

## **BLOW OF TEXTILE INDUSTRY ON MEMBER WEAVERS' OF SILK HANDLOOM CO-OPERATIVE SOCIETIES IN KANCHIPURAM DISTRICT**

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### **ABSTRACT**

India is a developing country with majority of its masses living in rural areas. Agriculture is the main source of employment providing work to 70 percent of the rural population. Next to agriculture handloom provides a major source of employment to the rural people in India. Mahatma Gandhi said “the spinning wheel is a nation’s second lung”. He considered the spinning wheel, a symbol of revolution. So, handloom weaving is the most important cottage and labour intensive industry in India carried out with labour contributed by entire family of the total handlooms in India 72 percent are engaged in cotton weaving, about 16 percent in silk weaving and rest are related to art silk and mixture. Kanchipuram is one of the biggest production centres of pure silk handlooms where no entry of powerlooms is being tolerated nor an introduction of any new techniques of production is readily accepted by the most quality-conscious weavers who are more concerned with the stable fineness of the texture of their handloom fabrics. In Kanchipuram there are around 60,000 silk weavers, out of them 50,000 weavers work under co-operative fold for more than 80 percent of the weavers co-operatives serve as a social asset in term of giving employment, ensuring a fixed wage implementing Government schemes etc., but at present these weavers face lot of problems related to their occupation. This enthused to analyse the blow of textile industry on member weavers of silk handloom co-operative societies in Kanchipuram District.

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Handloom sector is an important cottage industry in India and is a very old profession. Handloom weavers are known for their knowledge, innovation and brilliance in designs. Weaving is now considered almost an art from considering deployment of skills and knowledge. This sector, estimatedly, provides employment for more than 15 million people and is second largest rural employment provider next to agriculture. In Tamil Nadu, there are more than 3 lakh handloom weaving families. In comparison with other traditional rural sectors, handloom weaving is a full-time family profession, involving all the members of the family.

Presently, handloom weavers are facing severe livelihood crisis because of adverse government policies, globalization and changing socio-economic conditions. However, in the present situation, there are too many issues, which are impinging on the development of the handloom sector. So, there is a need to develop broader understanding of its multidisciplinary perspective, which is more needed in the present circumstances of globalization and environmental degradation, particularly in relation to development. So an attempt is made to study the blow of textile industry on member weavers of silk handloom co-operative societies in Kanchipuram District.

### Statement of the Problem

With liberalization of Indian economy, the modern textile industry has posed serious threat to the traditional handloom industry. Rapid technological upgradation and automation in textile industry has made high volume of production of a variety of quality synthetic and cotton textile items, enjoying competitive advantage over the handloom products. The handloom industry, both in co-operative and private sector, with its vast rural work force especially of weaver communities is confronted with challenge of competitive economic environment. The weakening position of handloom sector in the wake of global competition of textile industry has posed a serious threat to the socio-economic life of the traditional weaver communities, in general and to the socio-economic status of silk weavers in particular.

The study has critically examined the change in status and pattern of employment of weaver communities engaged in handloom weaving in Kanchipuram. Besides, the extent of their productive utilisation, nature, seasonality and remunerativeness their jobs, their role and contribution in production of handloom items, social and economic constraints, work participation, change in their social and economic status in the family and community, change in employment and working condition, new problems and risks perceived by them in their occupation and work environment have also been studied. The study suggests effective strategies to enhance their socio-economic status and quality of life through necessary provision of better facilities, welfare support and improved means of livelihood. The study has reviewed the prevailing employment status and working condition of the weavers particularly member weavers in silk handloom co-operative societies in context with their social and economic benefits and security.

### Objectives

1. To study the socio-economic conditions of member weavers of silk co-operative societies in Kancheepuram District.
2. To analyse the impact of textile industry on member weavers' of silk co-operative societies in Kancheepuram District.

### Methodology and Sample Selection

A sample survey was conducted among 684 member weavers of silk co-operative societies in Kanchipuram District in Tamil Nadu. These district represent a high number of silk handloom weavers co-operative societies in Tamil Nadu. The study covered 4% of the respondent of total population of selected 10 silk co-operative society weavers. Further, only member weaver of silk handloom co-operative societies were considered for the present study.

