



OPERATIONAL PROBLEMS OF HANDLOOM WEAVERS IN SPSR NELLORE DISTRICT

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ABSTRACT

The outstanding history of handloom industry in India as well as of the Nellore district, particularly ‘Venkatagiri and Patur sarees’, of Andhra Pradesh is well known to all. The handloom industry has also gained fame and name in respect of its usefulness and uniqueness. It is such a sector that provides a huge number of jobs, next to agriculture in India. The handloom industry, which was a symbol of freedom during the independence struggle, it is now well-known for its problems such as competition with the power looms, lack of proper marketing facilities, raw-materials crisis, high labour costs, sharp decline in the number of weavers, lethargy of the new generation in adopting weaving as a livelihood, a number of challenges due to low adaptability in changing trends, lack of skilled manpower, high cost of credit, and so on. So, the government should take the necessary steps to overcome these problems for the development of the handloom industry.

Keywords: Handloom industry, Cooperative weavers, profitability, pre-loan issues, ill-health problems,

.INTRODUCTION

The handloom industry plays a very important role in the country's economic development. It is one of the largest economic activity, providing direct employment to over 65 lakh people engaged in weaving and allied activities. As a result of effective government intervention through financial assistance and the implementation of various developmental and welfare schemes, this industry has been able to withstand competition from the power loom and mills. Handloom industry is unparalleled in its flexibility and versatility, permitting the experimentation and encouraging innovations and creativity. The strength of handloom industry lies in the introduction of innovative designs, which cannot be replicated by the power loom sector. Thus, handloom forms a part of the heritage of India and demonstrates the richness and diversity of our country and the artistry of the weavers.

At present, the handloom industry is facing multiple problems that some other sectors do not have. Despite the fact that the state and federal governments are consistently pursuing development in the productivity and marketing of the handloom sector, weavers continue to face a severe livelihood crisis. In order to make the sector profitable, the problems should be identified and the strengths and weaknesses should be estimated. Therefore, the objective of this paper is to focus on the problems of the handloom industry and further suggest suitable actions or remedial measures.

OBJECTIVES: The following are the important objectives of this paper:

1. To analyse the reasons for unprofitability of the handloom sector in Nellore district;
2. To study the pre-loom processing issues of the handloom sector in the district; and
3. To examine the major problems faced by the handloom sector in the district.

SAMPLING

Primary data is collected from the selected handloom weavers in SPSR Nellore district. All the handloom weavers in the district during 2020 are listed out. Using Random Sampling, a sample of 256 weavers is selected at random from the list of 2560 which equals to 10 percent after eliminating the defunct and sick units.

ANALYSIS OF THE WEAVER'S PROFIT

Table-1 shows that the majority of the handloom independent weavers 132 (51.56 percent) have remarked, out of which 33 weavers (25 percent) said competition from power loom products and 27 weavers (20.45 percent) have recorded high cost of production and 21 weavers (15.91 percent) said middlemen involvement is the main reason for not getting a reasonable profit, while 19 respondents (14.39 percent) of weavers mentioned that it is because of the high cost of labour and 16 weavers (12.12 percent) each have the lack of government involvement and lack of marketing facilities as the main reasons for not getting reasonable profits.

The master weavers out of 41 (16.02 percent) respondents cited the majority of 9 respondents each (21.95 percent) of competition from power loom products and the high cost of labour involvement as the major reasons for not getting a reasonable profit. 7 respondents (17.07 percent) of master weavers think lack of marketing facilities, whereas 6 each (14.63 percent) of lack of government involvement, middlemen involvement, and the master weavers think high cost of production is the hindrance that diminishes reasonable profits. The weavers under middlemen out of 28 weavers, noticed the problem of the high cost of labour and the lack of marketing facilities, and 10.93 percent detected the lack of government involvement in earning profits satisfactorily.

