



WOMEN EMPOWERMENT THROUGH WEAVING: A STUDY ON DHARMAVARAM TOWN

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Abstract

Women empowerment is an essential tool to bring about changes in their socio-economic condition. Empowerment of women needs to begin with their participation in different spheres of life. Education is a great determinant in this regard. To achieve empowerment, women have to be educated about their rights and privileges in a modern society. It is education that can bring about awareness in them related to their social status, injustice and differentiation meted out to them. In Dharmavaram women plays a significant role not only in economic development but also in social, political, religious etc. As handlooms and handicrafts being the inmate artistic skill for the Dharmavaram women they successfully take up this occupation as income generating activities. Empowerment of women is the pre-requisite to transform a developing into on that is developed. Handloom industry has a crucial role to play in supporting and strengthening the self-sufficiency of the rural economy. The present paper highlights the empowerment of women through weaving in the Dharmavaram town in Anantapuramu district of Andhra Pradesh.

Key words: *Handloom, Women Empowerment.*

Introduction

In India, since time immemorial, agriculture and handloom have existed side by side in every nook and corner of the country. Since independence self-sufficiency has been one of the goals of India's planned economy. Self-sufficiency of the national economy can however be built only on the edifice of the self-sufficiency of the rural units, namely, the villages which constitute India¹. Village and cottage industries to which the handloom industry belongs are concerned towards balanced socio-economic development in Indian economy due to the built-in mechanism that encourages to help weaving craftsmen in seeking an honorable place in the society. Handloom industry has a crucial role to play in supporting and strengthening the self-sufficiency of the rural economy². Indians will have to ensure that the basic minimum clothing requirement of the rural population, as far as possible, is met by the cloth produced on handlooms which along with agriculture constitute the core of the self-sustaining rural economy of India.

The handloom industry has great socio-economic importance in Indian economy. In recent years the socio-economic life of weaving communities is deplorable. A study brought about by the 'Frontline' investigation team in 6 Dec. 1991³ observed that the handloom sector has been playing an important role in providing livelihood to several lakh of people; the conditions of the weavers are precarious; most of them being semi-starved and ill-lad. The average earnings of a weaver household is estimated at Rs. 20 per day and they did not get even this pitifully small income all through the year. Handloom weavers formed a significant component of the rural poor, the majority of them falling into the lowest income-expenditure group⁴.

Review of Literature

Sahai (1956)⁵, in his study Handloom Industry in North India, identifies the problem of competition from power-looms and organized mill sector. He felt the need for introducing modern techniques of production in handloom industry. He suggested that weavers should learn modern techniques relating to handloom industry to get continuous employment and to earn more through handloom weaving; weavers must learn modern designs. To give training in this field to them, the Government must open training centers in the States and appoint teachers to teach all the aspects of the modern designs. Special courses should be conducted in the villages where the weavers are highly concentrated and bring more and more weavers to choose classes and give them material free of cost like design books and other related instruments to the weavers.

According to Sharma D.S.(1980)⁶, the Government made several programmes for the benefit of the handloom weavers. But the weavers didn't receive any benefit from any sources, because of the middlemen and master-weavers have knocked away all the benefits. They could get yarn and raw material for subsidized rates in the names of weavers. The Government introduced a photo-pasted-identity –cards of the actual weavers to eliminate middlemen.

Suntu Kumar Ghosh & Shahriar Aktur (2005)⁷, they are conducted a study on “Handloom Industry on the Way of Extinction; an Empirical study over the pre-dominant factor”. In this study sample size is 100 with quota sampling in five areas like, weavers, handloom board, exporter, retailer & whole seller in Bangladesh.

Significance of the Present Study

The handloom weavers of Andhra Pradesh in general, and the weavers of Anantapuramu district, in particular are facing acute problems of dire poverty and under employment to do and eke out livelihood. Majority of them are struggling hard to survive and some others have committed suicide as well. Sporadic reports of suicide and starvation deaths appeared in the press. As many as 22 deaths of starvation and suicides are reported in Anantapuramu district of Andhra Pradesh. Hence, this study is focused on the empowerment of women weavers. The study is confined to and concentrated on the Anantapuramu district due to its decisive role in the handloom industry of Andhra Pradesh. Moreover, this district has export facilities being a coastal region and because of this proximity to the coast, natural calamities like cyclone etc., are usual happening in this district. The study of handloom industry and weavers during these catastrophes is also a worthy studying aspect and the present work has its look on this point also. Therefore, there is a need to study scientifically the living conditions of the women weavers and the factors responsible for it. In the light of such knowledge policy suggestions can be made to improve the living conditions of the women weavers in Anantapuramu district.

