

Women's Participation in Handloom Industry: A case study of Chendamangalam, Ernakulam

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Abstract:- Handloom is Kerala's most widely recognized cottage industry that is widespread throughout rural areas. It employs a large skilled and unskilled workforce and which, in chendamangalam society, mainly consists of women workers, handloom spinning and weaving is the main occupation. The objective of this paper is to evaluate female participation in the handloom industry in Chendamangalam. The study focuses on the socio-economic condition of the weavers, derived from primary data collected through personal interview schedules of 90 active members of the chendamangalam society. Results show that weaving is the main occupation of Chendamangalam handloom industry, as there is a high concentration of handlooms. The key reasons which enforced females to do work in handlooms are pooreconomic conditions, unemployment, low income, low literacy, and education.

Keywords:- Handloom industry, Work participation, Female weavers, chendamangalam handloom society.

I. INTRODUCTION

The handloom industry in India has a very long history spanning over centuries. Handloom spinning and weaving were the main occupations of the people in rural areas. Unfortunately, this industry has been declining owing to so many reasons. This area backs nearly 15% of the cloth production in the country and also pays to the export earnings of the country. Handloom weaving is one of the largest economic activities after agriculture providing direct and indirect employment to 35.23 lakh weavers and allied workers. It employs more than 1.5 lakh people in Kerala. (Annual Report Ministry of Textile 2020-21 August). In Kerala, hand weaving was a traditional occupation of Chayalan's, the main weaving caste. This industry is mainly concentrated in Kannur, Kozhikode, Ernakulam, and Trivandrum districts. At present, this industry is facing a severe crisis due to increased cost of production, marketing difficulties, and working capital problems. Handloom always encourages innovations in its products through experimentation and exhibitions. The strength of handloom lies in presenting innovative designs, which cannot be recreated by the power loom sector. Thus, handloom forms a part of the tradition of Kerala and signifies the richness and diversity of the state and the creativity of the weavers. As most of the weaver societies were situated in rural areas, it has a major role in improving the livelihood of rural people as well as eradicating poverty in the area.

Handloom industries are producing eco-friendly and energy-saving products, resulting in the enhancement of sustainable development. Kerala's handloom products are well applauded for their attractive designs, elegant craftsmanship, exciting colours, and delicate texture. For centuries, the majority of the product had been made by family weavers and each with a unique story on how they were introduced to this special trade. The artistry of the weavers of Chendamangalam in Ernakulam district is very well-known across the world. There are five handloom weavers' co-operative societies working in Paravoor. Each society has its handloom units, founded in 1954, the business name Chendamangalam handloom society runs under the brand name Chendamangalam handloom which is owned by Griesh Kumar located in Paravoor, Kochi, is one of the oldest in the locality. Society has 158 weavers. The workforce is predominantly female, constituting 91 per cent of the total workforce. The yarn, thread, and dye materials are provided by various handloom weavers co-operative societies. Weavers work at home and provide a finished product to these societies.

Women contributed substantially to the economic prosperity of the nation. The handloom sector is the only manufacturing sector wherein one finds a large number of women producing products that are worn by a large number of women. A unique feature of the chendamangalam handloom sector is that 91 per cent of women produces almost 60 per cent of women products. At present, the Handloom industry is declining which has directly affected the women workers of this industry. Their work participation has increased as well as the increase in per day working hours has resultant more health issues, especially about physical problems. The present study has highlighted the work participation and socio-economic condition of weavers of Chendamangalam handloom society.

II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To analyze the socio-economic conditions of the weavers in handloom industry in Chendamangalam, Ernakulam (Dt.)
- To identify the nature of problems of the female employees.
- To analyze women's participation and involvement in the weaving occupation.

III. SCOPE AND PROFILE OF THE STUDY AREA

Chendamangalam is a small town and a panchayat in Paravoor Taluk Ernakulam district in the state of Kerala, India. It is in the Central Kerala Division. It is situated 30 km towards north from district headquarters Kakkanad, 3 km from Paravoor, 237 km from state capital Thiruvandapuram. It is spread over an area of 10.83 km². This town consists of 18 wards (Local self-government report of Kerala.) As of the 2021 India census, Chendamangalam had a population of 28,133. Males represent 48% of the population and females 52%.

It is famous for handloom. The weaving products are famous in the brand name of "chendamangalam kaithari". The weaving products are Kerala cotton saree, women's set mundu, cotton dupatta, men's dhoti, and shirting fabrics. This weaving custom was set up by the Devangana Chettiar community who were inhabited at Chendamangalam in the 16th century for the Paliath Achan family, the hereditary Prime minister of the Kingdom of Cochin. They started by weaving fine Muslim dhotis. The handloom tradition flourished into sarees and other fabrics under the aristocrats of Cochin. The weaving declined by the early 20th century as a result of waningsponsorship. However, through the Chendamangalam Handloom Co-operative Society formed in 1954 and The Kerala Co-operative Society Act of 1969, the handloom witnessed a revival.

