

A STUDY ON THE PRESENT CONDITION OF THE WEAVERS OF HANDLOOM INDUSTRY: A REVIEW

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Abstract: Handloom has been a major economic activity after agriculture. It is an age old tradition of weaving beauty into the threads and converting them into masterpiece to be worn. But with time these culture has lost its face value due to number of reasons and gradually deteriorated the economic condition of the weavers. The present paper makes a brief review of the socio-economic condition of the handloom weavers, their problems and the challenges that they are facing in continuing the tradition. The study concludes with some suggestion that is derived from the review of the literatures in context to the handloom.

1. INTRODUCTION

Of all the art and crafts in India, hand-woven textiles are probably the oldest and most widely recognized. Weaving practise in India has been in existence for more than 5000 years. It is also found in Ramayana and Mahabharata that speaks about length of craft. Historically, a few famous hand woven textiles of India were Baluchari sari of Varanasi, Bandamis of Kutch, Chandri sari of Madhya Pradesh, Georgettes of Mysore, Sambalpuri saris of Odisha, Jamdhani sari of Bengal, Temple silk of south from Kancheepuram and others. Providing direct and indirect employment to more than 30 lakh weavers, handloom industry is the second largest economic activity in India next only to agriculture. Handlooms contribute to nearly 23% of cloth production in the country. It plays a significant role in the Indian economy owing to their rural employment potential.

Handlooms products have been a major part of export basket of the country. Sarees, dress materials and home furnishing have been the major contributors to the handloom exports basket. Furthermore, the majority of these exports have been to Europe, USA and other Asian countries.

The distinctive feature of Odisha handloom industry is the "IKAT" design, which finds ancient linkages in the cross-cultural influence with the maritime activities of South-East Asia. Odisha is the land of handloom and handicrafts. It has a special recognition in the country's textiles scenario, for its exclusive handloom product. Thousands of looms across the state are engaged in weaving cotton, silk and other natural fibres. Handlooms are a key element of Odisha's economy

Significance of the research:

In this dynamic era, fast changes in fashion trend have also led to the increasing demand of handloom and challenges on the other hand. The socio-economic conditions of the weavers, profitability of handloom industry, challenges faced by the weavers, availability of financial support, innovative marketing strategy are some of the issues which now the handloom industry is facing. So it is the need of the time to ponder into these issues, and formulate such type of strategies which could help the weavers and the handloom industry in improving their present condition.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The review deals with the contribution of different researchers on the concept of handloom industry. Research articles, case study, white papers and working papers on handloom and the weavers have been taken as literature review.

Different studies conducted on handloom within Odisha and in India have been reviewed under two broad categories as follows:

- Studies relating to socio-economic condition of the weavers
- Studies related to the challenges and problems faced by the handloom industry

The present paper is a descriptive and qualitative analysis of the factors affecting the weavers and handloom industry, taking all the literatures available as secondary data. A review of the literatures available is given so as to make the paper more conducive for further research.

A. Sub area: Studies related to the challenges and problems faced by the handloom industry

Varghese and Salim (2015), have carried out a work entitled “*Handloom Industry in Kerala: A study of the problems and challenges*” to study the significance of handloom industry in India, to make a detailed study of major problems and challenges of handloom industry in Kerala state, and to suggest suitable remedial strategies and policy options for the healthy growth of the handloom sector in Kerala. The paper is descriptive, analytical and is based primarily on secondary data, and also on primary data collected through interviews with the major stakeholders.

Roa and Rao (2015) has conducted a study named, “*An Analysis of Handloom Industry in Andhra Pradesh – Challenges vs. Government schemes*”, based on data that has been collected from both primary and secondary sources. The study explores the present schemes implemented by both state & central governments. It also explores the present status of Handloom Industry in Andhra Pradesh. The paper states various challenges faced by handloom weavers. Despite several measures taken by the government by the way of institutional support and direct financial assistance to the handloom weavers, they are suffering miserably due to myriad problems and are sustaining continuous losses.

