

A Study of the Present Situation of the Saurashtrian Weavers - A Minority Group in India

B. A. Pratheshta

Student, Department of Law, Sastra Deemed University, Thanjavur, India

Abstract: The Saurashtra people, also colloquially known as Palkar or simply Saurashtrians are the linguistic minority group of India who speak the Indo-Aryan language called Saurashtra. These people are found majorly in the parts of South India especially in Tamil Nadu. The predominant occupation of these people was weaving and merchanting. But in the recent years there is a tremendous decline in the number of Saurashtrians weaving. This is because of various socio-economic causes. The study aims to analyze the causes and reasons behind the decline of these weavers and the current situation of this minority group. The study also offers some recommendations to restrict the declining number of the weavers.

Keywords: Saurashtrians, Handloom, weavers, socio-economic conditions,

1. Introduction

Saurashtrians have been the métiers of weaving and also been appreciated and praised by many kings of those days and still have a demand for their handloom sarees. The main course occupation of these people was weaving. But in the recent years the population of this linguistic group opting for weaving is facing a very big drop. The handloom industry in India is the second largest sector after agriculture. In spite of such an imperative role played by the handloom industry, there is notable decline of people weaving. This is mainly because of industrialization and cheap labor. The study focuses only the Saurashtrian population of Madurai who have dropped weaving and the reason and causes of such disinterest.

2. Review of literature

Many studies have been undertaken to study the economic conditions of handloom weavers at various places and also studies have made on various sectors of textile industry. Here are few such studies reviewed.

The paper studies about the financial situation of Indian weavers and analyzes the strengths and weaknesses of handloom industry to make it profitable. The study also suggests few remedial measures for the growth and development of handloom industries.

The paper aims to study about the influence of demographic variables like gender, age, educational qualification, occupation

and annual income on customer satisfaction towards handloom products.

- The paper is a focused group discussion of the weavers of Varanasi and the study details on the problems faced by the handloom weavers of the place. The study reveals that the weavers of Varanasi have lost their traditional weaving industry due to the main cause of industrialization and the invention of power-loom technology.
- The study analyses the importance of the handloom industry in India and the problems faced by the sector. Also it reveals the importance of “Make in India” campaign for alleviating Indian handloom sector.
- The paper is on the Mouza Chak Harharia, Murshidabad, West Bengal. The place is best known for silk weaving. The study brings out the demographic features, socio-economic conditions, over-all living status and the problems faces by the weavers of Chak Harharia.
- The paper examines the expectations of the weavers of THICO Silks Ltd., and their level of satisfaction. The paper also gives various suggestions to remove the gap between the expectations and the satisfaction.
- The paper makes an in depth study into the life and misery of handloom households in a selected prominent areas of this sector.

3. Statement of the problem

The paper attempts to study the reason behind the decline in the number of Saurashtrian weavers and their current living status. In short, the studies details on the demographical features, occupational activities and living style of the Saurashtrian weavers at present.

A. Scope of the study

The present study deeply analyses the demographic, occupation and living of the Saurashtrian weavers. The study encounters the problems faced by the weavers and the alternatives they choose because of such existing issues.

B. Limitation of the study

The study is constrained only to the Saurashtra speaking weavers- linguistic minority of Madurai district in Tamilnadu.

The information gathered and provided in this paper is purely collected from the Saurashtrian weavers of Madurai.

C. Objectives

The main OBJECTIVE of the study is to find out the

- Reason behind decline of Saurashtrian people weaving.
- Current situation of this linguistic minority group.
- Suggest some helpful ways to protect the interest of the weavers.

D. Sources of data

The study is made purely from the primary data collected from the Saurashtrian weavers. The study has been conducted in the areas of Madurai District, TamilNadu. The regions covered are

- Krishnapuram colony
- Nilaiyoor
- Pamban nagar
- Avananiyapuram

The Saurashtrian people are found more in these areas in Madurai.

E. Tools for data collection

The data is collected through the investigative schedule method covering the questions relating to the demographic profile of the weavers, reasons for their back drop from weaving, alternative occupation, socio-economic conditions, demand and suggestions they make for protecting their interest.

F. Sample size

As the study is concentrated only to the Saurashtra speaking weavers, the study is undertaken in few selected places of Madurai and 100 families are taken as the sample size.

