



SOCIO AND ECONOMIC CONDITIONS OF HANDLOOM WEAVERS IN KARUR DISTRICT- AN ANALYTICAL STUDY

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Abstract

Handlooms have been known to India right from the historic ages. Basic needs of the human being are the food, clothes and shelter. This study explores the dynamics of local-level trade in plant-based handloom product of Karur District. The handloom weaving sector plays an important role in the financial development of the rural areas. It contributes significantly by generating more employment opportunities and providing brass to the rural poor. In the present study, the researcher has analyzed the socio-economic profile of handloom weavers in Karur District. This study is based on both primary and secondary data sources. The study results revealed that the situation of the weavers was worrying due to illiteracy, financial constraints, health problems, and poor Government support. Handloom industry occupies a distinguished place in preserving country's heritage and culture, and hence plays an imperative role in the economy of the country. However, this sector is faced with various problems, such as, superseded technology, unorganised production system, low productivity, insufficient operational capital, conservative manufactured goods range, and feeble marketing links. Further, handloom sector has always been a feeble competitor against powerloom and mill sectors. Against this backdrop, the present work attempts to make an in depth study into the life and misery of handloom households. It covers households located in selected prominent areas of this sector.

Introduction

The Handloom Industry of India is essentially a traditional one. It is also a cottage industry in the best sense of the term, as the work is done largely in the home of the weaver himself. The loom just like the plough symbolizes the ethos of India. In fact, the handloom industry along with agriculture is the mainstay of our rural economy. The handloom textile is unique to mill made textiles and it has a very good glorious heritage, over the years. Handloom goods are no longer the choice of the poor alone, but a favourite of the elite in India and abroad. Next to agriculture the handloom industry accounts most of rural employment and income. It meets about a quarter of the clothing needs of the country.

Indian Handloom Industry is an ancient cottage industry of India with a decentralized set up. This industry is a source of livelihood for millions of people and contributes a major part towards employment. The tradition of making handicrafts and weaving by hand constitutes one of the richest and vibrant aspects of the Indian cultural heritage. This sector is one of the largest unorganized sectors after agriculture having being an advantage of less capital intensive, minimal use of power, eco-friendly, adaptability to market requirements etc. But at the same time, this industry is facing multifarious problems that some other industries did not face. The government of India also acting toward the development and improvement of its productivity and marketing, still weavers are facing livelihood crisis. So that it is the need of the today to identify the problems as well as the strengths and weaknesses of handloom industry to make it profitable.

The textile cottage industry includes cotton, silk, and bleaching, dying, finishing, hosiery, lace embroidery, silk reeling, silk twisting. It is the chief means of livelihood to people who entirely depend upon it. Handloom sector plays an important role in state economy. Weaving is the basic process among the various manufacturing stages of handloom clothes. It is defined as a frame for weaving equipped with some wooden devices. The sound of the handloom is the music of rural home. In the process of weaving the handloom weavers achieve harmony of motion and rhythms in Karur. It is only in this content the Tamilnadu Handloom weaver's cooperative society limited popularly known as co-optex was established in 1935.

Review Of Literature

Kanagasabapathi and Shree¹ (2006) concluded that many of the textile units in Karur are running on supplier basis. The margins realised were very low. Exporters take the major portion of profit, while the manufacturers are not aware of the international market conditions and their opportunities. Karur had witnessed a boom in local manufacturing as well as exports. At the same time, it faced fundamental problems associated with growth centres. Moreover, the industry is presently witnessing serious competition in a globalised scenario. To maintain the growth and make further progress, necessary steps have to be taken jointly by the industry and the authorities concerned.

Sharma Shantanu Nandan² (2006) has pointed various Government and Semi- Government schemes for Small Scale and Cottage Industries. Various facilitation centers will help in guiding the entrepreneurs.

Vijalakshmi³ (2009) evaluates the benefits of weavers in handloom weavers co-operative societies in Coimbatore district. The study found that the improved performance of the restructured co-operatives is evident in the rise in exports of the region. The inherent characteristics of the co-operatives qualify these societies as an instrument for development mixing the benefits of private ownership with common good. The study suggests that the research and development must be encouraged in co-operative societies for product development and effective market practices.