Narzary (2013) has carried out a research named “*A study on the challenges faced by the handloom industry in BTAD, Assam*” to find out the major challenges faced by the handloom industry in BTAD (Bodoland Territorial Areas District).

Goswami and Jain (2014) has conducted a study named, “*Strategy for Sustainable Development of Handloom Industry*”, based on the data collected through semi-structured interview schedule, observation method and secondary sources. The objective of this paper is to explore the problems of the handloom industry and further to suggest a suitable strategy. The strategy suitable for handloom sector is Differentiation strategy, which means creating something innovative which is best suited to handloom industry.

Basu (2016) has conducted a study entitled “*Textile, Garment, and Fashion Industry in Odisha, Prospects and Challenges*” based primarily on descriptive analysis and the author’s own investigation and analysis. The paper aims to study the growth and prospects of textile, garment and fashion industry in Odisha and challenges faced by the same. The paper briefed about the need of textile industry, reasons for close down of textile mills and government initiatives to revive the sector. The findings revealed that Odisha handloom is growing but there is some drawback in form of quality, price, marketing and export of the products. It is suggestible that the garment sector should be encouraged for earning more revenue and employment and initiative should be taken by the state Govt to provide infrastructural development and more refined textile schemes.

Department of Planning and Co-ordination, Govt. of Odisha had prepared a report on “*Marketing Study in the area of Handloom Project under CLSP component of OFFDI*”. The study was carried by a thorough visit to the secondary information available on handloom sector of Odisha followed by interaction with primary and secondary stakeholders associated. The study intended to find out the different aspects affecting the sector and specifically the market chain mechanism associated with the sector. The study brings out that in spite of growing competitions and pressure caused by the modern textile sector, irregular availability of raw materials, almost all the weavers families, met, still been continuing with their weaving operations to limited scale.

Tripathy (2009) prepared a report on “*Odisha handloom: Problems and Perspective*” based on descriptive data and mostly authors observation towards the topic. The basic objective of the study is to find out the problems and perspectives of Odisha handloom. It is suggested that at this level all type of generalists and specialists are required for manning key position in productive enterprises, research, and planning in a variety of ways.

Kar and Bhuyan (2012) have conducted a study named, “*Integrated Handloom Cluster Development in Odisha: A case analysis of Bargarh cluster*”. The study has unique findings such as multiplicity and un-coordinated developmental efforts, depletion of knowledge worker base, insufficient measures for protection of traditional art and craft, insufficient training need identification and industry fragmentation as major area of concern for the planning, executing and monitoring agencies in the cluster.

Jain and Gera (2017) has conducted a research named “*An Analytical Study of Handloom Industry of India*” based primarily on secondary data available on handloom sector of India. The findings of the paper suggest that the weavers lack knowledge about the modern techniques of production, packing, designing, promotion etc. Therefore for the development and promotion of handloom industry there is a need of extensive research in this field.

Banerjee and Choudhary have carried out a research named, “*A comparative study of Handloom industries in Chattisgarh*” based on descriptive analyses of the data collected through observation, survey and secondary sources as per authors observation and experience. The study is conducted to know the concentration of handloom industries in Northern, Southern and Central regions of Chattisgarh with reference to the number of weaving co-operative societies operated, number of active looms used and number of weavers employed. The study concludes that Central Region of Chhattisgarh has maximum handloom production with maximum number of districts, weaving co-operative societies, active looms and employed workers.

Patra and Dey has carried out a research entitled “*Profitability Analysis of Handloom Weavers: A case study of Cuttack district of Odisha.*” to study the profitability position of the selected handloom products of Odisha, to make comparative study of profits between the selected handloom products of Odisha and to provide suggestion for improving the profitability of handloom weavers in Odisha.