Objective of the study

1. To study the theoretical background weavers
2. To analyse the empowerment of women weavers in Dharmavaram Town
3. To draw the conclusion

Source of data and Sample Size

The primary data are elicited from the sample respondents through a specially designed interview-schedule by personal interview method. The women weavers in this district were living in rural areas and some towns. The researcher has taken only Dharmavaram town and taken 150 sample respondents from the selected area.

Secondary Data

Secondary data were collected from the records of the office of Development Commissioner for Handlooms, Ministry of Commerce, Udyog Bhavan, New Delhi. The annual report of the All India Federation of Co-operative Spinning Mills Limited, Bombay, various books, Journals, editorials, news papers, dissertations and unpublished theses.

The main purpose of the present paper is to analyse the empowerment of the women who depends on handloom industry. It also seeks to analyse their educational and cultural background. For this purpose a detailed study has been undertaken in the selected mandal of the district

Table- 1 Community-wise classification of the Women Weavers

S.No	Community	No. of Respondents	Percentage to total
1	Forward Community	12	08.00
2	Backward Caste	127	85.00
3	Scheduled Caste	9	06.00
4	Scheduled Tribe	2	1.00
	Total	150	100

Source: Field Survey

Although the weaving population is fairly large, running into millions, it is confined to a limited number of castes. Weaving is the hereditary occupation of certain communities like Thogata, Padmasali, and Devanga, etc., in Andhra Pradesh. The weaving activity in Dharmavaram of Anantapur district is also being carried on by several other communities.

An analysis of the table 1 reveals that about 85 per cent of the respondents belong to the backward classes, about 8.00 per cent of the respondents belong to the forward caste. The Schedule caste and Scheduled Tribe people are also learning these skills and are engaged in this profession in some parts of the district. However, their percentage is insignificant.

It is evident from the above table that nearly 85 per cent of the weavers belong to the weaker sections. The socio-economic development or empowerment of workers involved in the industry must take special note of processes of large number of weaker sections involved and accordingly the policies must be formed. These weaker sections have the art of weaving as a traditional occupation and therefore it must be preserved by taking all supporting measures.

Table 2 Educational Background of the select Women sample Respondents

S. No	Education	No. of Respondents	Percentage to total
1	Illiterates	71	47.00
2	Primary	52	35.00
3	S.S.C/ Intermediate	25	17.00
4	Graduation	2	1.00
	Total	150	100

Source: Field Survey

Table 2 depicts the educational background of the respondents. In this study indicates that the little over 47 per cent illiterates. In the case of literates, there are about 35 per cent weavers having their education qualification if primary level. In the case of weavers there are 17 per cent of the sample respondents having the S.S.C level. And only two sample households are having the graduate level in the anantapuramu district of Andhra Pradesh. It is here that the welfare measures of the government should be directed towards educating the uneducated craftsmen through its programme like adult education, etc.

Table- 3 Reasons for Selecting the Present line of Activity

S. No	Reason	No. of Respondents	Percentage to total
1	Traditional	88	58.00
2	Easy to earn more income	25	17.00
3	Less capital required	25	17.00
4	The only known work	12	12.00
	Total	150	100

Source: Field survey

An analysis of the table 3 reveals the reasons for selecting weaving activity as the present way of life. The reasons expressed by the respondents are traditionally, 'easy to earn', 'more income less capital requirement' and the 'only known work'. A majority of the respondents representing 58 per cent of the total community expressed that weaving is the traditional activity. Next to traditional, about 17 per cent of the total respondents have expressed that it is easy to earn more income and less capital required. About 12 per cent expressed that it is the only work known to them. It may be concluded that weaving industry is a traditional industry. Most of the weavers engaged in it because it is their hereditary occupation. Once the industry provides more opportunities to earn more income, people prefer to enter to this profession took with less capital investment. But in the present globalization the weavers are trying to quit their profession because of the industry falling into crisis.