### Profile of Weavers engaged in Silk Weaving

The primary survey was conducted among 684 member weavers of silk co-operatives engaged in traditional handloom weaving. Out of 684 respondents selected from 10 silk co-operatives, 86.26 per cent were male and 13.74 per cent were female category. Among the total number of sample weavers engaged in handloom sector, 76.46% of them belongs to other backward communities. About 20.32% and 2.49% of the sample weavers belong to most backward class and scheduled tribe and caste communities. The proportion of sample weavers belonging to joint families constitutes only 39.18% of the total weavers surveyed. Nearly 60.82% of the weaver families of the surveyed weavers live in nuclear families. Nearly 61.84% of the weaver families surveyed belongs to medium sized families with 4-7 members. Nearly 40.20% of adult members of the

surveyed weavers engaged in weaving activities are men. Around 88% of the adult members of the surveyed weaver families are married. It is noticed that majority (68.71%) of the weaver members of the weaver families surveyed falls within age group of 31-50 years. The weaver members falling in the age group of above 50 years constitute nearly 15.79% of the total weaver members. As a whole, weaving activities have been able to cover relatively higher number of young and middle-aged weavers engaged partly or fully in handloom activities.

Among the weaver members of the weaver families, nearly 15.79% of them are reported literate. It is heartening to note that majority (62.14%) of the weaver members of the weaver families do possess some relevant skill relating to weaving. Only 15.25% of the weaver members reported being unskilled. Weaving has been a traditional occupation of these households and members of the weaver households have acquired such skills from their childhood. Among the weavers selected for the study, nearly 33.71% of them have undergone relevant vocational training. The vocational training undergone by them mostly pertain to weaving, dying, fabrics design etc. As regards landholding status, marginal farmers constitute nearly 68.5% of the weaver families.

Nearly 72.8% of the weaver members of the weaver families reported exclusively depending on weaving as their sole occupation. About 27.2% of the weaver members reported being engaged in weaving as well as other occupations. It is found that about 68.7% of the weaver members engaged in weaving activities are employed for about 180 days in a year. Further, it was revealed that 58% of the weavers engaged in weaving for 11-15 hours a day and 42% of them work for period of 7-8 hours per day. The average hours of work per day per worker in Co-operative sectors worked out 11 hours.

Nearly 90% of the weavers surveyed have houses with asbestos and tin roof. About 74.5% of the weavers reported having 2 to 4 rooms in their houses. As regards environmental sanitation, it is noticed that majority of the selected weaver households do not possess any toilet in their houses. Open field defecation is widely prevalent among the weaver community in rural areas. Among the 684 surveyed weavers, nearly 12.5% of them reported having their own dug-well supplying them water for drinking and other domestic purposes. Public dug-well provides drinking water to about 52% of the weaver households. Majority (72.6%) of the sample weaver households reported experiencing scarcity in water particularly in summer season.

### **Blow of textile industry on Silk Handloom Weaving**

It is significant to note that in spite of growing competitions and pressure caused by a modern textile sector and irregular availability of raw materials, almost all the weaver members surveyed have still been continuing their weaving operations to a limited scale. Nearly 66.5% of the member weavers reported that the weaving activities of the family has seriously been affected due to competitive pressure of modern textile industry. About 26.5% of the weavers reported that their weaving operation has moderately been affected. The effect has been more severe for these weavers working under the co-operative societies. Majority (96%) of the weavers reported that modern textile items are available at relatively cheaper prices affecting market for handloom silk products. Nearly 92% of weaver respondents reported that growing consumer preference in recent times, towards variety of modern fabrics has severely affected the demand for silk handloom items. Textile products being manufactured by organized spinning mills offer variety of design and fabrics and attract more number of consumers, squeezing the market size for traditional handloom products, as reported by 68.5% of the weaver respondents. The growing consumer preference for modern textile products is directly attributed to increasing investment made by the organized sector on advertisement and promotion. The opinion of the surveyed

weaver respondents call for modernization and technological up-gradation of the traditional silk handloom industry in order to retain its unique position and to achieve economy in competitive environment. Provision of sustainable supply of good quality of raw materials can greatly aid in smoothening the operational crisis in silk handloom sector.