Sekar and Vignesh (2014) conducted a research entitled “*A Study on customer perception and marketing issues of cottage industry products in Madurai district*”, to study the product attributes related with the quality dimensions for cottage industries like lack of demand, poor quality and design, poor bargaining power, poor service to customers, brand preferences and ignorance of potential market areas. The socio demographic factors included in the survey are gender, age, education and income. The findings of the survey conducted in a large population are valuable for the cottage industry manufacturers which establish customer oriented strategies. As the quality perception and importance given by the customers is influenced by socio demographic properties and it changes with time, it is recommended to the cottage industry product manufacturers to analyze their market well in order to better determine the segments of the market with up to date information.

B. Sub topic: Study related to socio-economic conditions of the weavers.

Tanusree (2015) has carried out a work entitled, “*A study of the present situation of the traditional handloom weavers of Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, India*” based on the data that have been collected through the in-depth interview, case study and focused group discussion. The paper briefs out the reasons behind the declining situation of handloom weaving in Varanasi. Thus the study concludes with a suggestion that due to industrialization, the handloom weavers of Varanasi have lost their prestigious traditional industry, so the policy maker should realize the importance of handloom sector and allocate the required funds for the up-liftment of handloom weavers to avoid the decline in handloom industry.

Mohapatra (2014) have penned down a paper named, “*A Management Approach to Sambalpuri Sari with a sign of Cultural Facets*”, based primarily on secondary data and descriptive analyses of the reviewed papers and literatures. The main objective of the study is to brief out the cultural history of Sambalpuri sarees, problems of weavers and cooperatives and institutional mechanism for Sambalpuri sarees. The paper culminates with the findings and suggestion that to keep the Sambalpuri sarees art in tact we have to find out the possible ways how the weavers will get fair wages. In the current scene of the aggressive marketing and high competition the business needs to adopt some modern practises to keep the art, technique, and pride alive. What our handloom sector needs now is better marketing strategies and design innovations. We could experiment with our patterns and add more creativity to suit the international market.

Sadanandam (2016) has conducted a research named “*Socio-economic conditions of handloom weaving societies – A case study of Warangal district*” to study the social conditions prevailing among the handloom weavers societies with an objective to find out their place in the society and to analyse the economic conditions of the handloom weavers societies and find out their economic status.

Victoria (2013) has undertaken a research entitled, “*Handlooms for livelihood in north-eastern region: problems and prospects*” explores the problems and scope of handloom sector in north-eastern region of India for economic upliftment of the people. Various issues like social and cultural aspects, demographic profile, production, employment, market structure, technology and skill are analysed for understanding the present condition of handlooms. The factors contributing in promoting handloom sector are identified so that mobilisation can be done for promoting it as a livelihood activity.

Anusuya and Chinnadorai (2015) has conducted a study named, “*A study on consumer awareness and satisfaction towards handloom products with special reference to Coimbatore district*” to analyze the awareness level of customers in Coimbatore while buying and using handloom products. The above study reveals that consumers are very much aware about the handloom products but that makes no profit to the handloom seller. It is concluded that Private and government organization take step for increasing the quality and availability of products

3. EMERGING ISSUES

The handloom industry everywhere in the country has been struggling for its survival. The industry suffered from low productivity, lack of needed marketing structure, required volume of cotton and inadequate modernization of production processes and so on. Handloom weaving which had been providing livelihood to the rural weavers is now in the deteriorating stage due to many factors. Some of the factors that caused to the crisis were the following:

1. Shortage, non-availability of raw materials

Scarcity and inadequate supply of yarn has been affecting the performance of handloom industry adversely. The supply of the major input in the handloom sector, hank yarn, has been unreliable and irregular. It was primarily due to the steep increase in prices of yarn that the handloom industry had to taste four spells of crisis in the years 1984, 1986, 1988 and 1991.

2. Rising Input Costs

Increased prices of inputs have been a key problem across centres of handloom production. The problem is far more acute for individual weavers. Cotton yarn is the major input for handloom weaving. In recent years, there has been a phenomenal rise in the prices of yarn.

3. Increased cost of Production

As a result of increase in raw material prices, cost of production of handloom fabric also increases. Goswami in his study stated that the handloom production is about 22 per cent more expensive compared with power loom production.

