



ISSN: 0976-3031

Available Online at <http://www.recentscientific.com>

CODEN: IJRSFP (USA)

International Journal of Recent Scientific Research
Vol. 10, Issue, 04(D), pp. 31883-31886, April, 2019

**International Journal of
Recent Scientific
Research**

DOI: 10.24327/IJRSR

Research Article

PROBLEMS OF HANDLOOM WEAVERS (A case study of Mangalagiri, Guntur district)

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DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.24327/ijrsr.2019.1004.3356>

ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Received 4th January, 2019

Received in revised form 25th

February, 2019

Accepted 23rd March, 2019

Published online 28th April, 2019

ABSTRACT

Handloom industry is the largest cottage industry in the country. The sector is very important from the point of view of its size and employment potential. It provides direct and indirect employment to over 13 million weavers and is the largest economic activity second only to agriculture. Handloom weavers are facing hardships in carrying out their livelihood on handloom due to competition with power loom sector, marketing problem, infrastructural constraints, and rising yarn prices. Similarly the containing features of in the handicrafts sector are scarcity of appropriate raw material, lack of infrastructure facilities.

Key Words:

The sector is very important from the point of view of its size and employment potential.

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INTRODUCTION

Handloom industry is the oldest cottage industry in India scattered widely throughout the country. The industry is providing direct employment around 10 million persons in India in the Indian decentralized sector. In addition to direct employment, the industry also provides indirect employment to 1.5 persons per every weaver engaged in production. Further, the industry generates indirect employment to others like loom manufactures, dyers, twisters, processors, printers, etc. The share of employment provided by the Indian hand loom industry in the total decentralized sector is about 5.5 per cent. Today there are approximately 40 lakhs of handlooms in India of which 22.1 per cent are commercial looms concentrated in Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Manipur, Orissa, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal. It provides employment to over 150 lakhs of families, a large number of Handloom weavers are women.¹ Thus, the industry constitutes one of the major sectors employing the largest number of persons next to agriculture. The most unique and notable feature of the handloom industry is its glorious survival in the face of competition with large scale mill sector. The importance of this industry in our country

can be gauged from the fact that it meets one-third of the total cloth requirement of the masses. The artisans in India are famous for spinning and hand dying.²

Andhra Pradesh has a name in the production of multitudinous varieties of exquisitely colourful handloom fabrics. Its textile products have been enjoying a high reputation for their distinctive designs and excellent workmanship. In the course of time, various unfavorable factors led to the decline of the hand weaving industry in the State. In spite of its decline even today it happens to be the most important household industry in the state and handloom products are quite famous for their artistic elegance and intricate designs.³ They are accustomed of the act of weaving as a hereditary occupation.⁴ Even though there is

¹ Mubarak Ali, E. (2004). "Handloom Industry in Tamilnadu", *Kisan World* –Vol. 31, No.6, June 2004.

² M.R.S. Babu and KVK Rao (2006). Socio-Economic Problems of Weavers, paper presented in second-pre Annual Conference on informal sector.

³ Subbaraj, B. and Joseph Nelson (2004). "Product Strategies of Handloom Weavers' Co-operative societies: An Empirical Enquiry, *Indian Co-operative Review*, Vol. 41, No.3, January 2004.

⁴ Prabhkar Sarma and Johlekar, P.V.N. (2002). Upgradation of Handloom Co-operatives, *Indian Co-operative Review*, January 2002, p.235

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backwardness in handloom sector, the handloom products are quite famous for their artistic clarity and majestic designs.