Manikandan and Thirunuvakkarsu⁴ (2010) in their article entitled, “Tamil Nadu Powerloom Industry Issues & Challenges (A Critical Study)” discussed that the Tamilnadu powerloom sector is expanding on the strength of cluster wise product specialization, which is a major competitive advantage for this sector. It contributes well over one fourth of the country’s total textile manufacturing meant for domestic consumption as well as for exports. In order to achieve the target of \$ 50 billion set for the textile export by the year 2010 can be achieved only modernizing the powerloom sector in the following ways: 1.Modernisation of powerloom service centre 2. Powerloom Modernisation 3.Skill up gradation 4.Establishment of new powerloom centres 5.Establishment of powerloom complex 6. Investment subsidy in automatic and semi-automatic powerloom units. The Indian Textile Industry has a huge presence in the economic life of the country. Apart from providing one of the essential necessities of life i.e. cloth, the textile industry contributes on 14% to the country's industrial output and about 17% to export income. After agriculture this industry provides employment to greatest number of people in India employing 35 million people.

TNN⁵ (2011) has mentioned that the state government has taken several decisions to encourage weavers to boost handloom industry in the state. The state government with the cooperation of the Centre has formulated several schemes to ameliorate the socio-economic conditions of the weavers belonging to the handloom industry.

A. Kumudha,M.Rizwana⁶ (2013) in her paper Problems faced by handloom industry-A study with handloom weavers co-operative societies in Erode district the paper focus on problems of handloom industry and problems of handloom co-operative society weavers.

A. Ramesh⁷ (2015) in his topic “Analysis of profitability and Financial Health of the Handloom weavers co-operatives societies in Karur District” studied the profitability and financial health about the handloom weaver’s society. He concluded that there is no significance in achieving gross profit of the various societies.

Statement of The Problem

As the available literature reflects, there is no much studies conducted on socio-economic status of Karur district. In spite of various schemes implemented for the development of social and economic conditions of weaving communities yet there is no much improvement seen. They faced more vulnerability especially due to weak organisational structure, administrative failures, financial disincentive, poor infrastructure, decentralized looms, poor marketing etc. Thus the present study aims at exploring the socio-economic profiles of the weaving community to examine their status in Karur district of Tamilnadu State.

Despite of its widespread across the country, there is significant under utilization of capacity in the industry. However, this sector is confronted with various problems, such as, irregular and inadequate supply of hank yarn. Sharp rise in prices of yarn, dyes and chemical is also the most disturbing factor contributing to the crisis of handloom sector at present. Inadequate marketing facilities have resulted in periodical accumulation of stocks, resulting in underemployment and unemployment among weavers.

The study emphasises the issues covering gender, age composition, social grouping and educational levels, income of the respondents, expenditure pattern of the weavers, category of assets owned by the weavers, indebtedness, organisational support for financial assistance and other problems faced by handloom weavers. The need for yet another study is felt only to highlight the fact that there has been no much change in the social and economic well-being of the handloom workers in spite of several initiatives and measures.

Objectives of The Study

The primary objective of the present research work is to analyse the socio-economic conditions of the handloom weavers. The detailed objectives of the study are:

1. To study the social and health conditions prevailing among the handloom weavers societies
2. with an objective to find out their place in the society.
3. To examine the policy of the Government of India towards promoting the handloom industry.
4. To give the suitable suggestions to develop the handloom industry



Scope of The Study

Weaving is one of the most ancient handicrafts patronized all over the world and at all times. Like food and shelter, clothing is also a basic need of every human being. Handloom sector has developed over the years and to see how far it is meeting the threats of globalization a study of handloom sector has been undertaken. In the present economic environment where dependency on foreign capital and know-how is increasing all round, the handloom industry presents a sustainable model of economic activity that is not energy intensive and has low capital costs, as well as an extensive skill base. The principle of hereditary continuance of occupation for generations introduced an element of stability and also enabled the craftsmen to venture further and acquire greater proficiency.

Collection of Data

The researcher has collected the Primary data from 54 respondents by supplying the questionnaire and through direct interview method. Secondary data are those data which are already collected by some agency, through books, magazines and through internet for some other purpose. The data composed during the project on which the information where derived from so many sources.

primary data

They are predominantly collected from the survey instrument the questionnaire contained qualitative data as well as quantitative data. Some questions were closed ended and some others were close ended for these study 54 respondents were selected. The researcher personally questioned all these respondents.

Secondary Data

Secondary data for the study collected from the published and unpublished sources annual reports, research, journals and various related website.

Sampling Techniques

Simple random sampling was used in the research. Socio-economic conditions of Handloom Weavers in Karur where the sampling unit and people of Karur were the sample population. Questionnaire has been collected from 54 respondents randomly through friends and relatives.

