Estimated workforce involved
Karnataka	9322	2470330	J & K, including Ladakh	132	34980
Andhra Pradesh	6778	1796170	Odisha	116	30740
Assam	4861	1288165	Madhya Pradesh	103	27295

West Bengal	2577	682905	Tripura	87	23055
Jharkhand	2220	588300	Mizoram	84	22260
Tamil Nadu	1984	525760	Bihar	63	16695
Meghalaya	1076	285140	Arunachal Pradesh	54	14310
Nagaland	615	162975	Uttarakhand	35	9275
Chhattisgarh	532	140980	Himanchal Pradesh	32	8480
Manipur	388	102820	Kerala	15	3975
Maharashtra	373	98845	Punjab	3	795

Uttar Pradesh	292	77380	Haryana	1	265
Telangana	163	43195	Rest of India	6624	798910
J & K,	132	34980	Total	38530	97600

including Ladakh					00
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Source: - The Indian Silk Export Promotion Council (ISPEC), 2021-2022.

Table 6: - Country-wise export earnings from silk during 2022-2023 and 2021-2022

	Country	2022-23		2021-2022		% change	
		Creore Rs	Mn US\$	Creore Rs	Mn US\$	Creore Rs	Mn US\$
1	UAE	451.00	56.03	654.63	88.41	-31.11	-36.62
2	USA	319.01	39.93	319.39	42.87	-0.12	-6.86
3	China	165.74	20.61	217.82	29.25	-23.91	-29.54
4	UK	139.20	17.24	84.09	11.24	65.53	53.38
5	Australia	84.09	10.43	65.33	8.73	28.73	19.47
6	Italy	78.75	9.79	51.79	6.93	52.05	41.27
7	France	65.02	8.06	71.93	9.70	-9.61	-16.91
8	Germany	47.40	5.88	40.84	5.43	16.07	8.29
9	Spain	42.22	5.25	18.17	2.42	132.40	116.94
10	Singapore	31.71	3.93	19.44	2.60	63.08	51.15
	Others	349.23	43.43	305.53	40.98	14.30	5.98
	Total	1773.38	220.58	1848.96	248.56	-4.09	-11.26

Source: - The Indian Silk Export Promotion Council (ISPEC), 2021-2022

Bihar has silk units mainly in the Bhagalpur region, as given in the preceding table. Bhagalpur has an estimated production of 63 million tons and a workforce of 16,695, as given in the estimate. Bhagalpur silk Industry is mainly in the region of Nathnagar and Champanagar, which is seen as a cluster and the industry that is labour soaking industry. Bhagalpur is known for the golden threads of the Tussar Industry. Tussar silk sarees, silk kurtas, Nehru jackets, Shawls, curtains and carpets are the major products of Bhagalpur. The industry have legacy of two hundred years and has remained a locus for silk in the region of Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, Nepal and Bhutan. Silk has been exported to several other European nations too and mainly from the ports of Calcutta in the early days and now from Bombay.

Major problems of the silk Industry include lower profitability because of power looms and its expense. Weavers have a tendency to stick to the old methods and not adapt to the changing technology, because of a lack of resources and funds. Weavers also have ideas for moving towards new paths of modern textiles. The newer generation is also not preferring to gain more knowledge and explore towards profitability. They are busy earning a livelihood and not exploring the major demands of the foreign

markets. Lack of internet and digital markets has made them more dependent on the offline markets. These markets have many players, making the per capita profit in a distributed format and making the profit minimal

Bhagalpur, which is the most important cluster for the Silk Industry, has potential but due to a lack of several preliminary requirements, has not developed and preexisting structures are in dilapidating condition. As per the survey of the silk industry in the regions of Nathnagar and Champanagar, the local workers are working at a minimal wage, depending on raw materials from outside the state. The local laborers are facing issues such as a lack of financial help, cheaper loans, easier transactions, and government initiatives of promotion of the handmade silk and high competition from cheaper exports and artificial fibers. The other structural and infrastructural problems are also present, such as a lack of branding of the local fibers. The fibers are not getting light because of the absence of transportational channels, such as airways and waterways. The products created are being exported to several countries, but not directly from Bihar, resulting in the flying out of profits to states such as Maharashtra and Gujarat.

## V. RESULTS

Bhagalpur silk industry, which is a globally recognized industry, needs the following care

1. Bhagalpur is a hub of silk in the state of Bihar, but it has much dependence on the raw material from other states and countries.
2. Bhagalpur, which has remained an important locus of silk production, needs some regulation and modernization.
3. Bhagalpur silk cluster needs more care for the development of the industry as export-oriented development and market-oriented approach.
4. Bhagalpur silk weavers need hand holding of government because of the trend of spatio-temporal development compared with other states.

## VI. CONCLUSION

Bhagalpur silk, which was unique and gave name and fame to Bhagalpur, is losing its current prevalence. The silk industry has changed its face value and needs a much more cautious approach for the development of the region. Silk, which has remained the identification of Bhagalpur, has lost its power in this global world. Weavers weaving silk have no attire on their body shows its losing sheen. Bhagalpur needs new techniques and a modern approach to make balance nationally and internationally. Government should work more cautiously and aggressively to give the weavers the rights they deserve and make Bhagalpur a silk city of modern machines and new ideas.

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