

IDENTITY CRISIS LOOMING IN INDIAN HANDLOOM SECTOR FOLLOWING COVID – 19 LOCKDOWNS

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ABSTRACT

Handlooms establish a timeless aspect of rich cultural heritage of India. As a commercial activity, handlooms inhabit a place second to agriculture in providing a living to the people. The element of art and craft present in Indian handlooms makes it a probable sector for the upper sectors of global and domestic market. The crisis caused by Covid – 19 gave rise to an unexpected disturbance of business across the globe and the Indian economy. The handloom sector has too been sternly affected as with all the areas in economy with their traditional and contemporary markets for artisans being totally closed. The sector has experienced a sudden delaying of orders as retailers themselves are closed due to the worldwide lockdown and no signs of retrieval as the crisis unfolds. Cash flow has stopped, with buyers unable to make payments and no sales happening at all. Small artisans and producer groups do not have the financial cushioning to hold through such a crisis nor would they get credit supplies from raw material suppliers.

KEYWORDS: *Handloom Crisis, Problem of Weavers, Identity Crisis of Weavers,*

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INTRODUCTION:

The COVID- 19 pandemic which is said to have emerged from Wuhan (China) has caused an enormous effect on almost every society of the world. Due to its rapid spread countries were forced to stop international travelling. Lockdown came up as the only method to control the spread of pandemic and Almost every country has adopted this method.

During the lockdown in Indian Society, multiple issues related to social, educational, economical, political, agricultural, psychological levels and many more have been noticed which has created the distressing effect on the lives of the people.

The world economy is seeing its greatest fall ever. Corona virus has largely impacted the growth of almost every country and is responsible for the slump in GDP worldwide. As per Federation of Indian chambers of commerce and Industry (FICCI), 53% of companies are impacted by Covid - 19. Slow economic activity is resulting in cash flow problems eventually impacting repayments, interests, taxes etc.

Over 82% of small businesses have experienced a negative impact and 70% believe it will take them nearly a year to recover demand levels prior to Covid – 19, according to a survey by Dun & Bradstreet, a provider of commercial data, analytics and insights for business.

The Indian Handloom Sector has been one of the worst hit sectors due to Covid – 19 crisis. We all are aware of this fact that handloom weavers and their societies are facing adversities due to availability of cheaper imported fabric mainly from China and stiff competition from power loom and mill sector due to high input cost and low productivity.

After Covid – 19 crisis the handloom sector is facing one of its worst crisis due to reduced trade (export & import) , low global demand, suspension of manufacturing units, factory workers staying at home and disruption in supply chains.

The condition created by CORONA virus has forced weavers to be idle without any productivity. And with this their survival becomes an ultimate question mark.

OBJECTIVES:

1. To get an idea of Economical status of handloom weavers.
2. To find out the social problems faced by weavers.
3. To describe the aspects of issues faced by handloom weavers.
4. To make a conceptual model on societal issues of handloom weavers.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY:

The scope of this research paper explores primary sources documenting the reason behind the Identity crisis looming in Indian Handloom Sector.

RIVIEW OF LITERATURE:

Goswami and Jain (2014) has conducted a study named, “Strategy for Sustainable Development of Handloom Industry”, based on the data collected through semi-structured interview schedule, observation method and secondary sources. The objective of this paper is to explore the problems of the handloom industry and further to suggest a suitable strategy. The strategy suitable for handloom sector is Differentiation strategy, which means creating something innovative which is best suited to handloom industry.

Tanusree (2015) has carried out a work entitled, “A study of the present situation of the traditional handloom weavers of Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, India” based on the data that have been collected through the in-depth interview, case study and focused group discussion. The paper briefs out the reasons behind the declining situation of handloom weaving in Varanasi. The study concludes with a suggestion that due to industrialization, the handloom weavers of Varanasi have lost their prestigious traditional industry, 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.

Roa and Rao (2015) has conducted a study named, “An Analysis of Handloom Industry in Andhra Pradesh – Challenges vs. Government schemes”, based on data that has been collected from both primary and secondary sources. The study explores the present schemes implemented by both state & central governments. It also explores the present status of Handloom Industry in Andhra Pradesh. The paper states various challenges faced by handloom weavers. Despite several measures taken by the government by the way of institutional support and direct financial assistance to the handloom weavers, they are suffering miserably due to myriad problems and are sustaining continuous losses.

Sadanandam (2016) has conducted research named “Socio-economic conditions of handloom weaving societies –A case study of Warangal district” to study the social conditions prevailing among the handloom weavers’ societies with an objective to find out their place in the society and to analyse the economic conditions of the handloom weaver’s societies and find out their economic status.

