

SOCIO ECONOMIC STATUS OF WEAVERS IN INDIA: A SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

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Abstract:

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This paper aims to highlight the socio economic status of weavers in the informal leading to occupational interlocking, wherein moving to alternate occupations is highly constrained due to the absence of alternate job prospects with the existing low skill levels of the artisans. This further perpetuates or entraps artisans and their families in a low- income situation with worse outcomes for their future generations. the associated institutions entrusted with achieving the socio-economic well-being of the artisans through the khadi programme have failed to realise the goals. The analysis raised questions as to whether employment in the khadi sector can be termed as 'decent work' with very low levels of wages and without much of social security. The only area wherein there seems to be hope is in the innovation of higher spindle charkhas, which would involve lesser drudgery and fetch more wages. In addition to this, the training of weavers and innovation in the improvement of looms and designs of products needs to be undertaken to encourage the production of highly value-added products in order to improve the socio-economic conditions of the artisans. Their jobs rely heavily on manual labor. Most of them have only a few years of schooling.

KEY WORDS:

Weavers, weavers welfares chemes, economic and social mobility, artisans, wages, child labour, Socio-Economic conditions, Self –Employment, Co-operative.

INTRODUCTION:

Weaving at home is a household activity, with an individual artisan working on the loom supported by other family members in the preparatory and production stages. The preparation of yarn for weaving, involving warping, sizing, and starching, is the responsibility of the weaver. The weaver's family does the warping and sizing. The hand-operated warping wheel, which looks like a charkha, is a common sight in weavers' houses. Women are mostly involved in the preparatory work, which is equivalent to a full-time job. In some states, children are also employed in the preparatory work, though part-time. Thus, the total number of persons employed in the household activity is at least 2 to 3 persons per loom. This is found to be true even in the estimates of the census wherein many scholars dealing in employment statistics believe that the census under-estimates women and other family workers.

This is possible, for the census tends to use a stricter definition of workers that sometimes leaves out part-time workers, and many women tend to be under reported (Lieble and Tirthankar, 2003). Most of the household-based spinners need to be treated as part-time workers and the job done by other family members of weavers, as either a full-time or a part-time job, need to be incorporated into the employment statistics. The overall wage earned by a family really goes down when we include the contribution made by the other family members. As defined by ILO in 1991, the term 'informal sector' refers to very small scale units producing and distributing goods and services consisting largely of independent self employed

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producers in urban areas of developing countries some of whom also employ family labour or a few hired workers or apprentices, which operate with very little capital or none at all, which utilizes low level of technique and skill, which therefore operate at a low level of productivity and which generally provide very low irregular income and highly unstable employment to those who work in it. The handloom sector plays a pivotal role in the country's economy. It is one of the largest economic activities next to agriculture. This sector, with about 35 lakh looms, at present provides employment to 65 lakh persons, the traditional handloom weaving in India has been kept alive by those professionally skilled household weavers, which inextricably is linked with the age-old tradition of weaving.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

- * To study the Socio-Economic conditions of weaving workers .
- * To observe the working conditions of weaving workers.

METHODOLOGY:

The study is based on Secondary data review was done to understand the macro aspects of issues and provided the basis for this study. the research aim and objectives, the article mainly based on secondary data are drawn classified from the Publications of books, monthly journals, article, magazines, and also was used internet.

IMPORTANCE: weaving industry is one of the vital industries of India and its survival is a remarkable one despite decline in some countries and it was wiped out in certain other countries where modern textile industry was established. The industry is unique in the sense that in no other country in the world, hand weaving is being carried vastly on such a nation-wide basis. It withstood the onslaughts and stiff competition from machine-made products. In the wake of mobility, growing urbanization, scientific and technological revolution, it escaped unscathed from annihilation keeping all the ancient tradition of weaving and carrying out improvements in tools and accessories. Indian weavers are not only producing enough cloth to meet internal demand, but also exporting numerous artistic varieties to industrialized countries of the World. Handloom is a way of life for many people in India. From the view point of employment, it ranks second next to agriculture and people dependent on it are heterogeneous in nature, among whom are Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Parses, Zoroastrians, besides Tribal, hill people and the like.

WEAVERS WELFARE SCHEMES: Health Insurance Scheme: 1. The Health Insurance Scheme (HIS) is a popular scheme and also boon and beneficial to the handloom weavers. Therefore, it is proposed to continue it during the Eleventh Plan period with extra benefits. It is expected to cover 3 lakh weavers in a year and 15 lakh weavers during the entire period of the Eleventh Plan along with renewals with Central assistance of Rs. 250.00 crore. A sum of Rs.2.00 crore will be kept for the publicity of the scheme over and above Rs.250.00 crore so that all weavers can take maximum advantage.