Area of Study: This study was confined to Handloom Weavers of Karur alone.

Statistical Tools

The tables are prepared with the help of the primary data for easy understanding and these data are used for drawing simple bar diagram and pie diagram. The researcher has also applied percentage, average and correlation for analyzing the primary data.

Analysis And Interpretation Of Data

The data are collected from 54 sample respondents by supplying the questionnaires, the data are analyzed on the basis of age wise, sex wise, educational qualifications, family size, monthly income, assets owned, major health ailments, number of workers involved in production, awareness of the various schemes and relationship between the production and Sales. Out of the 54 respondents, 38 are males and 26 are females.

Characteristics Of Handloom Industry

The basic meaning of Indian Handloom is creating designs by keeping traditions intact. Its power is such that Handloom Industry contributes around 14 percent of total production and 30 percent of the total export business.

The main characteristics of Indian Handloom Industry are as follows-

- The Handloom sector occupies a distinct and unique place in the Indian economy and the largest generator of non-farm rural employment.
- It is a largely household based industry carried out by the contribution of family members.
- This Industry is an ancient cottage industry which is seems to have started between 5000 & 3000 B.C.
- Handloom Industry is best known for its distinctiveness style, traditionalism and modern technology.
- Handloom Industries are decentralized located both in urban and rural.
- Handloom weaving is a hereditary occupation which requires the contribution of various people. A single man cannot do weaving so whole family including women and children indulges in this work.
- Most of the handloom units are run either as sole proprietors or on partnership basis.



Challenges Of Handloom Industry

Presently Handloom Industry is facing many problems related to raw material, marketing and sales network which can be explained as follows:

Lack of sufficient and reliable data

Lack of reliable data with respect to number of crafts person, their socio-economic conditions, livelihood conditions, details of families and their productivity, is a major shortcoming that affects the planning and policy formation of Handloom Sector. Absence of data hinders the growth of Handloom sector due to non- possibility of inter-sectoral comparison.

Deprived quality of yarn

In present scenario the major problem which is faced by Handloom sector is non- availability of good quality of yarn at reasonable price. Most weavers are from the families which are economically disadvantaged and having limited access toward markets which can provide them good quality of yarn.

Economic crisis

Investment is a very important source for any industry to become successful but in handloom sector there is a shortage of credit facilities so financial crisis is very major problem in Handloom sector. Lack of financial literacy among weavers increases credit related challenges for them.

Lack of proper infrastructure

The availability of infrastructure required by the Handloom sector is less satisfactory which leads to a loss in their competitiveness. They do lack even the basic facilities like clean drinking water, sanitation, electricity etc.

Education, skills, research and training

Our formal education systems have not included teaching, training and skill development for the Handloom sector in their mainstream activities. As a result the responsibility of introducing innovation in techniques and designs is left to the initiative of weaver families who usually having a lack of resources for this critical field.

Shortage of input and their rising cost

The pre-requisite of Handloom Industry is cotton, yarn, silk, art silk, chemicals, dyes & zari. Weavers purchase yarn from private traders who usually charge very high cost and the transportation costs are also so high. Even after the high cost the supply of yarn is not regular so the problem becomes more acute due to lack of economies.

Problem of working capital

Working capital is the main source for maintaining a industry but in handloom sector working capital is also a major crisis so weavers become unable to purchase the raw material even at the declining prices.

Poor management

Inefficiency of management is also a major constraint in the working and growth of Handloom sector. There is a lack of Structured Board of Directors which affects the decision making policies of the sector.

Type and size of weavers' family

In Indian society, families are broadly grouped into nuclear, joint and extended joint families. By tradition, joint family and extended joint families are more popular in the society. Whereas nuclear family system is widely prevalent in the present society and are mainly found in the urban areas. Slowly, this trend is also extending to the rural areas. Type and size of the family are important issues in the study of social conditions of any group of respondents. Nuclear families have turned out to be the general social norm. The same situation is also found among the respondents. More than half of the respondents are organised as nuclear families, thus devoid of the elderly care and advice. The respondents in the study area felt that the joint families get more earnings than the nuclear families, since weaving is a group activity. Size of the family is also an important factor in terms of economic status and extent of help available for carrying out handloom operations. Though the respondents are maintaining nuclear families, the size of the family is larger, up to six members. However, majority of the respondents have only up to three members as their family size.

