



STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE MENTAL HEALTH OF WEAVER'S WOMEN

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Abstract

At present days the weaver women's empowerment has become a growing concern both at the National and International levels on the subjugated, the disadvantaged and status of women in the society. They are facing so many Mental Health problems. In India, weaver women's empowerment has to be focused mainly in non formal sectors, where the women's work force is predominant. One among them is handloom sector. It is one of the largest economic activities, after agriculture, providing direct and indirect employment as well as being predominately a non-farm activity. It has passed on from generations to generations. In the wake of industrialization, our country's own Power-loom and Khadi movement totally deteriorated the overall status of handlooms and its weavers. Mainly it burdens the life of women, a major work force in the handloom sector, compared to men. Nearly 80 percent of handloom workers are women in the state of Andhra Pradesh. Commonly illiteracy and poverty are the two major factors that doubt the elevation and livelihood of these women workers. Hence the handloom women workers should get benefit from the current scenario, need to move up the economic status in the sector from primary levels. On a whole the purpose of this article is to familiarize with the current status and livelihood problems of unorganized women handloom workers and also to improve their Mental Health, social protection and security.

Keywords: *Skill Development, Livelihood Problems, Handloom Industry, Women Weavers, Social Protection, Mental health.*

INTRODUCTION:

Handloom sector, predominately a rural occupation, is one of the largest generations, next to agriculture in India. Nearly 24 Lakh handlooms provide direct and indirect employment to 43lakh weavers and allied workers. out of which 36.33 lakh workers stay in rural areas and 6.0 Lakh workers stay in urban areas and 38 lakh adult persons are engaged in weaving and allied activities in the country. According to handloom Census 2013, weaver women 77.90%. The Handloom weaving is one of the skilled professions and is passed on generations, but the followers of this tradition i.e. handloom weaving have always been the victims of a staunch hierarchical system. Being at the bottom of the system they fall prey to the extreme forms of exploitation and harassment.

The Government policies were further pushed them to the lowest strata of society. It was expected in independent India that the art of hand looms weaving would be a development on the status of handloom weavers. In the contrary, the socioeconomic

conditions of handloom workers declined as it was before. In the current scenario, the handloom workers were the poorest of the lot, least respected, socially and economically deprived, living in debts and almost living like an island in the Indian society. In India, handloom weaving lost its fame and prosperity. Basically handloom weaving is a men's domain but at this juncture we must acknowledge women's significant role in the handloom sector as per the handloom census 2013. Women handloom workers are one of its biggest assets. They are the pillars and foundations of weaving community. Women workers in the handloom sector are mostly illiterate and semi-literate due to low economic conditions. This resultant may bring out livelihood insecurity and social insecurity. Mainly, the women workers, who are from handloom weaving family not permitted to go and learn beyond the weaving activity. The Mental Health condition of the weaving women is not good. They are unable to run the family in a proper way.

WOMEN WORKERS IN THE HANDLOOM SECTOR:

In Andhra Pradesh so many Major handloom centers are there. Each centre has its unique identity of producing varieties of handloom products. Large numbers of handloom can be seen in coastal Andhra and Rayalaseema. In all centers of Andhra Pradesh, production is geared for the domestic market only. The benefiting from the handloom sector, including transportation, financial services, marketing services, maintenance services and hotels. Many handloom centers are well known tourist spots, drawing visitors from far places of India and foreign countries as well. Thus, the tourism industry's fortunes are in part influenced by the handloom sector and its fame.

Handlooms have a linkage with cotton farmers and the rural farm economy. Agricultural labor gets employment in handloom sector during the non-agricultural season. The sector has self-sustaining mechanism, including training for young weavers, irrespective of gender. The sustaining of the weaving skill itself has not been dependent on the government. There is also inherent flexibility for all types of communities to take up handloom production as a profession. Handloom is an independent and autonomous technology. The Emergence of Industrialization in India's handloom sector it directly affects the empowerment of weaving community. Moreover in large parts of India, women's participation as allied workers in the handloom sector is an unutterable achievement, but there is no recognition given to women's work.

Handloom sector is one of the largest employment providers after agriculture. It is essentially a very big labor intensive and low capital industry. It offers employment to the most vulnerable sections of the society. Lack of information to women weavers regarding

various policies and schemes is no less a significant cause for the dwindling fortunes of the women weaver community. Even government departments and implementing agencies related to handloom suffer from inadequate information and data resulting in a widening gap between policy formulation and implementation. It may cause the suffering conditions for women weavers in weaving to gain momentum and to gain sustainable growth in this sector.

Significance of handloom sector in rural Economy:

The handloom sector has a unique place in India economy and plays a vital role in the economic development of the rural poor. It is one of the largest economic activities providing direct employment to over 65 lakhs persons engaged in weaving out of this, more than 40 percent are women and majority of them are low caste and extremely poor, working in small family units. This sector contributes nearly 19 percent of the total production of the cloth produced in the country and also adds substantially to the export earnings.

Raw material and usage pattern:

Though the women weavers in Andhra Pradesh produce wide range of cloths, it is predominantly cotton based and uses various types. The following aspects are require immediate attention:

1. Raw Material supply

Access to raw material such as yarn, dyes and dye stuffs has become a problem. Weaving is a rural and semi-rural production activity and weavers have to go far to get these raw materials. To top it off, yarn prices are steadily increasing. The availability of hank yarn - the basic material from which weaving is done - is a serious issue because it is controlled by modern spinning mills, who see more profit in large-volume cone yarn.