Table 4 Details of who motivated the Respondents to enter into Weaving Activity

S. No	Motivator	No. of Respondents	Percentage to total
1	Self	98	65.00
2	Family members	20	13.00
3	Friends/Relatives	13	9.00
4	Local Merchants	05	3.00
5	Neighbors	14	10.00
	Total	150	100

Source: Field survey

Human beings take up a profession by observing others without seeking their suggestions. In other words, they come under self-motivated persons. There are some other category of persons who consult other such as family members, friends, relatives, local merchants, master-craftsmen, government agencies etc., before taking up a particular activity for their livelihood. An attempt was made to know who motivated the respondents to settle in the present profession. As it can be seen from the table 4, about 65 per cent of the total weavers are self-motivated again 20 respondents accounting for 13 per cent are motivated their family members, 13 respondents representing about 9 per cent of the weavers are motivated by their friends and relatives, whereas 5 respondents are motivated by the local merchants. And remaining 14 sample weavers are motive by their neighbors respectively. The role of the friends and relatives and dealers, neighbors in motivating the respondents is insignificant.

Table 5 Training Programmes attended by the Select Weavers at the different Levels
N=150

S.No	Training programme	No. of respondents	Percentage
1	Attended at Mandal level	36	24.00
2	Attended at District level	32	21.00
3	Attended at State level	15	10.00

Source: Field Survey

According to table 5, it is understood that out of 150 select sample respondents, as many as, 36 members have attended the training programmes conducted at different levels. It is explicitly noticed that majority of the members have attended only at mandal level, 21 per cent have attended and received training at district level, and 10 per cent of the respondents have attended the training programmes conducted at state level. From the above, it can be inferred that the majority of the respondents attended their training programmes confirming to mandal, district and state level only.

Table 6 Impact of the Weaving on the Living Standards among the Women weavers

S.No	Living standards	No. of respondents	
		Yes	No
1	Changes in food habits	135 (90.00)	15 (10.00)
2	Dressing pattern	127 (85.00)	23 (15.00)
3	Awareness about chronic diseases and health care	121 (81.33)	29 (18.67)
4	Need and importance of children education	125 (83.33)	25 (16.67)
5	Caution about repayment of old debts	134 (89.33)	16 (10.67)
6	Awareness about the importance of sanitation hygiene conditions	110 (73.33)	40 (26.67)

Source: Field Survey



Table 6 furnishes the details about the impact of weaving on the living standards of weavers in Anantapuramu district. It is evident from the findings that there is a positive impact on the food habits, clothing pattern, awareness about chronic diseases and health care practices, identifying the need for and importance of children's education, caution about repayment of old debts and awareness about the importance of sanitation and hygiene conditions in and around house premises. More specifically, it is further observed that out of 150 weavers, as many as 90 per cent respondents have aware of and changed their food habits, 83 per cent have recognized the need and importance of children's education, 89 per cent are cautioned by themselves in repayment of their old debts, 85 per cent have changed their dressing pattern and as many as 73 per cent are aware of the importance of sanitation and hygiene conditions. Thus, from the analysis it can be concluded that the impact of weaving could not be seen much in knowing the need and importance of sanitation, awareness about chronic diseases and health care practices, dressing pattern, awareness about the need and importance of children's education and precautions about repayment of old debts.

Conclusion

The present study concluded that the welfare measures of the government should be directed towards educating the uneducated craftswomen through its programme like adult education and various women developmental programmes in Anantapuramu district. Further, it can be concluded that weaving industry is a traditional industry especially in drought prone areas. Once the industry provides more opportunities to earn more income, people prefer to enter to this profession took with less capital investment. Thus, from the analysis it can be found that the impact of weaving on women weavers could not be seen much in knowing the need and importance of sanitation, awareness about chronic diseases and health care practices, dressing pattern, awareness about the need and importance of children's education and precautions about repayment of old debts. This is main reason, the government both central and state will be taken different developmental programmes through weaving for upliftment of the weaving women and also empowerment of women.

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