Table-1
The respondents' reasons for not getting a reasonable profit

Problems	Independent Weaver	Master Weaver	Weavers under Middlemen	Co-op Weaver	Labour Weaver	Total
Lack of Govt. support	16 (12.12)	6 (14.63)	5 (17.86)	6 (28.57)	8 (23.53)	41 (16.02)
Middlemen involvement	21 (15.91)	6 (14.63)	3 (10.71)	2 (9.52)	4 (11.76)	36 (14.06)
Cost of production is high	27 (20.45)	4 (9.76)	4 (14.29)	2 (9.52)	3 (8.82)	40 (15.63)
Wages of labour is high	19 (14.39)	9 (21.95)	6 (21.43)	4 (19.05)	2 (5.88)	40 (15.63)
Lack of Marketing Facilities	16 (12.12)	7 (17.07)	6 (21.43)	3 (14.29)	6 (17.65)	38 (14.84)
Competition from power looms	33 (25.00)	9 (21.95)	4 (14.29)	4 (19.05)	11 (32.35)	61 (23.83)
Total	132 (100.00) (51.56)	41 (100.00) (16.02)	28 (100.00) (1094)	21 (100.00) (8.20)	34 (100.00) (13.28)	256 (100.00) (100.00)

Source: Primary Data

Note: Figures in parentheses indicate percentages to total.

The cooperative weavers out of 21 (8.20 percent) weavers, of which 28.57 percent have the lack of government support, 19.05 percent each of the high cost of labour and competition from power loom products. 14.29 percent conveyed by weavers' problem of the lack of marketing facilities and middlemen's involvement, the high cost of production having noticed 9.52 percent each. The labour weavers out of 34 (13.28 percent), with competition from power loom products accounting for 32.35 percent, a lack of government involvement accounting for 23.53 percent, a lack of marketing facilities accounting for 17.65 percent, middlemen accounting for 11.76 percent, high labour costs observed at 8.82 percent, and high production costs accounting for 5.88 percent.

On the whole, it can be concluded that the major obstructive reasons for not getting reasonable profits are competition from power loom products, lack of government involvement, high cost of production, high wages of labor, etc.

ANALYSIS OF THE WEAVER'S PROBLEMS

The particulars of problems encountered in pre-loom process requirements are presented in Table-2. It could be seen from the table weavers under independents that the majority of respondent weavers (39.39 percent) take help from the members of their families, while 15.91 percent of weavers hire labour help, 13.64 percent of them take relatives' help, 11.36 percent of them take friends' help, and 8.33 percent of the members of their neighbor's help. However, only 1.52 percent of respondents use the government to assist them in pre-loom processing.

In the case of individual categories, the majority of master weavers out of 41 respondents engage in hired labour, and 26.83 percent capture family member's help, 14.63 percent gain from government help, and 4.88 percent each of organisation help, friends' help, relatives' help, and neighbor's help. The majority of weavers under middlemen are 28 respondents, out of which 32.14 percent of family help, 21.43 percent of hire labour, 10.71 percent of friends' help, and the remaining all categories have 7.14 percent each, except relatives' help and government help.

Under labour weavers out of 34 respondents, 38.24 percent acquired from family's help, 14.71 percent each obtained from hiring labour help and friends' help, and 8.82 percent gained from relatives' help, neighbours' help, colleagues' help, and organisation help, with 5.88 percent each. 21 respondents under cooperative weavers, out of which prefer to take family help, hire labour help, friends' help, neighbors' help, colleagues' help, relatives' help, others, government help, and organisation help, respectively.

It can be concluded that a higher percentage of weavers from all categories mostly prefer and take their family support and help than the rest for pre-loom processing in the area of study.