IV. METHODOLOGY

This is an exploratory study, based on both the primary and secondary sources of data. The primary data is collected with the help of a direct interview with the respondent to collect information about the socio-economic conditions of the female weavers in Chendamangalam taluk. Chendamangalam taluk has 158 handloom weavers out of which 90 female weavers from Kuriappilly handloom weaver's co-operative society have been selected for interview. Care was also taken in the selection of handloom households that should be truly representative of their wards. After the collection of data, data were converted into tabular form. After analyzing these tables inferences have been made about the various socio-economic conditions of female weavers of the study area. The study limits itself to women weaver's issues and focuses on suggesting solutions to solve their problems.

V. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Dr. Dharam Chand Jain, Miss Ritu Gera (2017) [1] conducted a study of the handloom industry of India. Their study summarizes the handloom industry and the difficulties related to production and manufacturing elements. They think that weavers should be well up-to-date about the schemes so that they can get benefits from the government and various social, co-operative agencies. They also suggest that proper training and tutoring about the new technologies of production should be provided to the employees.

Dr. Selvaraj A and Tamilrasi N (2016) [2] studied factors deciding handloom weavers to enter into the area. Their main objectives were to measure the factors

influencing the handloom weavers to enter the field and offer suitable suggestions for further development. In this study, many factors are found to enter into this field, such as heredity, ease to start, less working capital, practical knowledge, availability of raw materials, etc. Getting regular income is the most important factor to enter into the handloom sector.

Dr. Manoj P K and Rajesh S (2015) [3] have studied the work-life of women workers and their job satisfaction has been studied, concerning textile units in the Malabar region (Northern part) of Kerala. In total 300 workers in various units in the unorganized sector were considered. Kannur district of North Kerala. Problems relating to social security, legal protection, etc. of women workers of textile units were included in this study. Suggestions for improving the QWL are made based on the findings of the study.

Dr. Manoj P K and Rajesh S (2013) [4] have studied the quality of work-life (QWL) and other variables relating to industrial relations scenarios in textile units in the Kannur district of North Kerala. Proposals for improving the QWL are made based on the findings of the study.

Suresh Kumar (2008) [5] found that the handloom co-operatives in Kerala are on the verge of a crisis in terms of economic indicators such as production, marketing, and finance and depend deeply on the budgetary support of the government for their survival.

Sivagnanasithi (2008) [6] conducted a study in the handloom sector and found that health problems, low and irregular wages, shortage and lack of supply of raw materials, low status in the society, etc are the main problems faced by the members of the co-operative society. The co-operative societies are confronting problems like poor marketing facilities, poor performance, low income.

Selvaraj (2007) [7] stated that due to outdated technology and competition from mills and power looms, the handloom sector is experiencing continuous loss. The management of the societies is not sound, and the financial and operational efficiency is poor.

Ajithan (2006) [8] in his study found that there are good prospects for the handloom industry in Kerala during the post-globalization period, which is evident in the increase in handloom export from Kerala during that period.

VI. ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Sl. No.	age	frequency	percentage
1	30-40	3	03
2	40-50	8	09
3	50-60	49	54
4	60 and above	30	34
	Total	90	100

Table 1: Age wise distribution of female weavers

Out of the respondents, 03 percent respondents belong to the age group of 30 to 40 years, 09 percent of the respondents belong to the age group of 40-50 years, following 54 percent of the respondents belong to the age

group of 50 to 60 years and remaining, 34 percent of the respondents belong to the age group of 60 and above years.

Sl. No.		frequency	percentage
1	Upper primary	61	68
2	High school	23	26
3	Higher secondary	6	06
	Total	90	100

Table 2: Literacy wise distribution of the female weavers

It is very evident that only less educated persons are engaged in this work. They have no other optional work to do and it is only unavoidable to them. The majority of the respondents i.e., 68 percent have upper primary education and 26 percent have secondary level education and the sad thing is that only a less percent of the respondent i.e., 06 percent of them have higher secondary level education.

Sl. No.	members	frequency	percentage
1	1-4	49	54
2	4-7	41	46
	Total	90	100

Table 3: Family size of the female weavers

Out of the respondents, 54 percent of weaving women are from a family of a maximum of four members and about 46 percent of weaving women are living in a family of a maximum of seven members. All the respondents are from the nuclear family.

Sl. No.	Number of looms	frequency	percentage
1	No loom	21	23
2	One loom	69	77
	total	90	100

Table 4: Loom ownership

The numbers of looms had by weavers: During the field visit, most of the houses i.e., 77 percent I went to had only one loom, and these looms were provided by the co-operative societies themselves. Out of respondents, 23 percent of the weavers has no looms. They weave in the looms which were owned and operated by the co-operative society.

