

SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROFILE OF HANDLOOM WEAVING COMMUNITY - A CASE STUDY OF SIRCILLA TOWN OF KARIMNAGAR DISTRICT

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Abstract

The handloom sector plays a pivotal role in the country's economy. It is one of the largest economic activities next to agriculture. At present like sector with about 35 lakh looms, at present provides employment to 65 lakh persons. The traditional handloom weaving in India has been kept alive by those efficiently skilled household weavers, which inextricably is linked with the age-old The Government of India's policy for the handloom sector had twin objectives of social and economic. The business objectives anchored in the thrust for growth, were to update old technology, innovativeness, increase productivity, introduce new colors, new designs and to export the handloom fabrics.

An oligopolistic market, fluctuating market conditions, inadequate modernization and the subordinate status of hired workers have contributed to the poor living conditions of workers in Sircilla, a power loom centre of Telangana State. The state and central governments need to intervene in a more organized fashion to end the distress. In the short run, the state governments should source procurement of cloth for supply to various welfare schemes from the power loom producers. In the medium term the central government should make it possible for the power loom operators to access funds from the existing textile modernization schemes.

Keywords: Weavers, Handloom, Cloth, Income, Expenditure.

INTRODUCTION

Handloom weaving is an ancient industry. The textile cottage industry includes cotton, silk, and bleaching, dying, finishing, hosiery, lace embroidery, silk reeling, silk twisting. It is the chief means of livelihood to people who entirely depend upon it. Handloom sector plays an important role in state economy. Weaving is the basic process among the various manufacturing stages of handloom clothes. It is defined as a frame for weaving equipped with some wooden devices. The sound of the handloom is the music of rural home. The handloom sector plays a pivotal role in the country's economy. It is one of the largest economic activities next to agriculture. This sector, with about 35 lakh looms, at present provides employment to 65 lakh persons, the traditional handloom weaving in India has been kept alive by those professionally skilled household weavers, which inextricably is linked with the age-old tradition of weaving.

Nevertheless, in India, handloom industry is an ancient cottage industry spread all over the country. This is a source of livelihood for the millions directly or indirectly. Its role is quite significant in meeting the clothing requirements of the masses. It occupies a pivotal place with its wide ramification into the socio-economic fabric of society. The hand-woven textiles have a long glorious tradition. They are symbolic of Indian culture forming part of great heritage of art. Centuries ago when Europe, the birth place of today's modern capitalism and industry, had little industrial development to boast of India was famous for its grand artistic skills of her craftsmen. The Indian cotton fabrics enjoyed worldwide patronage especially in Eastern and European markets in the world.

The sector is beset with various problems, such as obsolete technology, haphazard production system, low productivity, inadequate working capital, conventional product range, weak marketing links, overall stagnation of production and sales and above all, competition from power looms and mill sector. There is no doubt that India's textiles constitute one of the sumptuous sources of textile designs in the world, drawn upon increasingly by textile designers, product designers and fashion designers from all nationalities. Many of these designs are in easy global access from books, museum collections, the web and commodities. The textile industry occupies a unique place in the economy of India by virtue of its contribution to the industrial output, employment generation and foreign exchange earnings. The Indian textile industry contributes about one-fifth of total industrial production, nearly one-third of total exports and provides oodles of employment to 20 millions of people.

IMPORTANCE

Handloom industry is one of the vital industries of India and its survival is a remarkable one despite decline in some countries and it was wiped out in certain other countries where modern textile industry was established. The industry is unique in the sense that in no other country in the world, hand weaving is being carried vastly on such a nation-wide basis. It withstood the onslaughts and stiff competition from machine-made products. In the wake of mobility, growing urbanization, scientific and technological revolution, it escaped unscathed from annihilation keeping all the ancient tradition of weaving and carrying out improvements in tools and accessories. Indian weavers are not only producing enough cloth to meet internal demand, but also exporting numerous artistic varieties to industrialized countries of the World. Handloom is a way of life for many people in India. From the view point of employment, it ranks second next to agriculture and people dependent on it are heterogeneous in nature, among who are Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Parses, Zoroastrians, besides Tribal, hill people and the like. Particularly Mahatma Gandhi recognized this significance of textile handicrafts during the struggle for independence. A notable aspect of Gandhi's views on this issue is that he emphasized not only handloom weaving but also spinning by hand. Gandhi emphasized hand spinning so much that the instrument for this the Charkha become a leading symbol of the freedom movement. This was important because while the handloom weaver was a symbol of a community's self-reliance in matters relating to a basic need (clothes), the availability of basic raw material in the form of hand-spun yarn within the community was a symbol of self-reliance of handloom weavers themselves. In addition as spinning work required little capital investment and could be taken up anywhere, anytime by any person, it offered a good source of employment for villages which could be adjusted to their rhythm of life.