Table-2
Pre-loom process requirement

Item	Independent Weaver	Master Weaver	Weaver under Middle men	Co-op Weaver	Labour Weaver	Total
Family's help	52 (39.39)	11 (26.83)	9 (32.14)	4 (19.05)	13 (38.24)	89 (34.77)
Neighbor's help	11 (8.33)	2 (4.88)	2 (7.14)	2 (9.52)	2 (5.88)	19 (7.42)
Hire Labour	21 (15.91)	12 (29.27)	6 (21.43)	4 (19.05)	5 (14.71)	48 (18.75)
Colleagues help	6 (4.55)	3 (7.32)	2 (7.14)	2 (9.52)	2 (5.88)	15 (5.86)
Friends help	15 (11.36)	2 (4.88)	3 (10.71)	3 (14.29)	5 (14.71)	28 (10.94)
Relatives help	18 (13.64)	2 (4.88)	1 (3.57)	2 (9.52)	3 (8.82)	26 (10.16)
Govt. help	2 (1.52)	6 (14.63)	1 (3.57)	1 (4.76)	1 (2.94)	11 (4.30)
Organization help	3 (2.27)	2 (4.88)	2 (7.14)	1 (4.76)	2 (5.88)	10 (3.91)
others	4 (3.03)	1 (2.44)	2 (7.14)	2 (9.52)	1 (2.94)	10 (3.91)
Total	132 (100.00)	41 (100.00)	28 (100.00)	21 100.00()	34 (100.00)	256 (100.00)

Source: Primary Data

Note: Figures in parentheses indicate percentages to total.

The data regarding the problems that the respondent weavers face during the process of product or weaving is represented in Table-3. The highest percentage 23.44 percent of respondent weavers of all categories remarked that they face problems during the process of weaving due to lack of cooperation with helpers. With a small gap 21.09 percent of them have pointed out family problems as their problem, while 20.70 percent have mentioned unfavourable climatic conditions. A shortage of raw materials is another problem, though it is mentioned by a percentage of respondents (17.19 percent). Inefficiency of workers or lack of skilled workers has been noted at 16.02 percent. The lowest percentage of handloom workers has a 14.45 percent power shortage and a negligible percentage of workers is uneducated (7.81 percent).

Based on the responses of individual category wise respondents, it is observed that the majority of weavers from all categories are independent weavers (51.56 percent), out of which 33 respondents are facing family problems, 27 respondents are facing non-cooperation with helpers, and 24 respondents are facing a lack of skilled workers. As per the master weavers (16.02 percent), out of which 12 respondents faced problems due to climatic conditions, 11 respondents faced non-cooperation with helpers, and 9 handloom weavers faced family problems. The weavers under middlemen (10.94 percent) out of which 8 weavers are facing problems due to a shortage of raw materials, 7 people are facing non-cooperation with helpers, and 6 weavers are facing problems due to unfavourable climatic conditions.

Table-3
Problems during product processing

Problems	Independent Weaver	Master Weaver	Weavers under Middlemen	Co-op Weaver	Labour Weaver	Total
Climatic conditions	23	12	6	5	7	53 (20.70)
Power shortage	17	7	4	3	6	37 (14.45)
Non-cooperation with helpers	27	11	7	6	9	60 (23.44)
Shortage of raw materials	20	8	8	3	5	44 (17.19)
Family problems	33	9	5	3	4	54 (21.09)
Lack of skilled workers	24	4	3	4	6	41 (16.02)
Un-education workers	11	2	1	2	4	20 (7.81)
Total	132 (51.56)	41(16.02)	28(10.94)	21(8.20)	34(13.28)	256 (100.00)

Source: Primary Data

Note: Figures in Parentheses indicate percentages to total.

The cooperative weavers (8.20 percent) out of which 6 respondents faced problems of non-cooperation with helpers, 5 persons are faced problems with non-climatic conditions, and 4 weavers faced problems of lack of skilled workers. The labour weavers (13.28 percent), out of which 9 weavers faced problems through non-cooperation with helpers, 7 respondents faced obstacles through unfavourable conditions, and 6 respondents each faced problems through power shortage and lack of skilled workers.

Overall, weavers have felt that non-cooperation with helpers is the major problematic obstacle during the product process. The independent weavers, the weavers under middlemen, the cooperative weavers and master weavers, and labour weavers have mentioned that the major problems during product processing are family problems, climatic conditions, and shortage of raw materials. On the whole, it can be concluded that non-cooperation with helpers is the major problem during product processing.