Education levels of children of sample weavers

Social status of individuals can also be understood from the opportunity available to provide good education to their children. An attempt has been made to find out the education levels of children of the respondents. Nevertheless, the schemes

introduced by both the Central and State Governments like Education for All, Education Guarantee Scheme, Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA), Mid-Day Meal Scheme, etc., are not touching the lives of the people involved in the handloom sector. It is also important to note that the provisions of Right to Education are also not able to improve the level of education of the sample weavers. This is mainly due to the innocence and poor educational background of the selected weavers.

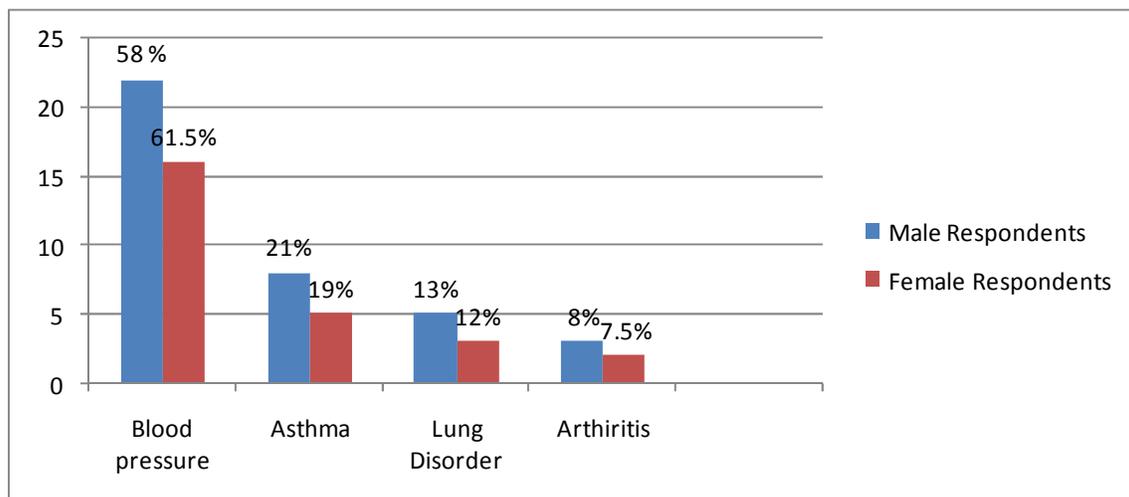
Occupational Diseases of the Handloom Weavers

The best wealth of a man is health. Good health can be defined as the state of wellbeing where a person is free from all kinds of physical or mental illness. It is the most precious possession of a man. Better health is one of the prerequisites for improved productivity and production. The better the health of the individual, the better will be his productive capacity. It is too common for handloom weavers to suffer from a variety of occupational health hazards and these problems become severe and acute, as they become aged. Occupational diseases are induced by prolonged work, excessive physical exertion, association of psychological stress in work, harmful factors inherent in materials used by the weavers, and working in poor ventilated and illuminated conditions. Some of the health hazards associated with handloom workers include eye sight, early cataract, loss of vision for the work, high or low blood pressure, heart problem, damage of lungs, filaria, arthritis and musculoskeletal disorder.

The other important serious health hazards similar to handloom weavers are those related to malnourishment. This is largely evident by their disproportionate body structure, underweight, loss of hair and anaemia. The aging process among the handloom weavers appears to be very rapid. A majority of them appear much older than their age due to continuous movement of the body in their weaving activity. It is true that the sample weavers are suffering from more than one type of disease. But to highlight the incidence of particular disease all of them are put together.

HEALTH PROBLEMS AMONG THE HANDLOOM WEAVERS

S.no	Problems	No of male respondents	Percentage	No of female respondents	Percentage
1.	Blood pressure	22	58	16	61.5
2.	Asthma	8	21	05	19
3.	Lung disorder	5	13	03	12
4.	Arthritis	3	08	02	7.5
	TOTAL	38	100	26	100



Source: Primary data

Further, the study has been revealed that most of the people are affected due to blood pressure and asthma problem in the area. Overtime people engaged in Handloom weaving start facing health ailments due to the hard working conditions. The major health ailments which people face are blood pressure, asthma, lung disorder and arthritis. It shows the major ailments which people are prone to in Handloom weaving. The major ailments were blood pressure and asthma. Weavers must know benefits of these schemes, especially those living in the back of beyond.