Despite this eminent position enjoyed by the handloom industry in our economy, it is beset with many handicaps. Though its contributions to the national exchequer as well as to the Indian culture stands high, an observation of the socio-economic and working conditions of the weavers in the country leaves much to be desired. Against this background this paper attempts to study the

1. Socio-economic profiles of the weavers, and
2. to know the problems of the handloom weavers.

Review of Literature

Dakshina Murthy (1982) made a study on financing handloom co-operative, NABARD. He has suggested that handloom sector need liberal financial assistance for Department of Co-operative handloom weavers.⁵

Mahapatro (1986) in his micro level study in Orissa emphasised the socio-economic background of handlooms weavers, employment and organisation characteristics. He also studied selected apex and primary societies. He suggested that credit facilities should be provided to weavers as well as co-operative societies on liberal terms and conditions.⁶

Kotaiah, P. (1987) in his study on problems regarding the handloom industry suggested several measures for weavers security purpose, like insurance, provident fund and group insurance. The author suggested the government to construct hospitals for the weavers and also provide tax free on Inputs of handloom industry.⁷

Prabhakara Sharma and P.V.N. Jogiekar (2002) have emphasised that the area under cotton cultivation in Indian is the largest in the world. India has the second largest spinning capacity after China in hand weaving sector and a long tradition of producing some of the finest and costliest fabrics in the world. India is the biggest yarn exporter with the share of 28per cent of the world market and is known for the quality of its line count cotton yarns. Through the contribution of the state handloom to the Indian culture as well as to the national exchequer presents a satisfactory picture, an insight into the socio-economic and working conditions of the weavers is tough one. At present, the most of the weavers main reason is due to improper technology and also the fruits of the industry are actually grabbed by the middlemen.⁸

Srinivasulu, K. (2004) critically analysed the causes of crisis in handloom industry in his article. The new textile system proposes to bring tremendous changes in Textile Industry. This change is of handlooms, power looms and mills. As it has already been facing crisis for the last one and a half decades.

⁵ Dakshina Murthy (1982). Financing Handloom Co-operatives, NABARD, The Co-operator, Nov. 1982.

⁶ Mahapatro, P.C. (1996). Economic of Cotton Handloom industry in India, Ashish Publishing House, New Delhi.

⁷ Kotaiah, P. (1987). Problems of Handloom industry, *Jagruthi*, 5th July, 1987 pp.5-15.

⁸ Joglekar (2002). Upgradation of Handloom co-operative, Indian co-operative review, Vol. XXXIX, No.3, January, p.235.

So, it is essentially needed to study the influence of New Textile Policy (system) on the field of Textile industry.⁹

Mubarak Ali, E. (2004) has emphasised that the handloom industry is today in doldrums. The weaving community is feeding the finch in every aspect of their working life, be its production or marketing or finance or anything else. The community has been today pushed to the mercy of the government. The government has been taking necessary efforts to help the industry in every possible way in its revival process.¹⁰

Socio-Economic Profile of Weavers

The handloom sector reflects not only the tradition of the weaving communities all over India, but also the socio-cultural heritage of our entire nation. It plays a vital role in the growth of the rural economy. "The nation cannot afford to allow the handloom industry to decay rapidly and die a violent death in its struggle". It is this background that underlines the need for a human approach to the entire problem. The scope of the present study is to cover some social aspects like age, education, economic conditions, etc.

The handloom market of Andhra Pradesh and the market of Mangalagiri, Guntur District in particular, are facing acute problems. The main reason for taking a household as a sample unit that Cotton handloom activity in Mangalagiri is mainly a household industry. About 2,300 households are actively engaged in handloom weaving. Of 57 Mandals in Guntur district, Mangalagiri alone accounted for 20 per cent (2,300) households of total number of households 11,064 in Guntur district. Even in terms of number of looms also Mangalagiri occupied first place in Guntur district with a share of 22.4% (3,203) of the total looms (14,325). Weavers are facing problem of poverty and not having enough work to do and eke out livelihood. In recent years, particularly in 2004 & 2005 some weavers have committed suicides and starvation deaths happened. Out of 242 total deaths 193 happened in Telangana only.

Need for the study

The handloom market of Andhra Pradesh, and in particular, the market of Mangalagiri in Guntur District are facing acute problems. In the course of time, various inferable factors led to the decline of the handloom industry in the state. In spite of its decline even today it happens to be the most important household industry in the state. Despite this eminent position enjoyed by the handloom industry in our economy, it is beset with many problems, though its contribution to the national exchange as well as to the modern culture stand high. An observation of the socio-economic and working conditions of the weavers in this are, however, much to be designed.