4. Rise of spinning industry and fall of handlooms

The reasons for the consistent and faster decline of this industry are many. The spinning mills have been growing steadily in the country producing the required low count yarns that are mostly used in the home textiles.

5. Shift from Handlooms to Power Looms

There is perceptible shift from handlooms to power looms over the few decades. Some of the handloom weavers have been converting their handlooms to power looms as the viability of handlooms has been diminishing very fast in the last couple of decades.

6. Lack of Technology Development

Weaving is a traditional and hereditary occupation. The weavers are following traditional methods of production and design due to lack of exposure, awareness and knowledge over changing technologies, methods and the requirements. The production capacity of these looms is low and the job is tedious. This sector encounters tough competition from superior quality products available at cheaper prices from the organized sectors.

7. Marketing related issues

The industry has been pursuing the sales oriented philosophy. Inadequate marketing services and facilities have resulted in periodical accumulation of stocks, resulting in unemployment among the weavers.

a. *Lack of availability of market information:* There is no reliable information available regarding the market for handloom products. This creates hurdles at the market end resulting in unsatisfied customers. The weavers are unaware of the market demand and new designs and colours because of the lack of customer feedback. This hampers their creativity and innovation.

b. *Lack of awareness about the product features:* Handloom cloth is very soft and good for skin. It is non-allergic synthetic fibres. The use of vegetable dye makes it health friendly. One of the greatest characteristic is its flexibility to adapt according to the customer's choice. It is more preferable because of its fine quality and added embroidery. Customers are not educated of these qualities of handloom products.

c. *Insufficient Promotion and Advertisement of Handloom:* Handloom sector is far lagging behind in promotion and advertising of its product as compared to the other textile sector. Generally, the promotion is only through exhibitions and fairs with limited outlets. Hence the customer purchases only when available and switches to the other competitive products when it is unavailable.

d. *Lack of Quality Standardization:* The handloom is famous for the production of the finest quality of cloth. It uses the unique selling proposition in many cases like carpets, furnishings and fine designs. However the quality and standardization of the product is not regularly mentioned and there is no procedure for checking the quality standards of the products like durability, shrinking etc.

e. *Improper Management of Handloom Logistics:* Handloom logistics should be done in a scientific way. There should be precise calculation of stock keeping and cost incurred in maintaining a huge stock. There should not be any blockage of money and subsequently the interest burden. Generally inefficiency occurs in case of finished products supply. Due to lack of improper marketing, the huge stock is blocked with marketers. Some of the co-operatives end up in loss because of mismanagement.

f. *Unable to exploit export potentiality:* There is vast export potential for handloom products. But its potential is not fully exploited. Functioning of handloom export promotion council should be geared up.

g. *Weekly Haats:* which supposed to serve as marketing facility for the small and marginal independent weavers are not serving the purpose they ought to serve. They should provide a direct link between the weavers and the consumer. But their very basic concept is forgotten and they are like any other commercial complex without any benefit to the small weavers.

8. *Financial Problem*

Handloom industry is one such delicate organization, which has been totally capital-starved at all the time. Allocations for handlooms in national and state budgets are being reduced. These allocations are much disproportionate to the industry's requirements and its employment potential.

9. *Organizational Problems*

In spite of the continuous efforts over the last four decades the co-operatives could not attract the total weavers of the country. A majority is still working under middlemen. They do not have a right to produce either the cloth of their liking or to fix the price of the product. Either the master weavers or the middlemen will decide everything.

10. *Poor Institutional Management*

The Handlooms sector was encouraged to adopt a co-operative model and the government policy facilitated the formation and running of Primary Co-operative Societies at the village/taluka level and Apex Societies at the State level. Besides, State Handloom Corporations were also promoted with a view to supporting individual weavers. Unfortunately, several Apex Societies /Handloom Corporations have become dormant due to a host of reasons such as financial losses, lack of professional management, over-staffing and poor marketing and distribution channels. These organizations are, therefore, not able to arrange for sufficient work for the weavers community, which has further adversely affected the health of the Primary Cooperative Societies.