There has been steady decline of the functional performance of the weaver co-operative societies as a result of growing competition caused by the organised modern textile industries. Nearly 76.7% of the weaver respondents alleged that the functioning of their societies have severely and moderately been affected due to the competitive situation caused by the modern textile industry. The competitive situation caused by the modern textile industry has resulted in complete stoppage and stagnation of the societies, decreased sales volume, low and irregular supply of raw materials, irregularity of wage payment, reduction of members, weakening of the financial status, stoppage of bank credit loan etc. Nearly 58.8% of the respondents reported that the function of the co-operative societies has drastically reduced to very low level. The strength of membership has gradually been reduced in several societies, as reported by 35.8% of the weavers. Sales volume of several societies has considerably been reduced. In spite of stiff competition and resulting weakening of their traditional business, almost all the weaver families are still continuing their traditional business, with much hardship.

At present, nearly 48.99% of the weavers reported having one working loom with them. Hardly 3.65% of them reported the status of their loom as non-functioning condition. Nearly 45.03% of the weavers reported possessing two working looms. It is noticed that maximum proportion 52.5% of the weavers is operating their looms 46-75 hours in week. The actual hours of utilisation of looms by weavers fall far behind the actual available hours per week. The low level of utilisation of loom is directly attributed to inadequate and irregular supply of raw materials, low demand or sales of the silk handloom products and associated financial problems faced by weavers and cooperative societies as well. The reasons for low utilisation of looms mainly relate to stagnation of demand, shortage of raw materials, shortage of loom accessories etc. Excessive delay in receiving the raw materials through co-operative societies has greatly reduced the level of utilisation of their weaving assets as reported by 26.3% of the weavers. About 82% of the weavers reported that there is no scope of further increasing the level of operation, but remaining 18% of them expressed their hope for further increasing the level of operation. About 48% of the weavers, who expressed their need for modernisation, felt the need for repairing their old looms to make it more productive and functional. Nearly 37.8% of the weavers opted for modernization reported that modernisation would contribute to improving the quality of their handloom products.

The co-operative societies, which are playing an important role for supplying raw material for traditional silk weaving, have been relegated to a very miserable position. The scarcity of funds and operational weakness of most of the co-operative societies has been responsible for decreased dependence of the weaver communities on them for procuring raw materials. About 82% of the silk weavers reported facing shortage of yarns required for weaving at present. However, 18% of the silk weavers reported that they did not face any shortage of yarns. The weavers reported that shortage of yarns arises more only for the co-operative weavers and not for the members not belong to the co-operative sector. The weaver co-operative societies have failed to ensure steady supply of yarns to its members to maintain continuity in silk production. Nearly 80.5% of the weaver members expressed their dissatisfaction on the role and performance of the co-operative societies in the context of arranging and supplying required quantity of yarns to its weaver members, at present. The major reasons of dissatisfaction of the weaver families on the

services of co-operative societies mainly pertain to irregularity in supply, inadequate of quantity of supply and poor quality goods delivered.

Among the various kinds of goods woven, it is interesting to note that almost all the weavers engaged in weaving sarees. The silk handloom products having its own creativity and distinct position in textile sector enjoy a wide spread market in both rural and urban areas. The competitive pressure exerted by modern textile products has created perceptible change in the acceptance and the choice of customer segment for silk handloom products. Due to growing deterioration of functional performance of the weaver co-operative societies, majority of the weaver community has switched over to direct marketing. The average monthly sale per household of handloom products in terms of pieces through co-operative societies has declined from 12 to 3, at present. In terms of change in value of woven products sold through co-operative societies, it is found that the average value of monthly sale per household has decreased from Rs. 3,500/- (past) to Rs. 2,000/- at present.