ROLE OF HANDLOOM SECTOR IN INDIA

The Government of India's policy for the handloom sector had two objectives social and economic. The business objectives anchored in the thrust for growth, were to update old technology, innovativeness, increase productivity, introduce new colors, new designs and to export the handloom fabrics.

DIFFERENT TYPES OF HANDLOOMS

Handloom was given different names depending on the mode of operation. It was known as throw-shuttle pit loom. When the workers operates it by throwing the shuttle from one side to the another with either of his hands, sitting on the edges of a small pit in which the heads could be suitably operated with his legs. The improved fly- shuttles which swing the shuttle from one side to the other by pulling the strings tied to the shuttle-driving cocks on either side. The loom was taken out of the pit and fitted on the frame and hence called Frame loom. Primitive loom where weft is threaded by hand for interlacing the war ends. The vertical looms like woolen blanket looms, weaver looms and tape looms are also included.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

1. L.C.Jain (1983): The study of LC Jain titled "Handlooms face Liquidation Powerlooms Mock at Yojana Bhavan", focused on systematic destruction and concealment of handlooms by powerlooms. The study concludes that yarn shortage has made the prices of the yarn competitive which has affected the wages and earnings of the weavers. Apart from yarn unavailability there was a problem of lack of finance. Reservation of certain items to be produced by decentralized handloom sector has not made any change unless and until strong policies and practical interventions take place.

2. Dhanapal Tare (1993): The study on "Prospects for Powerloom Sector in Textile Exports-Challenges and Opportunities", by Dhanapal Tare has sensitively analyze the benefits that Powerloom sector may reaps if the industry goes for modernization. The author stresses the need for Banking and Cooperative sector to extend the helping hand by providing the loans at subsidized rate of interest to Powerloom sector on the condition of being modernization of looms.

3. Tirthankar Roy (1998): The author in this article "Development or Distortion? 'Powerlooms' in India, 1950-1997" has focused on the rise of a cotton mill industry in India, most of the 20th century has seen a dismantling of weaving in the mills, and its shift to small weaving factories, called powerlooms.

The article disputes this view and interprets the growth as a pattern of industrialization founded on 1) unlimited supply of low-quality labour 2) developing systems of inter-firm co-ordination, 3) agglomeration based on such systems, and 4) continuous accumulation of capital 'from below', in artisanal activities in the past, and in modern small-scale industry and agriculture more recently.

4. Asha KrishnaKumar (2001): The author in article "Despair and Death-The Crises in Sircilla", has define the structure of Sircilla powerloom industry. With Globalisation and Modernisation big producers, such as the Reliance and Mafatlal groups, entered the arena with modern jet and auto looms, as such the Sircilla powerlooms could not even dream of competing with these modern looms in terms of price, quantity or quality. Sales dropped and stocks mounted, as did the interest outstanding on bank loans. The article concludes that the weavers could not benefit much from any of the government scheme as the schemes does not cover cottage industries.

5. R K Sarkar (2003): The author through the article "**Modernisation of Powerloom Sector**" tried to analyse the measures taken by the Government of India to modernize the powerloom sector in order to make it capable of facing competition at domestic as well as international level. Many Committees were formed from time to time to analyse the scenario and to make recommendation for the development of Powerloom sector and to set the matter in a streamline. The author suggested that infrastructure needs to be strengthened and the Government of India has to play a major role in the development of core areas of Powerloom sector in order to make the industry sustainable.

6. Naandi Foundation Report (2009): Naandi Foundation was appointed by the government to survey the families of Sircilla weavers. The suicides have been unprecedented among weavers community since 2000 and to know the reason for the suicides the survey was undertaken. The objective of the survey is to study the Socio-economic status of the weaver community. To identify various vulnerable groups within the community, to examine the outreach of the government schemes and interventions. The study concludes that there are three factors which played the pivotal role in resorting the weavers for suicides are Social, Demographic and Economical factors. In a way the factors responsible for the incidence of suicide are social in nature rather than psychological.