G. Division of study

The study is divided into three parts. The first part discusses about the demographic details, the type of saris they weave, dealers, distributors, labor and other necessary information. The second part deals on the reason behind the disinterest of people in weaving and the problems they currently face. And the last part deals with the demands raised by the weavers and some suggestive methods to protect the interest of these weavers.

H. Demographics

The people who are involved in weaving do not belong to a particular age. All age group Saurashtrian people weave (from the age of 14). In other words it can be said that the whole family involve in weaving. They assign themselves a flexible time to weave. The whole family weaves day and night to finish their target, only then they could earn their living. For instance: the school or college going teens weave in the morning before going to college or school and also weave for some time after they come home. The male members of the family weave till the homemakers finish their daily chores. The homemakers weave after all the chores done. The male members also go for

a daily wage work for an extra income after their turn of weaving is done.

The group weave three types of sarees, which includes pure silk sarees, pure cotton saree and cotton silk sarees (colloquially known as aparna silk). The percentage of people weaving these sarees has a huge difference. Among the 100 family surveyed only 15 families weave pure silk sarees, 27 families weave cotton sarees, and other remaining 58 families choose weaving cotton silks.

When the reason analyzed behind this big gap in the choice of saree, the common reason given by the majority of the population was that though the wage of weaving pure silk is the highest the amount of work required is so high, two people are required at a time to weave, it is very delegate, even a small mistake can spoil eight whole sarees. The weavers also are not affordable to replace the damage. For this main reason many people avoid the liability of taking risk in weaving pure silks.

Cotton sarees: handloom weaving cannot give attractive design in cotton sarees, though today's generation go for cotton sarees, people do not choose these unattractive sarees except few. Having such less demand people weaving cotton sarees are more discouraged. Weaving of cotton saree is quite easy than weaving other sarees.

Silk cotton saree: majority of the people choose weaving these silk cotton sarees as the weaving time is flexible, no so much risk taking factors, also have considerable good demand compare to other types of sarees.

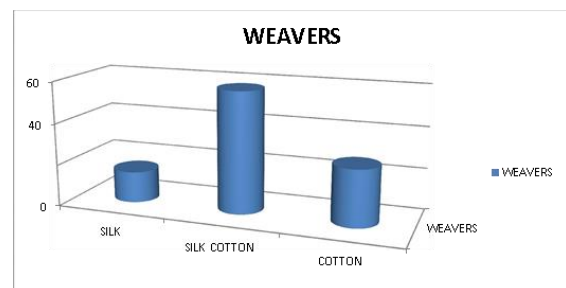


Fig. 1. Weavers

I. Agents and wages of the weavers

The weavers get raw materials either directly from the wholesalers of the product or through agents. Maximum people choose to get it from the agents, the main reason behind this is that, meeting the wholesaler directly and getting raw materials is time consuming which results in one whole day of loss of work.

There are so many disadvantages of relying upon agents. In spite of such disadvantage people prefer it because the weavers in remote areas and aged people feel it difficult to travel to the place of the wholesalers. In case of agents they get the raw materials at their door step.

The main disadvantage of the agents is that the agents get a higher percentage of commission resulting in lesser wage to the weavers. The intermediaries get more profit without any much hard work. The main job of the agents is that to distribute the

raw materials to the weavers and collect the finished sarees from the weavers and give to the wholesalers for the actual market sale.

The agents give the raw material that is the weaving thread and an amount of Rs.9000-9500(second grade silk) or Rs.4800(silk cotton) or Rs.4200(cotton) as the wage as a whole for a bundle of thread, depending on the type of saree they weave. The whole bundle of thread can give out 8-9 full sarees. A weaver may take minimum of 5 and maximum of 10 days to complete weaving the whole bundle.

The wage given further goes into many hands, like to the people involved in warping and loading, punching card and loading and to repairers in case of any default.

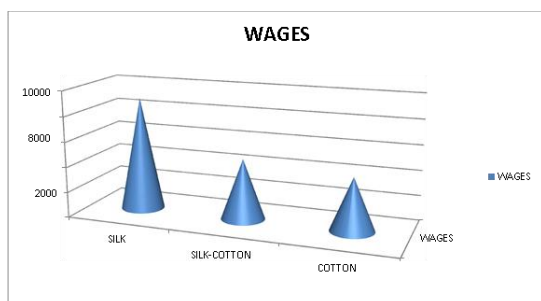


Fig. 2. Wages

4. Process involved in weaving

There various process involved in weaving. The processes from thread to complete saree include the following.