### **Blow of Textile Industry on Economic Status of Member Weavers of Silk Co-operative Societies**

With growing competition posed by the modern textile industry, spinning mills and power looms, the handloom industry has steadily deteriorated over the last decade, rendering thousands of weavers especially the silk weavers unemployed and under employed, resulting in large scale closure of several societies, which used to provide support weaving activities in rural area. Many weaver co-operative societies are passing through operational and financial crisis

In scenario where power loom and modern textile industry have adversely affected the traditional silk handloom sector, the weaver communities have been pushed down to the lower strata of the economic ladder. As a whole, the average annual weavers income has decreased to a large extent. It shows that the poor weaver community has been able to cope with negative effect of the competitive environment to some extent. However, majority (89.2%) of the member weavers family is still pursuing their traditional silk weaving activities without entering into any new avenue of income. Apart from the above, nearly 10.8% of member weavers that they are in search of other additional sources of income in addition to their existing silk handloom weaving activities.

Nearly 82.5% of the member weavers reported that the extent of their engagement in terms of working hour in handloom activities has declined. However, about 17.5% of the member weavers reported no change in extent of their engagement in handloom operations as a result of competitive environment in textile sector. Among the weaver members who reported decrease in the extent of their engagement, nearly 67% of them reported that the extent of decrease in their working hours in weaving is marginal.

### **Blow of Textile Industry on Socio-Cultural life of the Member Weavers engaged in Handloom Silk Weaving**

The impact on living style and social status of the weavers engaged in silk weaving activities have been analysed with regard to their food intake, children's education, health and sanitation, participation in the community activities, domestic energy used, accessibility to means of entertainment.

Nearly 78.2% of the member weavers reported that the quality and quantity of food intake have deteriorated due to slackening of their weaving operation and dwindling position of co-operative societies. About 21.8% of the member weavers reported having experienced no change in quality

and quantity of food intake. Among the member weavers who reported deterioration in their food intake, nearly 19.6% of them reported it significant. As reported by almost all the member weavers, the health status of the family members has declined due to deterioration of their livelihood condition. Their capacity to provide better health care facilities have decreased due to their falling standard of living as a result of deterioration of their traditional silk weaving activities. The effect was considered marginal for majority of the member weaver families. Almost all the member weavers reported facing financial difficulties in giving primary schooling facilities to their children due to decline in their family based silk weaving activities. Nearly 78% of the member weavers have suffered a great deal and have reduced their participation in various community activities (e.g. village club, community festivals and programmes). About 22% of the member weavers have experienced no effect as regards their participation in their community activities, as a result of decline in their silk weaving activities. Nearly 72% of the member weavers have suffered in availing recreational facilities due to their financial problems caused by declining handloom business. Since most of the member weavers in rural areas commonly used fuel wood, dung cake, kerosene etc. as their cooking fuel, there has been limited effect of their handloom business on use of cooking fuel used by member weavers. However, nearly 39.5% of the member weavers reported facing difficulty in meeting their expenditure towards cooking fuel. While 50.5% of the member weavers were using kerosene as the cooking fuel in the past period, currently only 23.5% of these families reported using kerosene.

### **Opinion and Attitude of the Member Weavers about the Blow of Textile Industry**

Majority of the member weavers engaged in weaving activities reported that the overall functional performance and service delivery system of the co-operative societies have significantly declined. As regards technical guidance, training, supervision and monitoring, almost all the member weavers rated the co-operative societies as “very poor”. The reasons of dissatisfaction of the member weavers on the functioning of the cooperative societies mostly pertain to inadequate and irregular supply of raw materials, low off-take and poor marketing support for handloom silk products. Nearly 72.1% of the member weavers attribute inadequate supply of raw materials as the important reason for their poor rating of services of societies.