GENERAL PROBLEMS FACED BY THE HANDLOOM INDUSTRY

The handloom units encountered several teething problems from different angles that greatly hampered the successful functioning of the handloom units. Ten major problems were identified and analysed in Table-4. The problems encountered by the handloom owners in the district as per their opinion. 35 respondents have been noticed as the major problem with the lack of infrastructural facilities. 33 respondents reported a lack of interest in this trade by future generations; 30 weavers reported a lack of government credit; 29 respondents reported a lack of raw materials; 25 weavers reported a lack of extension; and 23 respondents reported a lack of basic education.

As could be observed from the table, a considerable number of 132 units (51.56 percent) encountered problems with independent weavers. Among these, lack of infrastructural facilities constituted the largest proportion. The second highest proportion has been constituted by the unavailability of credits from the government and a lack of interest from future generations in this trade. The third largest proportion is constituted of the unavailability of raw materials. Of these, about 41 (16.02 percent of) respondents faced problems with master weaver, of these, lack of infrastructural facilities accounts for a large percentage. The unavailability of raw materials, lack of extension and lack of interest of future generations in this trade constituted the second largest proportion.

About 28 (about 10.94 percent of) weavers got problems with their weavers working under middle men. Out of 28 units faced with the problem, the major sufferers were lack of infrastructural facilities and unavailability of credits from government respondents. Weavers were confronted with this problem. Co-operative weavers also seemed to be an important problem for the study's weavers at 21 or about 8.20 percent of the units were confronted with this problem. Among those who faced the problem of co-operative weavers, lack of extension constituted the largest proportion. The labour weavers also hampered the smooth functioning of the weaving. About 34 weavers, or 13.28 percent of the units, were affected by the labour weavers due to various problems.

Handloom weavers are still using the same old method of weaving and there is no improvement, which is followed by major problems like lack of new designs, uncooperative workers, higher cost of production, low capacity of loom, frequent repair of looms, fluctuation in yarn price, quality of yarn, late yarn supply, lack of training and shortage of yarn, inadequate storage, overstock due to over production and overstock due to low demand, etc.

Table-4
The general problems faced by the handloom industry

Problems	Independent Weaver	Master Weaver	Weaver under Middle men	Co-op Weaver	Labour Weaver	Total
Unavailability of raw materials	15 (11.36)	6 (14.63)	3 (10.71)	2 (9.52)	3 (8.82)	29 (11.33)
Lack of infrastructural facilities	17 (12.88)	7 (17.07)	4 (14.29)	2 (9.52)	5 (14.71)	35 (13.67)
Lack of proper training	10 (7.58)	3 (7.32)	3 (10.71)	1 (4.76)	3 (8.82)	20 (7.81)
Lack of marketing system	12 (9.09)	2 (4.88)	2 (7.14)	1 (4.76)	3 (8.82)	20 (7.81)
Unavailability of credits from Government	16 (12.12)	4 (9.76)	4 (14.29)	2 (9.52)	4 (11.76)	30 (11.72)
Lack of Extension	11 (8.33)	6 (14.63)	2 (7.14)	4 (19.05)	2 (5.88)	25 (9.77)
Lack of Basic Education	13 (9.85)	2 (4.88)	2 (7.14)	3 (14.29)	3 (8.82)	23 (8.98)
Less wages rate in reeling industry	10 (7.58)	1 (2.44)	2 (7.14)	2 (9.52)	2 (5.88)	17 (6.64)
Lack of interest of future generation in this trade	16 (12.12)	6 (14.63)	4 (14.29)	2 (9.52)	5 (14.71)	33 (12.89)
Lack of financial resources	12 (9.09)	4 (9.76)	2 (7.14)	2 (9.52)	4 (11.76)	24 (9.38)
Total	132 (100.00) (51.56)	41 (100.00) (16.02)	28 (100.00) (10.94)	21 (100.00) (8.20)	34 (100.00) (13.28)	256 (100.00)

Source: Primary data

Note: Figures in parenthesis indicate percentages to total.