7. S Galab, E Revathi (2009): The authors in the article "Understanding Powerloom weavers' suicides in Sircilla" have thrown light on the oligopolistic market of Sircilla. The article has highlighted the conditions of workers and the state and central government intervention in a more organized manner to end the distress. Apart from production related stress the article has describe the condition of hired workers suffering from occupational health hazards and lack of social security.

8. S Galab, U Vindhya and E Revathi (2010): In a report on "Suicide in SAARC Countries, Multidisciplinary Perspectives and Evidence" the authors have describe the multiple factors which leads to suicides. In the case studies from the handloom and traditional power loom weaving households from Andhra Pradesh, the important suicidesrisk factors are located along the spectrum of economic reasons-non-availability of work, low incomes, and high indebtedness.

9. Dr. Kishor N. Jagtap (2011): The theoretical study titled "**Socio-Economic Conditions of Displaced Power-Loom Workers -A Case Study**", is an attempt to find out total number of displaced power loom workers by reviewing past and present conditions of textile industry. The study also analyzed the family problems and socio-economic problems of displaced Powerloom workers. The study made a conclusion that among all the players employees are worst affected with displacement, exploitation, migration and uneducation.

10. Uttam Paul (2013): The research paper on "A Study of Socio Economic status of workers in the unorganized powerloom sector of West Bengal", has analysed the socio economic status and development of workers engaged in small-scale powerloom sector of West Bengal. The study concludes that workers are illiterate and are exploited whereas on the other end looms are less productive, shortage of finance, tax structure and poor organizational efficiencies have added to low productivity.

11. Pradeep Gangurde (2014): The research paper titled "Socio-Economic Condition of The Powerloom Workers of The Bhiwadi, Thane", has highlighted the social and economic background of powerloom workers of Bhiwandi. The study was conducted on 200 Powerloom workers with an objective to understand Social, cultural and economic issues.

The study concludes that majority of the workers are migrant and are employed on contract system and work in unhygienic, cramped and inhuman conditions. Lack of technology and awareness about Government schemes has made them jobless.

12. Chaudhary, Sainib and Solankic (2015): The researchers through the article titled **“Problems Faced by Handloom & Powerloom Industries in Uttar Pradesh”**, has made an attempt to understand the various problems of Handloom & Powerloom industries. The study is descriptive and concludes that Upgradation & Modernization is the need of the hour supported by Industrial Estate & Textile Park.

POWERLOOM SECTOR TELANGANA STATE

Telangana State has 10 district of which Warangal, Nalgonda, Hindupur, Sircilla and Katedan is famous for handloom and power loom weaving. Among this Sircilla Mandal of Karimnagar District is a major Power loom centre so much so that it is called as Sholapur of Telangana. Majority of people does business with cloth and belong to Padmashali Community.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF SIRCILLA POWERLOOM INDUSTRY

Sircilla was predominantly Handloom industry. Over the time weavers of Sircilla have developed a unique designs and a niche market for their product. The up-gradation of technology has not spared this small town and the first sign of trouble came in the mid of 1970 when large number of powerlooms in Maharastra started duplicating the design of Sircilla Handloom Sari at low cost with high productivity which has affected the Handloom industry of Sircilla. The Sircilla handloom weavers could neither match the productivity nor the low costs of the Maharashtra power looms. In order to continue with the survival weavers started migrating to major Powerloom centres to learn the art of Powerloom weaving. This phase has laid foundation of powerlooms in Sircilla. As per the Directorate of

Handloom and Textile (H&T) Andhra Pradesh, there are about more than 30,000 power looms in Sircilla which account for about 40 percent of the total power looms in the state. There are three types of cloth produced on these looms using Natural fiber (Cotton), synthetic fiber (Polyester) and mix of these two fibers. According to the department records there are 20,000 power looms manufacturing polyester cloth, 8000 looms producing cotton and rest of 2000 looms producing suit cloth. The change in industry profile has developed the industry into various forms and structurally linked the groups. The stakeholders in Sircilla powerloom industry is classified into four groups who interact on daily basis and are classified as:

1) Traders 2) Master weavers 3) Asami (unit holder) 4) Worker weaver (Employees)

1. Traders are outside Sircilla town and are engage in further processing of the cloth in Hyderabad and supplied it to Surat for printing, from there it is being supplied to other parts of the country and abroad.

2. Master Weaver or ‘Setu’ or ‘Seth’ is the most important category, who controls the entire power looms industry in Sircilla. They supply the yarn to weavers to produce the cloth and after weaving they take the cloth. It is like a job work. Most of the master weavers do cloth business and supply grey cloth produced at Sircilla to the traders at Hyderabad.