### **Suggestions of the member weavers to protect the silk handloom sector**

Almost all the member weavers demanded that the yarns should be available at reasonably subsidized price to make silk handloom products competitive and affordable. The silk handloom cooperative societies should be strengthened to help the weaver community to adopt new design and technology and diversify their products to capture much wider market. Necessary support should be provided to weaver communities for technological innovation of their production process. Nearly 86% of the member weavers reported that effective market support can improve the performance of the silk handloom sector. Nearly 52% of the member weavers held that assistance of technological innovation and better design can enhance the performance of the silk handloom sector in Tamil Nadu.

Considering the relevant factors, issues and problems linked to the globalisation of textile industry and its consequential impact on the socio-economic condition of members engaged in silk handloom activities, as analysed by the present study, following suggestions have been made.

The silk handloom co-operative societies which have played pivotal role in the development and growth of silk handloom industries in the state are currently passing through operational,

administrative and financial crisis. In the light of growing composition caused by the modern textile industries and spinning mills, it is imperative to suitably restructure and rehabilitate the ailing societies through provision of liberal package of measures, aids and facilities.

The services of the co-operative societies have not been effective in delivery of necessary training and guidance, facilitating modernization and upgradation of technology and providing marketing support to the weaver beneficiaries. The major weakness of these societies mainly pertain to their irregularity in supplying raw materials, inefficient administration, irregular and low wage payment, lack of professional approach in marketing and operational management. It is, therefore, essential to remove these drawbacks so as to enable these organizations to function efficiently and smoothly.

Modernisation of the looms and allied accessories is the most important step in increasing the productivity of weaving of operation and ensuring high quality handloom silk products. It is highly essential to expand the modernisation activities in view its direct impact on efficiency production, productivity and quality.

Publicity is one of the essential factors, which influence the sale of consumer products. Since the weavers co-operative societies are unable to bear the expenses of publicity. The State Government should launch special publicity drive to promote silk handloom products.

In the wake of increasing competitive pressure of modern textile industries, posing threat to the traditional silk handloom sector, it is essential that the development commissioner for silk handloom need to take all possible promotional steps to preserve the unique role of silk handloom and enable the weavers to realize their full potential as also to ensure earnings for the silk handloom weavers. Handlooms remain idle for some period on account of non-availability/inadequate and irregular availability of yarns, leading to loss of earning of weavers. Appropriate measures need to be taken to ensure steady and adequate supply of yarns.

In consideration of large-scale poverty among the silk handloom weavers in the state, there is an imperative need to improve the lot of silk handloom weaver by giving high priority to support the poor weavers under various ongoing poverty alleviation and income-generating programme.

In silk weaving, the looms are still manually operated to get better quantity fabrics especially in case of silk sarees. The weavers feel that the operation of handlooms needs a lot of physical strain and it is a time consuming one. Hence, the handloom research centres should find out an attractive modernized looms to replace the existing one.

The silk co-operatives face a tough competition from the private silk weavers, who are financially very sound and who have more control over the cost of production and design. The private master silk weavers do not have more permanent weavers and most of them are working on temporary basis. The master weavers pay them only when they have work. This factor reduces the total expenses or salaries or other allowances payable by the private master silk weavers. Since the silk co-operatives consist of permanent weavers, it has to pay them even when there is no work, thus it naturally increase the cost of production. Therefore, the silk co-operative societies face financial crisis. So it is suggested that silk co-operative societies should take necessary steps to reduce the cost of production.

Most of the weaver members involved in silk weaving are illiterates. As they are uneducated, they face many problems in knowing the modern techniques in weaving, in utilizing the welfare schemes of the Government, in getting financial assistance from banks and other similar funding agencies. Hence, it is essential to create awareness among the weaver members by implementing mass and non-formal education programmes and impart training on weavers.

## Conclusion

Majority of weaver members of the silk co-operatives feel that due to a various reasons they do not get job satisfaction in their present occupation. Due to globalisation and modernization of textile industry the handloom co-operative weavers face lot of problems like meager wages, poor working conditions, inadequate non-monetary benefits, and insufficient work throughout the year. Thus, the involvement of members and opinion will certainly improve the performance of silk weavers' co-operative societies not only in study area but also in other areas. So, the Government should take necessary steps to overcome the problems of handloom weavers and improve the social status of the weavers.

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