In Mangalagiri, about 150 households are selected who have actively engaged in handloom weaving. To have expedience and greater representativeness of the population, stratified random sampling method has been adopted for the study.

⁹ Srinivasulu, K. (1994). Handloom Weavers Struggle for Survival, *Economic Political Weekly*, Vol. XXIX, No.6, Sept.3, 1994, pp.2331-2333.

¹⁰ Mubarak, A.H. (2004). Handloom Industry in Tamilnadu, *Kisan World*, Vol. 31, No.6, June, p.45.

The socio-Economic profile of the Mangalagiri cluster

- No. of looms established (Estimated) 3,000
- Looms in the co-operative sector 600
- No. of Pit looms: 2,000
- No. of stand looms 1,000
- Working looms out of Co-operative sector 2,400
- Annual production out the cluster (Estimated) – Rs.60 crores
- No. of persons directly employed 4,000
- Working weavers Co-operative Societies 4

Table 1 Distribution of sample workers by Age (Years)

Type of workers	Age (years)				Total
	20-35	35-50	50-65	65 & above	
Weaving	20(26.7)	45(60.0)	7(9.3)	3(4.0)	75(100.0)
Bobbin winding	3(15.0)	6(30.0)	11(55.0)	-	20(100.0)
Dyeing	20(52.7)	10(26.3)	7(18.4)	1(2.6)	38(100.0)
Others	6(35.3)	8(47.0)	2(11.7)	1(5.9)	17(100.0)
Total	49(32.7)	69(46.0)	27(18.0)	5(3.3)	150(100.0)

Note: Figures in parenthesis are in percentages

Table 1 indicates the persons in the age-group of 35-40 years actively indulge in income generating activities. These respondents constitutes 46 per cent followed by the samples in the age group of 20-35 representing 32 per cent, who do have their actual share in income gaining activities.

Table 2 Distribution of sample weaving workers by sex

Type of workers	Sex		Total
	Male	Female	
Weaving	54(72.0)	21(17.0)	75(100.00)
Bobbin Winding	6(30.0)	14(70.0)	20(100.00)
Dyeing	26(68.4)	12(31.6)	38(100.00)
Others	16(94.1)	1(5.9)	17(100.00)
Total	102(68.0)	48(32.0)	150(100.00)

Note: Figures in parenthesis are in percentages

Table 2 depicts that male weaver dominate with 68 per cent (102 members) and the representation of female weavers is 32 per cent. As the weaving is family activity, the female members in the family will take part in other weaving activities like bobbin winding etc.

Table 3 Distribution of sample workers by level of Education

Type of workers	Level of Education				Total
	Illiterate	Primary	Secondary	Higher	
Weaving	10(25.3)	28(37.3)	15(20)	13(17.3)	75(100.00)
Bobbin winding	5(25)	13(65)	2(10)	--	20(100.00)
Dyeing	14(36.8)	9(23.7)	15(39.5)	--	38(100.00)
Others	4(23.5)	6(35.3)	5(29.4)	2(11.8)	17(100.00)
Total	42(28.0)	56(37.3)	37(24.7)	15(10.0)	150(100.00)

Note: Figures in parenthesis are in percentages

Educational standards of the sample weaving workers in present in the table 3. It is clearly evident from the data that among the sample 150weavers literate workers constitute 72 per cent. Yet despite many illiteracy eradication programmes being implemented by government there exists a remarkable percentage of illiterate weavers 28 per cent.

Table 4 Distribution of sample weaving workers by number of working days

Type of workers	Number of data worked			Total
	Below 100	100-200	201 and above	
Weaving	13(17.3)	22(29.4)	40(53.3)	75(100.00)
Bobbin winding	6(30.0)	10(50.0)	4(20.0)	20(100.00)
Dyeing	16(42.1)	10(26.3)	12(31.6)	38(100.00)
Others	6(35.3)	7(41.2)	4(23.5)	17(100.00)
Total	41(27.3)	49(32.7)	60(40.0)	150(100.00)

Note: Figures in parenthesis are in percentages

Distribution of sample weaving workers by number of days they worked is presented in table 4. The data indicates that the whole weaving community does not have work throughout the year. Among 150 samples 40 per cent are having work more than 200 days in a year. 27 per cent said that they will have work only less than 100 days.