2. Mahatma Gandhi Bunkar Bima Yojana: The Mahatma Gandhi Bunkar Bima Yojana (MGBBY) was launched in 2004-05 and provides life insurance to the weavers is another popular scheme. This scheme is proposed to be continued in the Eleventh Plan and more benefits are proposed to be in economic and social mobility of artisans under the scheme with the following modifications in consultation with the Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC) .Source: Office of the Directorate of Handlooms and Textiles, Hyderabad

Working Conditions of Weavers: Some weavers are shed-based, but most of them prefer to work from home. This affords them the luxury to set their own work schedule. In some cases, weaving is also a seasonal activity, which is stopped during the agricultural season when everyone goes to work in the field. But traditional weavers' families, who have no land, have no alternative but to weave to earn a living. Most weavers are men, though now-a-days women are also being trained to weave. Shed-based weavers send the yarn home so that their families can do the pre-processing. It is observed that some of the institutions in Gujarat, which organise shed-based weaving, have adopted some good safety norms like using noise-reducing apparatus around the ear to reduce noise pollution caused by the frame-looms in motion. Some of these safety norms are required to be emulated by all the institutions to enhance the working capacity of the artisans. Home-based weavers usually have their pit-looms or frame-looms in one of the two rooms that typically constitute a village home. It is observed that especially among the poorer families across the

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country, the loom takes up most of their space and they have to live in cramped conditions in their own homes. Most of the year, the pre-processing is done outside their homes, but during the monsoons, they face an acute shortage of space. Also, the conditions around the loom are very dingy with no proper lighting or ventilation if the loom is inside a house. If the loom is kept on the porch just outside their home, then in the monsoon, they have to literally halt weaving when it is raining. It is observed that the income they earn through weaving just sustains them enough to be able to weave more.

Economic and social mobility of artisans: Here, the question of social mobility in the khadi industry is analysed to assess the impact of khadi across generations to obtain an insight into the socio-economic mobility of artisans engaged in this occupation. The term 'social mobility' refers to the process whereby individuals move from one position to another in the society, positions which, by general consent, have been given specific hierarchical values. Thus, social mobility can be defined as the movement of individuals, families and groups from one social position to other. For a working definition, the most popularly used concept is a significant movement of the individual's or stratum's economic, social and political position (Mellor, 1975). The fact that occupational mobility predominates sociological research is another reason for more closely examining it. Economic mobility is studied as a movement in the occupations across generations. Many studies have classified occupation into broad categories such as those of the socio-economic levels of the Bureau of the Census (Kahl, 1975), wherein the data used mobility of occupations, which are described in descending order as professionals, managerial, clerical, skilled, semi-skilled, farmers, and unskilled labourers. It is quite naive to assume that occupational mobility means only movement across occupations without taking into account the quality and skill involved in delivering the job, and this is one limitation of the study of occupational mobility. Mobility is to be considered consequently, as only one of the elements in stratification, both in terms of the objective aspect of the class position and in terms of the subjective attitudinal reactions to the class position (Mellor, 1975). In India, apart from occupational stratification, social stratification is a more complex subject to study and understand. However, despite being aware of this limitation, still an attempt has been made to understand intergenerational occupational mobility, by using a proxy—the respondents' current jobs vis-à-vis those of their fathers, in understanding economic and social mobility.

Earning differentials of home-based and shed-based artisans : it can be concluded that spinners and weavers working in sheds earn higher daily wages. The shed-based weavers consistently exhibit higher percentages in terms of higher income ranges as compared to home-based weavers. This implies that higher earnings are possible with shed-based production. Thus, the promotion of shed-based production could be one way of ensuring higher wages for the artisans.

Training and impact on wages: Quality training plays a crucial role in promoting higher productivity and wages of the artisans and improves the quality of the products produced. It is observed that weavers who had acquired formal training through institutions or privately earned higher incomes than those who had acquired traditional training. It also highlights the fact that training in the use of modern equipments is a necessary condition for enhancing the productivity and wages of the khadi workers.