PROBLEMS THAT DRIVE WEAVERS TO COMMIT SUICIDE

The particulars of the problems that have led to commit suicide by the weavers are depicted in Table-5. The data reflects various types of problems that ruined the lives of different categories of weavers, leading to their committing suicide. If ranking is given to the type of problem suffered by the number of people, the major problem suffered by the

majority of weavers from all categories, 19.53 percent, which stands at rank 1 in the area of study, is credit force. The involvement of middlemen was the second major problem that worried and grieved the greatest number of weavers of all categories (16.41percent), followed by a lack of financial support, which was the third highest problem faced by 13.67 percent of weavers.Lack of marketing facilities is the fourth highest problem faced by 10.16 percent. Due to power loom products is the fifth highest problem faced by 9.38 percent. The rise in yarn prices and a lack of worker problems are ranked sixth and seventh, respectively, with family problems ranking eighth and a lack of government assistance ranking ninth.

Looking into problems faced by category wise weavers, it is understood that the majority of weavers, comprising of independent weavers 132 (51.56 percent), master weavers 41 (16.02 percent), weavers under middlemen 28 (10.94 percent) and weavers under cooperative 21 (8.20 percent), and labour weavers 34 (13.28 percent), suffer mainly from credit force, middlemen involvement and lack of financial support, which nearer to 50 percent feel credit force.

The credit force has the highest percentage of independent weavers (19.70 percent).The highest percentage of master weavers (21.95 percent of middlemen involvement), weavers under middlemen (17.86 percent of credit force), under cooperative weavers (19.05 percent of lack of government assistance), and labour weavers (23.53 percent of credit force) face problems from the involvement of middlemen, whereas independent weavers face problems due to competition from the products of power looms and cooperative weavers face misery due to harassment of moneylenders.

Overall, the majority of respondent weavers from all categories commit suicide as a result of a lack of government assistance, competition from power loom products, moneylender harassment and involvement, family problems, and a rise in yarn prices in the area of study.

Table-5
Problems that drive weavers to commit suicide

Problems	Independent Weaver	Master Weaver	Weaver under Middle men	Co-op Weaver	Labour Weaver	Total	Rank
Credit force	26 (19.70)	8 (19.51)	5 (17.86)	3 (14.29)	8 (23.53)	50 (19.53)	1
Middlemen involvement	21 (15.91)	9 (21.95)	4 (14.29)	2 (9.52)	6 (17.65)	42 (16.41)	2
Due to power loom products	11 (8.33)	5 (12.20)	3 (10.71)	3 (14.29)	2 (5.88)	24 (9.38)	5
Lack of financial support	15 (11.36)	8 (19.51)	4 (14.29)	2 (9.52)	6 (17.65)	35 (13.67)	3
Hike in yarn price.	13 (9.85)	2 (4.88)	4 (14.29)	2 (9.52)	2 (5.88)	23 (8.98)	6
Lack of govt. assistance	9 (6.82)	2 (4.88)	3 (10.71)	4 (19.05)	5 (14.71)	23 (8.98)	6
Lack of marketing facilities	17 (12.88)	3 (7.32)	2 (7.14)	3 (14.29)	1 (2.94)	26 (10.16)	4
Family problems	13 (9.85)	2 (4.88)	2 (7.14)	--	3 (8.82)	20 (7.81)	7
Lack of workers problems	7 (5.30)	2 (4.88)	1 (3.57)	2 (9.52)	1 (2.94)	13 (5.08)	8
Total	132 (51.56)	41 (16.02)	28 (10.94)	21 (8.20)	34 (13.28)	256 (100.00)	

Source: Primary data

Note: Figures in parenthesis indicate percentages to total.