Jain and Gera (2017) have conducted research named “An Analytical Study of Handloom Industry of India” based primarily on secondary data available on handloom sector of India. The findings of the paper suggest that the weavers lack knowledge about the modern techniques of production, packing, designing, promotion etc. Therefore, for the development and promotion of handloom industry there is a need of extensive research in this field.

Dr. R. Velmurugan & Mr.K.P. Balraj (2018) Power loom sector is growing on the strength of cluster wise product specialization, which is a major advantage for this sector. Tamil Nadu and considering its well-established handloom mindset, there is need for “Operation Transformation”

that will aim at raising its structural composition, technology levels of looms and preparatory machinery as well as processing capabilities, quality compliance in manufacturing processes, man-power training besides aggressive and competent and competitive marketing practices.

D. Gowreeswari & Dr. M. V. Sathiya Bama (2019) Handloom weavers they are facing lot of problems like high cost of production, lengthy procedure to get loan, Ineffective Government schemes, increase quality of product etc. In present scenario, the handloom cotton sarees are traditional but its production is down due to high cost so that people do not prefer this cotton saree at this cost. But, the quality of the cotton saree is better than power loom saree.

METHODOLOGY:

The objectives of this research paper are accomplished with the help of the secondary Data. The study focuses only on handloom weavers and not others who are involved in the textile industry. A conceptual model has been designed to understand the issues of the weavers.

The Identity crisis looming in the handloom sector and the social status of the handloom weavers can be categorised in two different parts.

1. Internal factors / Controlled factors

- Weaver's skills
- Earning capacity of weavers
- purchasing power of weavers
- weaver's productivity
- awareness of government schemes etc.

2. External factors / Uncontrolled factors

- Dwindling wages
- Employment opportunities

- Government intervention
- Intervention of Natural Force(**Corona Virus**)
- Benefits reaching from schemes to weavers

Both the factors play a vital role in determining the problems of handloom weavers. The internal factor covers the issues faced by the weavers themselves whereas the external factors touch on the issues faced by weavers from the outside world.

The internal factors can be controlled because in this case the weavers can transform their life with their efforts. The external factors are uncontrolled which means that the transformational process is not in the hands of handloom weavers.

In the current scenario the entire world is facing a major challenge to lead their lives due to Corona Virus. Small businesses are the hardest hit across countries and sectors. Due to the Covid – 19 Pandemic and its impact the handloom industry everywhere in the country has been struggling for its survival.

The handloom industry was already suffering from low productivity, a good marketing structure, required amount of cotton and silk and inadequate modernization of production processes. Due to COVID – 19 pandemic some more existing factors increased in their intensity causing the identity crisis looming in the handloom industry. Those factors are as follows –

- Shortage and non-availability of raw materials
- Rising input costs
- Increased cost of production
- Lack of technology development
- Lack of availability of Market information
- Unable to exploit export potentiality

- Unfair practices of power looms

The 50 years old Firoz Ahmed from Banaras has not faced financial crisis of this sort all these years. The handloom weaver could not work for four months starting from March 24, 2020 as the country went into lockdown in four phases to stop the spread of Covid – 19.

Even now he will lose work for weeks if any of his colleagues contract the virus or the civic officials impose lockdown in his area or at his place of work. He is losing sleep when he thinks about managing the budget of his 7-member family.

“Life has been so difficult since the first lockdown. I could not work for four months. I did not earn anything during that period. My family survived the tough time because of the state governments food distribution programme’, he said.

CONCLUSION:

After digging into the problems of weavers by this study a solution is suggested for the issues of handloom weavers faced in today’s scenario. Major issues are not reaching government. Without government intervention none of these issues will be resolved by any private bodies.

Hence government should take active participation directly or indirectly. Indirect participation will activate co-operative societies, owner’s community to be strengthened and to offer financial assistance to the handloom weavers.

Some of the other strategic choices adopted by the Indian government to contain the impact of COVID-19 on the textiles sector could be relaxation of tax compliance deadlines and rules, especially for the lower economic strata, so that consumer demand conditions do not deteriorate precipitously. Also, a more comprehensive financial package than the ones already announced (read: Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan), factoring in labour and export-intensive sectors

of the likes of textiles, could be announced to stem the negative fallout of the pandemic on the sector. The other major step could be concessions to exporters against the Remission of Duties or Taxes on Export Products scheme so that they are reimbursed for the hitherto unpaid duties and taxes.

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