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LIVELIHOOD ANALYSIS OF HANDLOOM COMMUNITY: A CASE STUDY OF BALARAMAPURAM HANDLOOM WEAVERS OF KERALA

MUHAMMED JABIR M M
RESEARCH SCHOLAR
DELHI SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK
UNIVERSITY OF DELHI
DELHI


ABSTRACT

The present study is on livelihood situation of handloom community at Balaramapuram handloom village of Trivandrum district in Kerala. The Balaramapuram handloom is one of the oldest handloom centres of Kerala with 350 years of experience in weaving. The largest concentration of handlooms in Kerala state is in this area only. The livelihood of the majority directly depended on handloom weaving and its allied activities. The livelihood condition of handloom weavers has been worsening year by year with the emergence of the giant cotton mills and it began to deteriorate. The poor folks engaged in handloom weaving could not compete with the productive capacity and technological eminence of these mills and it became very threat to the livelihood of handloom community. Even though government has introduced many welfare measures for the handloom weavers, most of them are not reaching to the poor weavers in the expected manner. Many of them are not even aware of these facts. Most of the weavers are getting only very meager income from weaving and it will not be enough for their living. Hence they are forced to engage their children also in the work. Often this affects their education also. The low incomes received from this sector often force them to withdraw from weaving/weaving related activity. The new generation people from the community are also not encouraged or attracted to the field due to low earning and profit. In this context, this is a humble attempt to analyze the current livelihood of handloom community of Balaramapuram. The study is very relevant in order to analyze the livelihood of the handloom community of Balaramapuram as it is one of the old and traditional handloom industries in the state. The study focuses on the livelihood asses, livelihood outcome and vulnerability contexts of the handloom weavers. Moreover, it analyses the impact of institutional mechanisms working for handloom weavers in the particular region.

KEYWORDS

balaramapuram, handlooms, livelihood.

INTRODUCTION

 *hadi is to me the symbol of unity of Indian humanity, of its economic freedom and, therefore, ultimately the livery of India"*

Mahatma Gandhi

The Handloom Textiles constitute a timeless part of the rich cultural Heritage of India. The element of art and craft present in Indian handlooms makes it a potential sector for the upper segments of market domestic as well as global. Handloom sector plays very important role in the country's economy also. It is one of the largest economic activities providing direct employment to over 65 lacks persons, engaged in weaving and allied activities. This sector contributes nearly 19% of the total cloth produced in the country and also adds substantially to export earnings.

Handloom industry in Kerala today provides employment directly to 3lacks people and indirectly to another one lack. The industry is more concentrated in the Northern and Southern districts of the State namely Thiruvananthapuram district in the south and Kannur in north. The organization and nature of production in these areas differ considerably. Though Thiruvananthapuram district has the largest number of co-operatives, 366 out of the 755 co-operative societies, weaver activists point out that more than 250 of cooperatives are not working well. The majorities of the weavers are independent or working for the master weavers as wage earners.

Kerala State Handloom Weavers Cooperative Society (HANTEX), the apex organization of the cooperatives and Kerala State Handloom Development Corporation Ltd (HANVEEV) providing services (especially marketing) to individual weavers. These are the principal development agencies assisting the Department of Handlooms and Textiles.

Balaramapuram is a village in the Thiruvananthapuram district bordering Kanyakumari district of Tamil Nadu and it is one of the oldest handloom centers in the State. The largest concentrations of the handlooms in the district are in this area only. It is considered as the second market hub of the district. The first being Chalai market in Thiruvananthapuram city. Balaramapuram is famous as the centre for the production of traditional varieties of handloom textiles meant for the contemporary cloth wearing style of Kerala. Balaramapuram Sarees and fine cotton fabrics are manufactured in seven blocks of the districts. The handloom industry in this area today provide jobs opportunity to thousands of families belonging to different castes and communities like Ezhava, Nadar, Nair, Mukkuvu, and others, mostly belonging to the weaker sections of the society.

The present study focuses on the livelihood analysis of the handloom community at Balaramapuram. The analysis covers the current livelihood asset, livelihood outcomes, vulnerability context of the livelihood and the institutional processing for the livelihood of handloom community in Balaramapuram Handloom community. The analysis of the livelihood asset contains physical, human, natural and financial assets of the handloom community. The study was conducted among the 50 selected handloom weavers from Balaramapuram grama panchayat. The researcher directly interviewed handloom weavers and collected data for the analysis. The study will be helpful in developing new strategies for the development of handloom industries in India.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To study the socio economic profile of handloom community of Balaramapuram.
2. To analyse the livelihood assets of the handloom weavers.
3. To analyse the livelihood outcomes of the handloom weavers.
4. To analyse the vulnerability context on livelihood of handloom weavers.
5. To analyse influence of institutional processing in the livelihood of handloom community.