Factors: Natural disasters and conflict have affected the people in the region to varying degrees and it has also affected carpet weaving too. Weavers themselves feel that conflict has impacted their profession and the impact was both direct and indirect. During the conflict contractors faced extortion by both militants and Ikhwan (state sponsored militia). The loss of money by the contractors ultimately trickled down to the weavers as their wages were reduced on the rationale of loss of money by contractors. Access to raw material also used to stop during the time of conflict which affected the production of carpets and thus resulted into lesser earning by the carpet weavers. Weavers' mobility was also restricted to a large extent during the conflict and if they wanted to explore the avenues for enhancement of their prospects through direct contact with sellers and dealers in Srinagar it could not happen.

child labour in weaving: The Census of 2001 revealed around 12.7 million child workers under the age of 14 years in India.. They are largely working in agricultural activities such as farming, livestock rearing, forestry and fisheries. This labour is outside the formal sector, and outside industry. Moreover, nine out of ten working children work within a family setting (Government of India, 2007; 2009). During the field trips in Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan, researchers observed that 8-10 year old children spent the entire day helping out in the pre-processing of the yarn leading up to the weaving stages. Their educational background is also poor because these children do not usually go to school, as they have to help out in the pre-processing. Evidence of children dropping out from the schools to help their parents in the pre-weaving

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processes across India, The study by Aggarwal (2004) further points out that there is no either/or situation between the two approaches—poverty vs. illiteracy—and both need to be attacked. Further, an analysis of the same study on child labour in the four states Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra revealed that there seems to be a clear link between child labour and the educational and economic attainments of workers in the four states. In other words, it implies that the problem of child labour may be contained if the educational and economic attainments in the states are higher. However, certain positive interventions by the community including the Government in terms of stringent laws are called for in order to reduce child labour.

Awareness: Weavers are aware of health ailments which they and other weavers face. But the adverse impact which these ailments can have on their health and life in the long run needs to be shared with them in an articulate manner. Campaigns in association with government doctors at block level can be conducted to bring awareness, free health check-up of the weavers and steps to be taken by the weavers to prevent health ailments. Weavers should be made aware of new technology (modern loom) citing the benefits in comparison to existing looms. The government has taken initiatives to promote handmade carpet weaving and Indian Institute of Carpet Technology runs training centers The weavers should be made aware on all such initiatives as they still are at a distance from all the programs and schemes being run for them.

Self –Employment: Weavers themselves expressed their willingness to start their own venture. The major hurdle which they face in this is the existing debt and hurdles in accessing loan to start their own venture. If the issue of access to loan is addressed, possibility of weavers' starting their own venture can become a reality. Some of the weavers were aware of government schemes and were also availing the facilities. Networking with concerned government departments (Department of Handicrafts & Department Handloom and Textile) at the village level in order to bring awareness and implementation of existing schemes can lead to the improvement of weavers' conditions.

Weavers' Co-operative: Weavers' Co-operative or society can be formed for the benefit of the weavers. The carpet weavers in these villages are unorganized as they work from home and no association covers them. By registering themselves as society or a co-operative, weavers can protect their rights and they can easily avail government schemes and subsidized loan from Khadi & Village Industries Board. Weavers' dependency of financial resources on contractors can be addressed through it. The co-operative can provide them an option to access larger audience (investors and buyers) for their carpets. Accessibility of money from banks or line departments will also become easy through the channel of co-operatives. Weavers' cooperative can be a solution to the issue of debt cycle faced by the weavers. If the weavers are registered as an artisan under Department of Handicraft they become eligible for health insurance under Rajiv Gandhi Shilpi Swasthya Bima Yojana which covers four members of a family including the artisan insured.

Socio-economic Aspect of Artisans in India in 20 th Century: The artisans are and important section of our society. By providing us beautifully crafted products, they enhance our aesthetic life. Besides they are significant contributor to our national economy. Our handicrafts have carved out a special niche in both developed and developing countries. The term artisan is used to refer to those people who work with ordinary or simple tools to make things of basic needs. They mainly use the locally available resources and make valuable products without the aid of machine. Artisan mostly work in traditional and unorganized sector in which they are vulnerable to exploitation and low wages. Both socially and economically they fall in lower strata of the social hierarchy. These people are mostly engaged in household or cottage industries in which they work hard but do not get enough to maintain a minimum standard of living. A major problem for this affair is the middle man who takes out a substantial share of profit leaving very little for the artisans. Most of the household industries in india use tool based technology which dates back to pre-colonial origin. Thus artisans may be called as skilled manual workers who imagine, plan and build things with their hands as per the demands mostly of the local people.