Secondly one is tax-free and has subsidies; enormous amounts are diverted to the power loom sectors. As a result there is a heritage of yarn for the weavers. Despite a few schemes, the hank yarn access issue has not been resolved. Colors' are expensive and presently there is no system to increase their availability.

2. Raw material prices

Handloom primarily uses natural fibers such as cotton, silk and jute. Prices of these fibers have been increasing during production and processing. Cotton production in India is expensive because of intensive and high usage of costly agricultural inputs such as pesticides and fertilizers.

Secondly, while the fiber production most often happens in the vicinity of the weavers, their processing is done in distant areas, and as such the prices to the weaver are higher. The

solution lies in establishing relatively low-cost, decentralized spinning units in the villages where handloom and fiber productions co-exist.

3. Infrastructure and Investment

Investment in handloom sector has thus far been limited to input supply costs. There is no investment on scrotal growth. While there have been some piece-meal projects such as work shed-cum-housing and project package schemes, they merely perpetuate the existing conditions. There has been no thinking on basic requirements of the producer. Facilities such as land, water and electricity need to be provided in many places that are a harbor for handloom manufacturing.

4. 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.

5. Market for products

Handloom products require more visibility. This means better and wider market network. One-off exhibitions organized with the support of government do not suffice. Presently, handloom products are available only in few places. An autonomous and financed by the government initially should be formed to undertake this task, financed by the sales of the handloom products.

6. Patenting designs or varieties

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 and registration under Geographical Indications Act. However, more discussion is required on this if handloom has to come up with designs that suit the market preferences and are still protected against it.

7. Co-operative system

While co-operatives do help in maximizing the benefits for weavers in the entire chain of production, their present condition a cause of concern. The handloom co-operative system is riddled with corruption and political interference. Many handloom weavers are not members of these co-operatives. Government departments have to stop using them as primary sources for routing government funds and schemes. Co-operatives have to become independent of district-level government officers in terms of management and decision-making.

8. Free export opportunity

Post the WTO Agreement on Textile Clothing, there is going to be more free export and import of textiles. The handloom sector, as a traditional area, can claim some special packages or discriminatory measures, to protect this kind of production. Options and policy measures need to be worked out either by independent institutions or the government.

9. Budget allocations

Allocations for handloom in national and state budgets are being reduced. This has to be reversed. Budget has to increase with new schemes which address the problems of the sector, in view of the linkage and the need to protect rural employment.

10. Intermediaries

Government has created a few research, training and input institutions to help the handloom sector. These institutions include weaver service centers, institutions of handloom technology. But their performance has been below par and their presence has not helped in obviating the problems of handloom weavers.

11. Enhancement of Value

There is a need for enhancing the value of handloom products through utilization of organic cotton and application of natural dyes and by increasing the productivity of the handlooms through research and innovation – for example, changes in the width of the looms and some appropriate technical changes.

12. Competition and unfair competition from mills and power looms

Competition is now uneven, with mill and power loom sector getting subsidies in various forms. Secondly, power looms have been undermining handloom markets by selling their products as handloom.

13. Wages, employment and livelihood issues

Wages have not increased in the last 15 years. Some sections of handloom weavers are living in hand-to-mouth conditions, with no house or assets. These issues need to be addressed by the government. At least effectively implement the Minimum Wages Act.

SUGGESTIONS FOR THE WOMEN HANDLOOM WORKERS:

1. In large parts of remote villages and semi urban areas in India, the women weavers are quite dissatisfied with being the members of co-operative societies, in order to protect these women weavers, self-help groups could be given rights to establish weavers co-operative societies exclusively for women.
2. Women handloom weavers and allied workers should have specific growth and Development programmers and allocations in the national budget.

3. Literacy programmers should be provided to improve the standard of living and escapes from the clutches of master weavers and shed workers.
4. Handloom women workers should be brought under the national employment Guarantee scheme.
5. The minimum wages act has to be amended to enable women to get proper and Appropriate wages for their work.
6. Handloom households with problems of hunger should be provided with specific Ration cards.
7. Government of India should take necessary steps to frequent supply of raw Materials to empower them economically.
8. Skill Development Programmers should be implemented in remote corners of India in order to make easy commutation for the women who are coming from Very far.

Conclusion: Handloom weaving is artistry with traditional heritage and culture. It has been sustained through transferring the skill of weaving over generations. Though there is snugness in the handloom sector, the handloom products are quite famous for their artistic elegance and complicated designs. There is historical records show that handloom fabrics of India had built their reputation in the International market long before the historic industrial revolution. The status of handloom sector in the state is deprived as many of the weavers shifting to other professions due to poor earnings, unemployment and poor demand for their products. The women weavers are not interested to choose weaving as their profession because of its losing fame and prosperity. To improve the mental health of women weavers, except a shift in their skills and increasing burden on their physique. It would lead to deskilling of women and their social position. Only long term vision, strong policies and schemes can protect this age old custodians, in particular, the frequent supply of raw materials will exempted this art and its barriers from the list of endangered traditional arts.

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