- Dyeing
- Winding
- Spinning
- Warping and loading
- Punching card and loading
- Weaving

A. Dyeing

The raw thread is dyed as per the need. Different and contrasting colors are used for the body of the saree and the border or pallu of the saree.

For dyeing, the raw thread is soaked in the hot boiling water. Washing soda and desired color dye is added to the boiling water. The thread is dipped well and then immersed in normal water to remove excess coloring. The dyed thread is dried well for 3-4 days.

B. Winding:

After dyeing the yarn is brought to the winding process. In this process the yarn is transferred to the spool facilitating for further process.

C. Spinning

After winding, the spool is spun onto to the spindles and the parivattam with the help of the spinning wheel. The spindles are used in the fly-shuttle which is used in weaving.

D. Wrapping and loading:

Warping is the process in which the yarn is stretched between two iron (or) wood poles to entangle the thread and then knotted together. It is usually done in the shade so that the yarn is not sun-bleached. Four or six people work together in this process. After warping the yarn is dipped in the rice starch (kanji) to make it stiff and luster.

The yarn is later warped in the large wooden beam and loaded to the loom. The process of weaving starts after loading the warp.

E. Weaving

After warping and loading, the weaver starts weaving. Weaving is done on the fly shuttle looms. The weaver interweaves the threads of weft and warp. The shuttle passes through the gap formed when the treadle is operated to interweave the threads of warp and the weft. Once the shuttle is passed, the adjourned rope from jacquard is pulled to form the weave. The woven cloth is enfolded to the wooden beam. Thus, once the weaving is completed the cloth is cut into full length saree and folded neatly for sales.

F. Co-operative societies of the weavers:

Co-operative societies are formed with the help of the government to assist weavers financially. Weavers' children are given Rs.600 every year once they complete 10th and 12th standard for their higher studies. The amount is given even after they join college, every year till they are graduated.

G. Role of government

The role of the government is very minimal. The government fails to look into the growth and development of the weavers. They struggle hard for their living because of the exploitation of the agents and the producers. Recently, the weavers of Madurai called up a strike demanding a rise in the wages given. After a week of continuous strike, they have now raised the wage by 2-5%.

H. Declining number of weavers

Due to lesser wage and advancement of power loom, the number of weavers continuing weaving has been decreased. The present weavers will be the last generation of Saurashtrian weavers. The upcoming generations are opting to other fields that could earn more income.

The weavers during the interview spoke out with tears filling their eyes that they struggle very hard to earn and give up many things for the education of their children. They do not want their next generation to suffer to earn an income from weaving. This alarms the society that the Saurashtrians known for weaving are declining. This may result in no more weavers in the Saurashtrian community in the future.

I. Poor marketing

Effective sales happen only when there is effective marketing. The marketing level is inadequate to reach the demand. As the sales rate is very low the wages are also low. In

this trend world, people preferring handloom sarees has decreased. There are only few people here and there who buy these sarees. Improvised marketing techniques and reaching out people in wider geographical areas can increase sales thus resulting in increased demand.

J. Current situation of the weavers

In the current years this weaving community have adopted to various other occupations from professors, engineers, doctors to lawyers. Many have also settled in abroad with high paying jobs. The saddest truth is that these community people are giving up their family traditional jobs for the sake of money that could satisfy their needs sufficiently.

K. Suggestions for protecting the interest of the weavers

Though it is very late, some steps can be taken to protect the present surviving weavers. The suggestions include the following:

- The government shall take step to buy all the products from the weavers directly.
- The government can provide interest free education loans for the education of their children.
- Increase wages.
- Prevent exploitation of the agents.
- Encourage commoners to buy handloom sarees to increase the demand.
- Conduct camps to educate weavers with new weaving techniques.

These suggestions are only elementary that could protect the weavers interest as of now. The government should make long term policies to protect the weavers

5. Conclusion

From the above study, it can be construed that though weaving being the traditional occupation of Saurashtrians, people are suspending themselves from weaving because of their lesser wage, development of power-loom, etc. They feel difficult to run their family with the wage they earn. Long working hours and efforts of the whole family earns only half of the stomach. The Government must see to the problems faced by them and take appropriate measures. Textile industry being the most prominent sector of India, such decline in the weavers may also affect the growth of the economy.

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