Sl. No.	Categories of weavers	Frequency	Percentage
1	independent	-	
2	Dependant (weaves for co-operative)	90	100

Table 5: Categories of weavers

As this case study shows, the role of the weavers' co-operative has been significant. From the study, it is clear that all the weavers are weaving for a cooperative society. However, the co-operative has been unable to provide continuous work, weavers are pushed into depending on the co-operative society for their livelihood.

Sl.No.		frequency	percentage
1	hereditary	80	89
2	Non-hereditary	10	11
	Total	90	100

Table 6: Occupational background of weavers

The respondent's opinion on the reason for opting for the weaving occupation: The majority of the respondents i.e., 89 percent, expressed their occupation by hereditary. Following, nearly one-tenth of the respondents i.e., 11 percent, expressed their occupation as non-hereditary. Some of them opined that they have other job ideas along with this occupation and the remaining respondents have expressed that they selected this profession because of the easiness and convenience to do. Therefore, a greater number of people involved few of the people engaged in weaving work due to the nature of work being easy and affordable.

Sl. No.	salary	frequency	percentage
1	5500-6500	16	18
2	6500-7500	21	23
3	7500-8500	23	26
4	8500-9500	30	33
	Total	90	100

Table 7: Monthly salary of the weavers

The data shows that 16 percent of the respondents are paid the minimum salary of 5500-6500 rupees, 23 percent of the weavers are paid 6500-7500 rupees and 23 percent of the weavers are having an amount of 7500-8500 rupees 33 percent of the weavers are having a maximum of 8500-9500 rupees. The weavers are getting only meager income so many workers are moving out from the Chendamangalam handloom industry thus they are not able to survive. However, if it is ensuring a permanent minimum wage, the workers are willing to stay there.

Sl. No.		frequency	percentage
1	satisfied	15	17
2	dissatisfied	49	54
3	Extremely dissatisfied	26	29
	total	90	100

Table 8: Satisfaction of the weavers

The respondent's opinion on the satisfaction of the income of weaving: only 17 per cent of the weavers have expressed that they do not satisfy with the income incurred by weaving. 54 per cent, have expressed that they are dissatisfied with their income and 29 per cent of the weavers have expressed that they are extremely dissatisfied with their income.

Sl. No.	Working experience (years)	frequency	percentage
1	1-4	3	3
2	4-8	6	7
3	8-12	11	12
4	12-16	30	33
5	16 and above	40	45
	total	90	100

Table 9: Working experience of the weavers

This case study shows that the majority of the respondents are having more than 16 years of experience. Out of the respondents, 33 per cent of the weavers have 12-16 years of experience and 12 per cent of the weavers have 8-12 years of experience. Only for a very small percentage of workers i.e., 3 per cent of weavers have 1-4 years of experience. From this study, we can understand very clearly

that all the weavers are highly experienced and skilled. And this study also indicates that young generations are changing their interest in weaving from handloom to other employment potential areas.

Sl. No	Health problems	frequency	percentage
1	Low vision and back pain	8	9
2	Low vision and leg pain	14	16
3	Low vision, leg pain, and back pain	68	75
	total	90	100

Table 10: Health problems faced by the weavers

The opinion on the problems of the weaver facing: the majority of the respondents i.e., 75per cent, expressed that they are suffering from low vision, leg pain, and back pain. The majority of the workers are aged weavers and so they are suffering from old age problems and they opined that they have physically and mentally stressed.

VII. CONCLUSION

The handloom industry is one of the ancient traditional occupations in Kerala. Chendamangalam is well-known all over the world for one thing the centuries-long heritage of the handloom industry. It all began hundreds of years before in “Paliyam Palace”. The Chendamangalam handloom industry was a symbol of pride for the “Paliyath Achan” family. It has a reputed name. Some years back there was a very good demand for the product, lately, there is flooding in the market with new cloth material type like polyester. This leads to a gradual decline in the handloom industry and has badly affected the income of weavers. The above study brings out the fact that female weavers of Chendamangalam are very poor from an economic point of view. Weavers are getting meager income from weaving, earning does not suffice for maintaining of the family, and fulfilment of family needs. As a result, they had begun to search for a better opportunity. The continuous decline of the handloom industry has increased the health problems in female weavers as their work is more physical. The status of education and health facilities is also very poor. Only with the full support and co-operation of the government, this working class will be able to sustain itself in this sector. So, a greater number of policies, programs, and education of the working women in the weaving industry.

VIII. SUGGESTIONS

- Government should recommend the government employers put on handloom products at least once every week to improve the demand for such products.
- The pending payments (subsidies, rebates, etc.) to the weaving community must be paid in full so as to motivate and help them to attain their full potential.
- Professional training for Handloom staff is required for meaningful marketing of Handloom products through cost-effective distribution channels.

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