Socio-Economic Changes in the Weaving Sector: At the risk of being repetitive let us summarise the major changes that have occurred in the silk weaving sector in the Arani region – in rural Arani in particular, over the last decade and a half, from 1993 to 2009. While in overall general terms there appears to be a decline in the fortunes of the sector in rural Arni, the changes in the strength of the sector seem to have locational and caste specificities. As for the location specificities, the strength of the sector seems to have declined in backward, remote villages, like Vinayapuram and Veeramsambanur, but in Nosal, a semi-urban locality close to Arani, silk weaving in fact has grown. Thus in sharp contrast to the process of

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ruralisation, earlier in 1980's, of the industry, it is being increasingly concentrated in semi-urban and urban areas. These are very sketchy, preliminary scenarios. In the complex social situation prevailing in Arani, these three, along with many more, are all operative, and interact with one another. Identifying as many of such scenarios and studying their interactions is a task we have just begun.

External factors affecting weavers: Globalization has affected and in some cases interfered with cultural heritages and value systems. Prior to the 1960s carpets in Mugla were woven for dowry and "sold only during periods of financial hardship". The global economy has impacted weavers both via merchants who transmit information about the market, and also directly as economic opportunities become available and change villages where carpets are produced (Breu and Marchese 1999, 247). What Landreau failed to consider, however, was how industrialization and consumerism might also have eased the household duties of women in some ways. As people became able to buy the things they need, making goods for self-use was no longer necessary. Life was far less strenuous, and while women may feel alienated from the actual things that they produced as commodities, it might be that life had become much easier and they would not like to go back to making everything for themselves.

Government involvement in the weaving industry: weaving, being part of an agricultural lifestyle and requiring no materials unavailable in rural Turkey, was encouraged under the Turkish government's import-substitution industrialization strategy initiated during the First Five Year Development Plan in 1963. Policy up to the point of Berik's research focused mainly on export promotion, and not on the weavers themselves. The government recommended that workshops and cooperatives be formed in order to maintain high quality weaving that could be used for export while at the same time subsidizing the machine-made carpet industry for domestic consumption. In this environment, the government-owned Sumer bank began training weavers in areas with no weaving tradition, and providing looms and yarn to cooperatives in areas with and without weaving traditions. Weavers were virtually invisible in labor statistics, due possibly to the classification of weaving as a chore of a household and thus not employment, or the fear that there would be a tax on weaving income if women were formally identified as weavers. In addition to weavers being under-reported, state policy had focused mainly on the product of weaving and not the weavers themselves. Though the Social Security Law stated that all people employed in workshops must be covered, weavers very rarely were. By the early 1980s this lack of coverage, as well as the poor working conditions in many workshops, had been officially recognized, though nothing was done to rectify this situation (Berik 1986, 41-47).

Problems of Women weavers : Women weavers have to face number of problems at home, at work place and deplorable health condition due to work in unhygienic condition. The problems faced at the house front were money related, the most important one being sharing of earnings and ill treatment by their family members. 100% of the sampled women reported that they have to share their earnings in different activities of the family. 60% got ill treatment by their family members and negligible involvement in decision making process. Several problems were faced by them at work place like long hours of work, low wages and no provision of leave with pay, lack of provision of basic services, welfare programs and social security. 90 % of sampled informal women weavers reported of suffering from common illness – like backache, leg ache, weakness, gastritis, eye sight problem. Both the living and working conditions were deplorable and at both places women were exposed to all the risk factors.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION:

This study In India, the sharing of economic activities. In fact, the backbone of the Indian workforce is the informal sector. almost all the Assamese people living in rural areas are well acquainted with the weaving job, the people of weaving culture. the weavers in mainly those who have inherited this occupation, are in a pitiable condition owing to the poor socio-economic conditions. The majority of them are wage weavers who earn minimal wages in spite of working for more than ten hours a day. It is interesting to note that the educational status among the weavers community was not discouraging. Almost sixty five per cent of the community belonged to Low income group, engaged with working under middlemen. The traditional weaving in India has been kept alive by those professionally skilled household weavers, which inextricably is linked with the age-old tradition of weaving. Nevertheless, In India, handloom industry is an ancient cottage industry spread all over the country. This is a source of livelihood for the millions directly or indirectly. Its role is quite significant in meeting the clothing requirements of the masses. It occupies a pivotal place with its wide ramification into the socio-economic fabric of society. Particularly Mahatma

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Gandhi recognized this significance of textile handicrafts during the struggle for independence. The project aims at mobilizing and organizing carpet weavers through increased awareness for participation in socio-economic development; developing synergy between various stakeholders and weavers and documentation of issues surrounding weaving community and other stakeholders. This research paper deals with the powerloom workers of Bhiwandi. Research has looked at the sociological background of powerloom workers of Bhiwandi, their causes of migration from the different regions of the country, their working conditions, their health conditions, industrial relations, wage structures, social security and living conditions.

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