3. Asami (Job Worker): They weave the cloth on the basis of job orders received from master weavers and also get the beams (Yarn) from the master weavers on the mutually agreed rate. The kind of arrangement between master weaver and merchant on one end and Asami on other end has brought the third category of weaver i.e worker in terms of employment. The worker weavers constitute the main workforce that is employed in the powerloom industry. They do not own any looms and work for either Asamis or for master weavers as wage workers. 20000 worker weavers, of which 15000 are directly engage in weaving and remaining 5000 are employed in allied works like warping, dyeing, sizing, beam drawing, carpenters, mechanic and service workers. The number of looms handled by the worker weavers depends upon the type of cloth woven on the looms. Accordingly, a weaver handles 6 looms in case of polyester cloth and 4 looms of either cotton or suiting cloth and payment is done on the basis of productivity and the type of cloth woven.

CRISIS IN THE POWER LOOM SECTOR OF SIRCILLA

The Power loom sector in different parts of India has faced crisis and Telangana is not left out from this situation and it is pertinent to note that a substantial number of weavers have committed suicides in this districts for almost a decade. Sircilla, the textile town of Telangana has recorded highest number of Powerlooms weaver's suicides following the crisis in the sector. The industry plunged into crisis with the closure of Powerloom units and its allied industries. Poor technical knowhow, Lack of marketing skills, Dependency on Master Weaver for work, Lack of creativity and value addition services has led to the crisis.

As a result the unemployment is vast spread among the workers with lack of regular jobs, inadequate wages, indebtedness and resultant harassment by the micro-finance companies. On the other hand the piling of unlifted stock due to slump in sales, steep rise in the cost of inputs and no commensurate increase in the price of cloth has badly affected the industry. Apart from this ill health and other domestic reasons with prolonged addiction to alcohol has added woes to the weaver's plight. The power tariff hike and the increased sales tax on yarn were the last straw which has caused starvation death of a weaver. The situation became so grim that it has attracted the attention of the State and Central governments, and media in particular. About 320 weavers committed suicides in Karimnagar district, out of which, 275 are from Sircilla power loom weavers between 1997 to 2008. From analysis it is clear that suicides are more among hired worker segment of Powerloom weavers.

REHABILITATION MEASURES

The Government took many rehabilitation measures to curb the suicides by entrusting the CESS to provide 50 percent subsidy on power tariff. Textile Park was set up 7 km from Sircilla with good infrastructure and modern amenities under one roof. The power loom service centre (PSC) is being formed with modern looms to provide training to weavers and their children on modern looms. In recent years PSC has started Apparel and garment training. Subsidies were given to the workers and suicide families. Health insurance schemes and counseling centres were set up for welfare of workers. Housing facilities and pensions were given to eligible persons. 35 kgs of rice at Re.1per kg is given to eligible workers. Self Help Groups are formed and several welfare and development measures were taken for improving the social and economic position of weavers.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

- It is revealed that the critical factors for crisis in Powerloom industry of Sircilla is infrastructure, increase power tariff, Technology, marketing skills with dependency on Master Weaver for work. As such many Powerloom units have shut down as cost of production increased with no demand for the product.
- Inadequate work and wages with high indebtedness has resulted in financial crisis.
- It is found that substantial increase in suicides of powerloom workers is due to financial crisis of workers
- Financial crisis has drastically decrease the Social and economical status of Powerloom workers.
- With poor Social and economical position, the workers were unable to perform their responsibilities as such they went into a stage of depression and took to Alcoholism.

CONCLUSIONS

Liberalization and Globalization has plunged the textile industry into crisis. Even the decentralized sector has to face the brunt of crisis. Lack of infrastructure, increase power tariff, Lack of Technical knowhow and marketing skills, Dependency on Master Weaver for work with no creativity and value addition services has led the sector into crisis. The crisis has resulted in unemployment of worker, which became a major cause of financial Problems. To cope with the crisis the workers have taken loans from Micro Finance Institution or Money lenders. This has subsequently resulted in harassment of workers from lenders. Apart from all these, the icing is done by serious health issues. Unable to perform the Social and economical responsibilities, the workers went into a stage of depression which resulted in suicides. A proper support from the Government in the form of modernization and rehabilitation measures will result in productive economy which is vital in shaping the social and economic status of workers and would turn the crises industry into flourishing one.

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