Problems of the Handloom weavers

Weavers suffer many problems like low productivity resulting in poor earnings, shortage of working capital, high incidence of unemployment, lack of adequate institutional support in raw material technology etc. The weavers are asked to explain about the present employment situation. Table 5 reveals that 60 per cent are not satisfied with their employment. And 36per cent are interested in continuing their children in this profession.

Table 5 Opinions of the weavers about the present employment situation

S.No.	Particulars	Yes	No	Total
1	Are you fully satisfied with your present employment	60(40.0)	90(60.0)	150(100.0)
2	Do you prefer change of job	100(66.7)	50(33.3)	150(100.0)
3	Do you like to continue your children in weaving	55(36.7)	95(63.3)	150(100.0)
4	Are you satisfied with the wages paid by the master weavers	45(30.0)	105(70.0)	150(100.0)
5	Are there any illegal deductions from the wage by the Master Weavers	80(53.3)	70(46.7)	150(100.0)
6	Are you a local person	120(80.0)	30(20.0)	150(100.0)
7	Are you aware the certain items are reserved for handloom sector	45(30.0)	105(70.0)	150(100.0)

Note: Figures in parenthesis are in percentages

Table 6 Opinions of the Weavers about the present crisis

S.No.	Factors responsible for crisis	Yes	No	Total
1	Rise in the price of yarn and other raw material	110(73.3)	40(26.7)	150(100)
2	Lack of marketing and Credit facilities	90(60.0)	60(40.0)	150(100)
3	Unauthorized Power looms	110(73.3)	40(26.7)	150(100)
4	Government Policies	100(66.7)	50(33.3)	150(100)
5	Ineffective working of the co-operatives	95(63.3)	55(36.7)	150(100)

Note: Figures in parenthesis are in percentages

The opinions of the weavers for the present crisis of the handloom industry are elicited through personal interviews with the respondents and depicted in the table 5. The table reveals that as many as 73.3 per cent of the weavers felt that the rise in the yarn price and other raw materials is the main cause of the present crisis, besides lack of proper marketing and credit facilities.

The respondents constituting 66 per cent have expressed that the government policies (i.e. new textile policy) are responsible for the present crisis of the industry; 73 per cent of them have ascribed the present situation to the unauthorised growth of power looms and 63 per cent of them focused on the ineffective working of the co-operative societies in state.

CONCLUSION

Thus, handloom industry is the most important instrument for the growth of rural non-farm sector, manpower absorption and justice promotion in the country especially in rural Andhra Pradesh. The Government should adopt a multidisciplinary and multi agency approach for the promotion and development through the provision of integrated supplies of various types of developmental inputs in terms of production and other infrastructure facilities. Though the weavers are working hard i.e. 10 to 12 hours per day and 23 days in a month, the wages paid to them are very low and which leads to suicide and starvation deaths in recent times. To eradicate the poverty of weavers, the following are the suggestions:

Suggestions

1. The government should set up production centres for every 1000 weavers in areas where the weavers are concentrated and these production centres must supply the required inputs to the weavers and average for the marketing of the handloom cloth.
2. The government should take steps for the conversion of pit looms into modern looms, to increase the productivity and earnings of the hand loom weavers.
3. Providing training to the weavers which is necessary in the development of new designs and methods of production to attract the consumer from textile cloth production, would prove helpful in resolving the crisis to a considerable extent.

How to cite this article:

Sudhir Maddela and Pradeep, M., 2019, Problems of Handloom Weavers (a Case Study of Mangalagiri, Guntur District). *Int J Recent Sci Res.* 10(04), pp. 31883-31886. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.24327/ijrsr.2019.1004.3356>