Exposure of Health Insurance

Health insurance is a mechanism by which a person protects himself from financial loss caused due to accident and/or disability. The Government of India is providing a Health Insurance Scheme for weavers for providing access to healthcare facilities for all diseases through ICICI Lombard General Insurance Company Limited. In the study area, out of the 54 sample weavers, only 10 per cent of the weavers have joined the health insurance schemes. The remaining respondents are unable to undergo any health insurance scheme due to lack of awareness and savings.

Level of Poverty among the Weavers

It is often believed that handloom work is mostly undertaken by economically weaker households, and they lack adequate financial resources.

Indebtedness and Purpose for Taking Loans

Indebtedness is one of the biggest and most serious problems of Indian economy. It means an obligation to pay money to another party. In India, poor farmers, agricultural labour, construction labour, weavers, allied workers, etc., are unable to repay a loan and it leads to the problem of indebtedness.

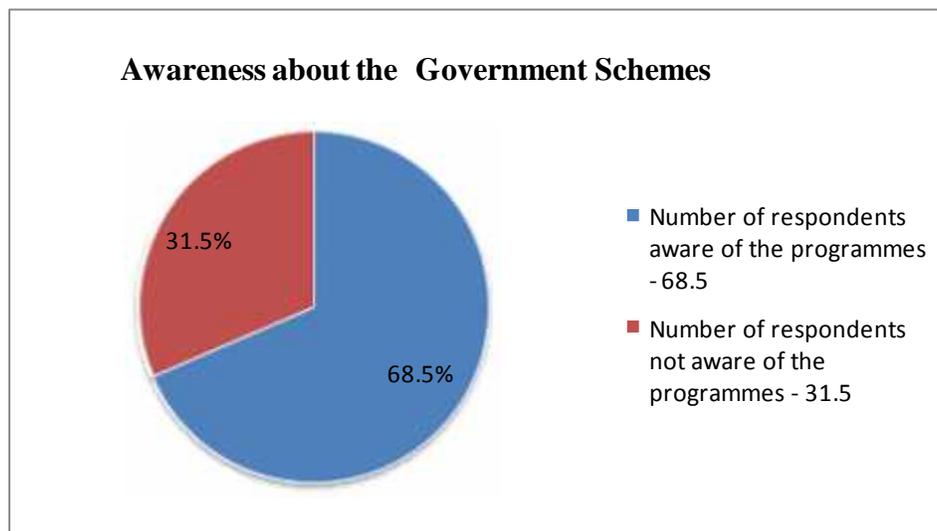
Migratory Character

Migration is an important feature of human civilization. It reflects human endeavour to survive in the most testing conditions, both natural and man-made. Migration in India is mostly influenced by social structures and pattern of development. Uneven development is the main cause of migration. The landless poor who mostly belong to lower castes, indigenous communities and economically backward regions constitute the major portion of migrants. The weaving community in Karur district cannot escape from the phenomenon of migration.

Drinking water facility

Safe drinking water is of paramount importance for healthy living. Since independence, the government has been undertaking various programmes to provide safe drinking water to the masses. Availability of safe drinking water and its use by the households of the surveyed handloom weavers have been studied. Among the 54 surveyed households, the present study revealed that 35 per cent were not getting safe drinking water. Only 19 per cent of the weaver families were getting safe and protected drinking water. Majority of respondents belonging to the areas of Vengamedu, Senguntahpuram and Ramakrishnapuram are collecting drinking water from public hand pumps/dug-wells installed in their areas by local authorities like Panchayats/ Municipalities. The scarcity of drinking water is felt relatively more particularly in summer season.

Awareness of Welfare Schemes Provided by Central/State Government to Handloom Workers



Around 68.5% of weavers and weaver-masters (72.6 percent) were found to be aware of central and state government schemes like Integrated Handlooms Development Scheme, Mahatama Gandhi Bunkar Bima Yojana, Health Insurance Scheme, Marketing & Export Promotion Scheme and Yarn Supply Scheme. Government should take necessary steps to make these schemes aware to all sections of the weaver community.

High yarn prices hit exporters

Home textile exporters here have been pushed to the wall as prices of yarn have shot up by 35 % in the last three months. The abnormal rise is attributed to direct fallout of the Central government tinkering with its cotton and yarn export policy.

Cotton is exported in huge volumes ignoring the demand of the domestic consumers such as spinning mills who cater to the requirements of specific categories such as home textile exporters. Around half the spinning mills in the nation are in Tamil Nadu and consequently the demand for yarn is high in the State. Another factor that contributed to the rise in yarn price is the lesser arrival of cotton in the markets.