The weaver's ill-health problems after the weaving operation are presented in Table-6. As could be seen from the table, the weavers' assessment of body pain was done through self-reported body discomfort ratings based on 13 point rating scales along with the frequency and severity of occurrence of pain among 256 weavers for performing weaving operations. Weavers reported the highest rates of elbow joint pain (12.89 percent), lower back pain (11.72 percent), shoulder pain (10.55 percent), neck pain (10.16 percent), wrist pain (8.98 percent), and knee pain (8.59 percent).

From subjective assessment for frequency of pain, there are 32. Out of them, 6 weavers experienced shoulder pain, 4 respondents experienced elbow joint pain, 3 weavers each of leg pain, wrist pain, and knee pain, and 2 respondents each for backbone pain, neck

pain, problems with the lungs, thighs pain, hand pain, and one each for lower back pain, foot pain, and ankle pain.

Table-6
Frequency of ill-health problems of weaver's working on handloom

Body parts	Pain always	Pain frequently	Pain sometimes	Pain never	Total
Lower back	1	3	5	2	11 (4.30)
backbone	2	6	16	6	30 (11.72)
Shoulder	6	7	11	3	27 (10.55)
Neck	2	6	14	4	26 (10.16)
Problem of lungs	2	3	6	2	13 (5.08)
Leg	3	6	7	2	18 (7.03)
Thighs	2	4	3	3	12 (4.69)
Foot	1	7	10	1	19 (7.42)
Elbow joint	4	8	17	4	33 (12.89)
Hand	2	6	6	2	16 (6.25)
Wrist pain	3	5	11	4	23 (8.98)
Knee	3	4	13	2	22 (8.59)
Ankle	1	2	2	1	6 (2.34)
Total	32 (12.50)	67 (26.17)	121 (47.27)	36 (14.06)	256 (100.00)

Source: Primary data

Note: Figures in parenthesis indicate percentages to total.

Frequency of ill-health problems frequently noticed 67 out of which 8 weavers have faced elbow joint pain, 7 weavers each have shoulder pain and foot pain, and 6 members each have different problems of backbone pain, neck pain, leg pain, hand pain, and 5 weavers illuminated the problem of wrist pain.

A significant number of weavers reported pains after treadle operation, with 17 reporting elbow joint pains, 16 reporting backbone pain, 14 reporting neck pain, and 11 reporting shoulder pain. It was discovered that the pains sometimes reported in leg, lungs, hand, lower back, thighs, and ankle.

Weavers reported without pain after treadle operation noticed out of 36 respondents, of which 6 weavers had no backbone pain, 4 respondents each conveyed without pain neck, elbow joint, wrist pain, and 3 weavers each had shoulder and thighs pain.

In overall observation, the majority of respondent weavers from all categories reported body pains after working on handlooms due to inadequate foot support for ankle and toe, which indicates the presence of ergonomic issues and the need for ergonomic intervention. Hence, an ergonomic design approach to modify the different components of the workstation which interact with the body parts such as elbow joint, backbone, shoulder, neck, wrist pain, and knee during operation will help to reduce pain.

CONCLUSIONS

On the basis of the study, the following conclusion may be drawn. The descriptive study showed that poor working conditions and musculoskeletal problems in handloom workers occurred at a high rate. More than 86 percent of weavers are currently experiencing musculoskeletal pain. Thus, improvement of working conditions and control of musculoskeletal problems seemed essential. The elimination of problems that likely contribute to the weavers' suffering is the prime need of the hour. Since prolonged sitting has been documented to be one of the problems affecting the musculoskeletal system in these settings, weavers should introduce frequent rest pauses between two consecutive work cycles by taking short breaks. Musculoskeletal problems were positively associated with age, gender, individual income, family income, family size, job experience, working hours per day, working days per week, general working conditions, and working posture.

The study focuses on the availability of various government schemes available to support handloom weavers, as well as the various problems faced by traditional handloom weavers, including financial problems. The study finds that the present profitability is very meager, which is insufficient to meet their day-to-day activities. The financial support from the government is very limited. The wage hike is the need of the hour and the reasonable wages should be provided to them without any delay. The immediate intervention of the government is essential for the survival of the handloom weavers.

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