DISCUSSION

1. PROFILE OF THE HANDLOOM WEAVERS

The Balaramapuram handloom weavers have 360 years of experience in weaving and they are traditional weavers. The weaving skill is being transformed from their older generations to them. The main income source of 90% of residents directly depend upon handloom weaving and remain do works related to weaving such as bleaching, sizing, warping, etc. They are considered it as their traditional occupation.

A large number of weavers in Balaramapuram handloom community belong to the Hindu religion due to their weaving tradition and some historical reasons. More than half of the weavers are in the age of adulthood or above. It proves the low representation of younger generation in the industry and could not see any respondents in the age in between 20-30. It may be a sign of withdrawal of younger generation from the industry. Due to the low earnings and low profit the younger generations are not attracted or encouraged to this job. In gender wise analysis the participation of women are higher than men. This is because of the equal wage rate and working time between men and women and it attracts many women to this sector. The job nature is also favoring women weavers.

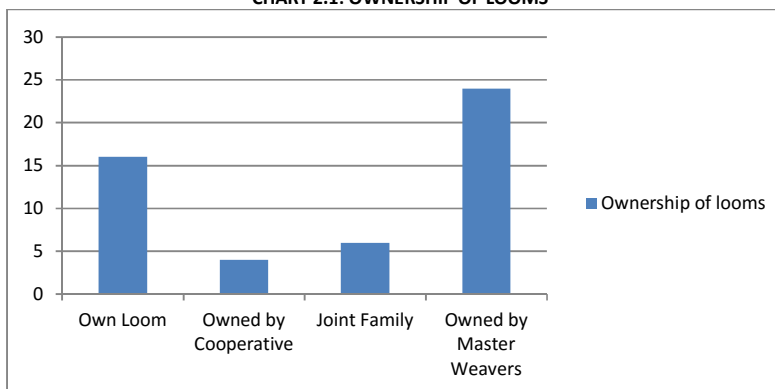
The educational level of the handloom weavers is very low comparing to other group of people. Majority of the workers studied up to only upper primary class. The economic condition of the weavers was not good in terms of occupying the land and other assets. It was observed that majority (62%) of weavers have only 5-10 cents of land. The region itself is densely populated and the availability of free land for purchase was also a reason for this situation. On the contrary it could see 72% of houses were self owned by weavers but majority of those were thatched roof only.

2. LIVELIHOOD ASSETS OF THE HANDLOOM WEAVERS

The study found that 40% of weavers are independent weavers and they have their own looms. The weaving activities are done very near to their houses also. There are different categories of weavers.

- 12% are master weavers- they are not weaving, but many people do weaving under the master weavers. They each have more than 6 looms and most of them processed by their ancestors. The master weavers have much experience in weaving and allied activities. They arrange looms and other raw materials for weaver under him.
- Wage Weavers- they do not have their own loom so that they are depending master weavers for weaving.

CHART 2.1: OWNERSHIP OF LOOMS



The availability of man days for weaving is one of the important factors which contribute to the livelihood assets of handloom community. It was observed that 58% of weavers get an average 25 man days of weaving in a month. But it was highly correlated to the physical ability and seasonal problems of the weavers. The younger people weave more days than older ones. The livelihood also associated with the productive capacity of weavers in weaving in a day. A large number of weavers can weave up to 5 meters per day. The younger people weaves much more than older ones due to their physical strength.

The better infrastructural facilities and storage capacity for products is one of main livelihood asset of the handloom weavers. This study found that 60% of weavers are not reliable in the existing infrastructure. Majority of weavers have only broken thatched sheds for weaving and those are old ones. In rainy season they are not able to weave with these sheds and have not enough facilities to store the cloth. The weak infrastructure challenges their livelihood situation and the low earnings from this industry are not helpful for the betterment of the infrastructure.

3. LIVELIHOOD OUTCOMES OF THE HANDLOOM WEAVERS

The handlooms are the main livelihood asset of the weavers. So, the livelihood outcome will be fully depended upon handlooms and its allied activities. It was observed that majority of looms were owned by the master weavers, those they owned by joint family system or by their ancestors. At the same time majority (48%) of weavers in this community are wage weavers and their livelihood is mostly depending on their wage in this industry. It was also found that 40 percent of weavers earn the wage range of 150- 200 and in a day. The wage is purely depending upon the capability and skills of weavers. They get 120 rupees for each 4 meter of cloth.