11. *Unfair practices of Power looms*

The power looms were able to misuse the concession given to handlooms and function under the cover of handlooms. Handloom products are increasingly being copied by power looms and are able to produce at a low cost due to rapid technological developments.

12. Infrastructure and Investment

Investment in handloom sector has thus far been limited to input supply costs. There is no investment on sectorial growth; while there have been some piecemeal projects such as work shed-cum-housing and project package schemes that merely perpetuate the existing conditions. Common facilities have not been developed such as godowns, credit facilities (banks in the vicinity), roads, proper sanitation, etc., have not been provided anywhere.

13. Designs and Patenting

Handloom designs are not protected. As a result, investors are not interested lest they end up with the risk and those who copy the benefits. Protection options include development of handloom/silk/jute marks and registration under Geographical Indications Act.

14. Design improvements

While there are suggestions that handloom sector should increase its design in response to changes in the market, the bottlenecks are many. The lack of change is not due to the weaver not being amenable to change, as is bandied. Rather, it is due to unwillingness of the investor to take risks and provide incentive to weavers for effecting the change. This apart, government has been providing substantial grants to the National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIFT) to provide design support to handloom cooperatives, but nothing much has come of it.

15. Impact of National Textile policy

Protection for handloom against unequal competition from mills and power looms has previously been the cornerstone of our textile policy. This has been knocked out and with it any possibility of saving the handloom industry, with all its significance for rural employment. Not only all capacity restrictions have been withdrawn on mills and power looms but all conceivable financial, fiscal and other assistance has been offered to enable them to occupy the market rapidly, leaving little space for the handlooms except for some controlled space.

16. Failures in implementation of government schemes

Lack of information to weavers regarding various Government policies and schemes under implementation, is a significant cause for the dwindling fortunes of the weaver's community. Sometimes, the implementing agencies and the concerned Governments Departments may not possess complete information, resulting in critical gaps in implementation.

17. Research needs

Extensive research into technological and organizational aspects of the handloom industry is necessary. Rarely have the research needs of the handloom industry been pursued systematically. Research institutes undertaking technical research into each stage of the weaving process, including pre-loom processes are required, since it is in these early stages that the need for technical improvement is most keenly felt. Research and documentation of designs as well as of existing markets also need to be undertaken.

4. SUGGESTIONS AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

Like any other Industry, the handloom industry is also facing stiff competition. The competition, particularly from the power loom sector, will only increase in the days to come. In order to retain its market share and also to enter new market segments the handloom sector needs some well thought-out and clearly articulated remedial strategies, supported by conducive policy initiatives. Some such meaningful measures, derived based on the foregoing analysis are noted below:

- i) To prepare the handloom industry, the Government has to take the initiative to re-orient its focus and activities and programmes to create a 'Data bank' in the handloom department so as to build up a reliable Information System for Market intelligence.
- ii) It is advisable to establish functionary centres in order to collect market facts on products, total market distribution and their channels, consumers competitions, import rules and regulations, economic factors and specific market characteristics and price trends, the availability and requirements of handloom products and disseminate this information among the Weavers Co-operative Societies involved in Export business.
- iii) The pending disbursements (like, subsidies, rebates etc.) to weavers and other workers in this industry needs to be fully paid so as to motivate them to put in their full potential.

- iv) Cost competitiveness of this industry segment, at present, is very poor. This in turn affects the profit margins and sales of the product. Stricter measures to control cost through adoption of advanced technologies, engagement of trained and skilled staff etc.
- v) Specialized training needs to be given to the handloom employees for the meaningful marketing of handloom products through cost-effective distribution channels.
- vi) Government should encourage the government-owned enterprises to purchase handloom products. It should insist on government employees to wear such garments at least once in every week so as to boost the demand for such products.

Given the definite advantages of handloom products, meaningful strategies as above supported by competent policy initiatives by the government would yield good results. Let us hope that the handloom industry will pick up momentum in the near future taking cue from the governmental policies, and hence attain commanding heights in the national economy.

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