In Karur, hundreds of home textile manufacturers and exporters have been affected by the steep rise in prices of yarn and are struggling to meet their orders. Though the Karur home textile industry fetches foreign exchange to the tune of Rs. 4,000 crore a year, the rise in yarn prices have upset their calculations and future plans.

Home textiles products are made from lower count yarn for which the consumption of cotton is high compared to higher count yarn. With spinning mills running short of cotton, they are inclined to produce higher count yarn which leads to huge shortfall of lower count yarn for the Karur manufacturers.

Impact of Globalisation

While there are supposed to be some sops for traditional industries such as handlooms in the WTO agreement, Governments in India have failed to educate the handloom weavers on what these provisions are, and how the application of the same would benefit or affect them negatively. In any case, it is obvious that interests of the handloom sector have not been integrated into the national trade negotiating positions.

India's textiles and clothing industry is one of the mainstays of the national economy. It is also one of the largest contributing sectors of India's exports, contributing nearly 13.25 per cent of the country's total exports basket. The textiles industry is labour intensive and is one of the largest employers and has realized export earnings worth of \$41.57 billion in 2013-14.

The textile industry has two broad segments, namely, handloom, handicrafts, sericulture, power looms in the unorganized sector, and spinning, apparel, garmenting, made-ups in the organised sector. The new Government has taken many initiatives for the development of the textiles sector. Some of the initiatives are as follows.

Setting up integrated textile parks

The setting up of integrated textile parks is one of the flagship schemes of the Ministry of Textiles. It aims to assist small and medium entrepreneurs in the textile industry to clusterize investments in textile parks by providing financial support for world class infrastructure in the parks.

Handloom development

Specific steps have been initiated for revival of the handloom industry, based on its inherent strength, for production of high value items. Focus is on assisting weavers with designs, marketing and improved wages. The National Institute of Fashion Technology and leading members of the fashion industry have been roped in for design support to weavers.

Suggested Remedial Measures For The Growth And Development of Handloom Industries

1. In order to improve productivity and bring in higher level of consistency in products, more sophisticated tools and processes should be developed and made available to the weavers.
2. Awareness should be made about the existing schemes so that they can take the benefit of initiatives taken by the government and various agencies.
3. Weavers need to be provided with market intelligence so that they can produce market relevant product.
4. Proper education and training should be provided to the weavers about the modern and innovative techniques of production.
5. Fairs and exhibitions should be organized so that they can get the exposure of customers understanding.
6. The weavers should be incentivized to make Handloom and Handicraft their main source of earning by lowering cost of raw materials and making loans readily available.
7. There must be a formulation of pricing strategy on the basis of market demand.
8. Activities of production of Handloom like manufacturing, supply and marketing should be properly organized.
9. There is a need to create awareness about the features and advantages of handloom products. Effective publicity should be done through appropriate media mix.
10. There is a need of regular quality assessment of yarns, dyeing, finishing and packaging to create a permanent space for the handloom products in the national and international market.



Conclusion

There is a future for handloom sector in India beyond 2015, for different reasons, even by the most pessimistic analysis. However, the living and working conditions for handloom weavers is likely to decline, unless there are specific interventions. Government is likely to reduce its role further, irrespective of the party in power. Competition is likely to increase from other sub-sectors of Indian textile industry, with government playing a partisan role. However, the bright future of handloom sector is ensured by the very characteristic of this competition – hitting at the weakness of countries. Environmental change and emphasis on conservation of natural resources should be able to help the handloom sector. However, one needs active government support here. Markets, both domestic and foreign, would continue to demand handloom products given the elitism and niche factors inherent in handloom production. But, handloom sector would be constrained by the raw material accessibility issues, unless resolved favourably. Thus the district must develop a user friendly and skill development training system by the skilled master weavers. Introduction of low cost machines will make the weaving process more efficient, promotion of market linkage, linkage with the banks and other financial institution for credit will motivate them for working and also linkage with designers can provide creative designs for development of weavers. Participation in trade fairs will lead to promotion of their products and also market entrepreneurship etc. The handloom industry is one of the major industries that need immediate care and attention. With this declining trend in the handloom sector the problems of unemployment will aggravate. So the policy maker should realize the importance of handloom sector and allocate the required funds for the upliftment of handloom weavers to avoid the decline in handloom industry.

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