The availability of raw materials is a dependent factor in handloom industry. It was observed that the raw material is available according to the need of weavers. Majority of weavers are directly purchasing raw materials like yarn, color and gums etc. from local markets. It is very easily affordable to the weavers because of getting raw materials from local traders in installment base.

The sale of cloth after weaving also contributes to the livelihood outcomes of the weavers. Majority of weavers have an average monthly sale of cloth in the range of 10000-20000 rupees. In the case of wage weavers the cloth is sold by the master weavers. Though the master weavers are the main producers of cloth and more than half of the cloth is sold by them. But the livelihood situation of master weavers is also still continuing as old stage. The exploitation and inadequate prizes for the commodity by the traders are also one of the reasons for the low income in the industry. The study noticed that the local traders are making more profit by giving cheap prizes for their commodity. So, the inadequate marketing facilities are one of the problems to be exploited by local traders.

The house hold income is the main source of livelihood of weavers. The average monthly incomes of majority of weavers are in the range of 4000-6000 rupees in a month. Among the weavers 42 percent get 6000-10000 rupees per month. The master weavers get more income than the wage weavers. The master weavers can increase their income through establishing new loom and appointing skillful workers but the wage weaver remains in the same position. For wage weavers, their physical wellbeing to weave becomes reduced day by day and their productive capacity will become low. The wage weavers are not directly selling the commodity and their economic transformation will be in very slow level.

The study also found that a large number (86%) of weavers have not any other income sources than weaving such as any livestock's, agriculture land or rental houses, etc. The present income is not suitable to occupy other income sources and the work nature is not favoring to maintain the livestock and agricultural resources also.

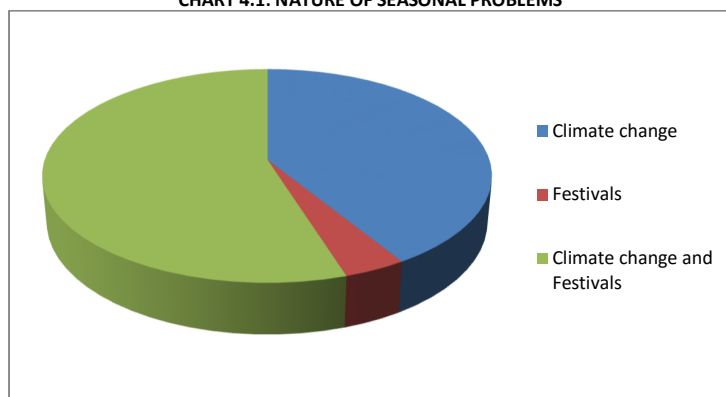
4. VULNERABILITY CONTEXT TO LIVELIHOOD

There are many vulnerable contexts in handloom weaving. It directly affects the livelihood of the handloom community. The indebtedness is one of the main threats for the livelihood of the handloom weavers. If the income is less than the expenditure, the households have to borrow money from others for their consumption expenditure. The study observed that 64 percent of weavers have house hold debt.

The diseases related to the handloom weaving are one of other main vulnerable contexts of the livelihood of handloom weavers. It was observed that among 50 weavers 42 percent of them have any type of diseases like chest pain, nose block, bone problems, etc. These diseases reduce the physical capacity for weaving and the average man days become decreases. It also directly affects the livelihood of the weavers. These diseases are related to their work nature.

The seasonal issues also contribute for the vulnerability for the livelihood of the handloom weavers. It is a worsening threat of the handloom community. All weavers in Balaramapuram handloom community affected the seasonal problems. Among the total weavers 48 percent of weavers affected the weather changing problem and remains affect both the weather changing and problems during festivals. In rainy seasons the weavers cannot weave due to the technological problems and during the festivals like 'Onam' also they have no proper weaving because of marketing problems of cloth. During these period weavers becomes unemployed. They should have to search other job for their livelihood during this period.

CHART 4.1: NATURE OF SEASONAL PROBLEMS



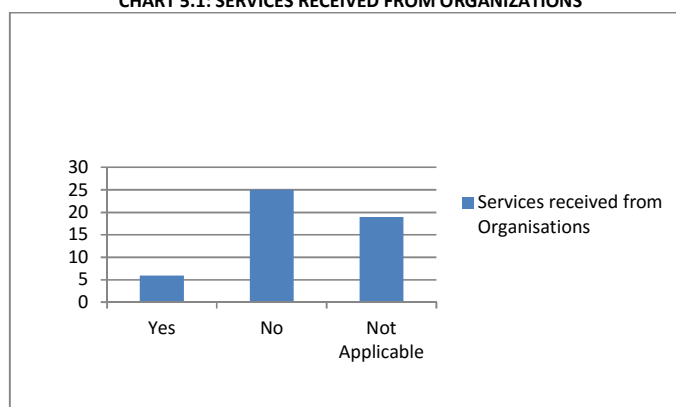
The frequency of the seasonal problems are has also analysed in this study. It was found that a large number (56%) of weavers affected seasonal problems during the periods up to 45-55 days. Majority of weavers are not going to other jobs instead of their traditional jobs during this long time and fell in debt.

The new trends in textile industry make a big change in the livelihood of the weavers. The main reasons observed for the decrease of production are the competitions from power looms, inadequate machineries, lack of demand for handloom cloth etc.

5. INSTITUTIONAL PROCESSING TO THE LIVELIHOOD OF HANDLOOM COMMUNITY

The institutions who are working for the welfare of weavers carry very big roles in the development of handloom community. The study observed that the 60 percent of weavers in Balaramapuram handloom community are the members of any type of organizations like cooperative societies, religious groups, etc. But only 12 percent of weavers benefitted at least any short services like financial, marketing and raw material etc. Though millions of money granted by the state and central government as financial assistance for the up gradation of handloom sector through cooperative societies it is not reaching to the weavers. Though the weavers have memberships in cooperative societies with 5-10 years majority of them have not get any short service till now. But at the same time the cooperative societies are flourished with lot of money and looms. Majority of cooperative societies are bogus and only in papers and a unethical relationship is exist among the government institutions and cooperatives in the case of financial matters.

CHART 5.1: SERVICES RECEIVED FROM ORGANIZATIONS



CONCLUSION

The present study on handloom community in Kerala explores the data related to livelihood assets, livelihood strategies, vulnerability contexts and different institutional processing for the livelihood development of the handloom weavers. The handloom sector give livelihood for hundreds people live in Balaramapuram Grama Panchayath. The livelihood of the weavers is completely associated with handloom weaving and allied activities. The main income source is the handlooms which they owned. The weavers in Balaramapuram are traditional weavers. Due to the low profit and low earning weavers are now withdrawing from this industry seeking with other jobs.

As a cottage industry it is most beneficial for the women labors and they get equal wage rate and working as men. In the context of huge amount of unemployment in India the handloom sector can be transformed to the employment generation sector for the lacks of people live in India.

The weavers face more vulnerable situations in their traditional occupation. The emergence of power loom, lack of demand of handloom products, lack of innovative design and seasonal problem etc made decrease in production and it directly affects the weavers. The diseases related to the weaving are one of main threat for this sector. The weavers face more problems like availability of adequate marketing system and availability of yarn and other raw material as their needs. The non availability of credits and loans causes weavers to fall in debt. The new technologies and design can promote this industry much more.

Though government brings so many program and schemes as the financial assistance for the weavers it is not properly reaching to the weavers. The study analyzed the working of cooperative societies for the livelihood of the handloom weavers. Most of the cooperative societies are not working purposefully among the weavers. The weavers don't get any benefit from them. The government doesn't conduct any proper inspection in the working of the cooperatives.

SUGGESTION AND RECOMMENDATION

- The wage rate of the wage weavers has to increase or modify.
- Appropriate Training interventions for weavers/master weavers in hard/soft skills.
- Give emphasis on modernization and provision of technological inputs for improving productivity, quality and finish.
- To improve the marketing of handlooms products, strengthening the infrastructure of marketing complexes, organizing the training of marketing personnel and intensive publicity.
- Most of the cooperative societies are only in papers. Though government gives financial assistance through them it is not reaching to the weavers. So, bring a systematic inspection body to evaluate the working of cooperative societies among handloom weavers.
- Bring a systematic credit system through banks or cooperative societies and save the weavers from the exploitation of the money lenders.
- The main livelihood of weavers is depended only in weaving and its allied activities. They affect livelihood problems in some particular seasons. So, the government should have to bring special financial packages for weavers in those seasons or give alternative employment opportunities.

- Most of the weavers are women. The adequate gender based facilities for women should be bringing in work sheds.
- Ensure and examine the availability of government programs and schemes of the weavers.
- Bring the infrastructure up gradation for comfortable weaving and give support for the infrastructural development by giving subsidies.
- The new generation people are not motivated or attracted to this industry. As the handloom sector is the one of employment generation sector should have to give the motivation to younger generation to engage in handloom Industry.
- Give financial assistance to the diseased weavers and ensure the availability of pensions among them.
- Bring new designs and innovation in handloom weaving.

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