Analyzing constraints of handloom weavers in the western zone of Tamil Nadu using rank-based quotient technique

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ABSTRACT

The handloom weavers were the backbone of Indian textile industry for many years. The weavers had maintained and transferred the tradition of uniqueness and excellence to many generations which made the Indian textile industry to hold a significant position in the contribution of GDP to the country's economic development. Despite being a labour-intensive sector, the population of handloom weavers has been reduced drastically in recent times. The present study was conducted to analyse the constraints faced by the weavers in the weaving industry in the western zone of Tamil Nadu. A total of 120 handloom weavers were selected as the study population through simple random sampling technique. Rank-based quotient technique was applied to find the major constraints of the handloom weavers and to prioritize them based on their significance. The involvement of middlemen followed by the competition from power loom sectors and low profit of the business were identified as the major problems among the weavers in the districts of Coimbatore and Erode.

Keywords: Handloom weavers; textile industry; constraints; rank-based quotient technique

INTRODUCTION

Handloom weaving was one amongst the richest and most vivacious facets of the native Indian cultural heritage. It was one of the biggest unorganized economic activities after agriculture and constituted an essential part of semi-rural livelihood. This industry generated employment for 43.31 lakh individuals involved in 23.77 lakh handloom units. The industry contributed almost 15 per cent of the cloth manufacturing in the country which gave way to the export earnings of the country. It was noted that 95 per cent of the world's hand-woven fabric came from India (Anon 2018). Handloom weaving was a largely decentralized sector and the weavers were chiefly from the susceptible and weaker sections of the society who weaved for their household needs and also contributed to the production in the textile sector. The weavers of various states in the handloom business were keeping the standards and traditional craft alive for many years (Anon 2015). Hence knowledge about their constraints could be helpful to identify their critical problems and to frame beneficial policies for them.

In a study Meher (2007) emphasized that there was a need for the Bargarh handloom cluster in Orissa to have direct market linkages with big traders, design development, improvement in dyeing quality, strong market base etc for the development of handloom weaving in the region. Elango (2009) reported that among handloom weavers in cooperative societies of Thiruchirappalli district in Tamil Nadu there was difference between the handloom weavers of different age groups as regards to the dimension of their problems but the number of looms owned by the weavers had no relationship to the dimensions of production, finance, marketing and the socio-economic problems faced by the weavers. The study suggested that the government should take steps to improve the literacy levels of handloom weavers, provide loans at easy terms to

weavers, start handloom research centres at district level and conduct exhibitions and fairs to promote handloom industry. Cathelina (2010) suggested that the government should give more publicity in foreign countries about the importance of handlooms and speciality in its weaving about the cooperative societies of Erode district in Tamil Nadu.

Sarma and Joglekar (2002) were of the opinion that though the contribution of the state handloom to the Indian culture as well as to the national exchequer presented a satisfactory picture, an insight into the socio-economic and working conditions of the weavers was tough one. At present most of the weavers were leading miserable life for which the main reason was due to improper technology and also the fruits of the industry were actually grabbed by the middlemen. Lopoyetum and Nelson (2003) found out the actual causes of low performance and ineffectiveness of weavers' cooperative societies in Tamil Nadu and suggested that the primary weavers' cooperatives should adopt effective selling strategies in order to increase their sales volume, attract new consumers and eventually provide sustainable employment opportunities to members or weavers.

In a study on social impact of handloom cooperatives on weavers in western Orissa, Mishra (1994) found that member weavers did not gain anything so far as exposure to mass media was concerned; they were a bit liberal towards status of women and their official and non-official contacts; their association with cooperative organizations did not help in participation in different organizational matters except the cultural one; member weavers were more aspirant for higher education of their children and spent more money for the same purpose and they were less interested to put their children in the traditional profession because of some sort of psychological dissatisfaction among them.

METHODOLOGY

The western zone of Tamil Nadu was selected as the study area as it had a significant number of weavers population. From the western zone, Coimbatore and Erode districts were purposefully chosen. Sixty sample respondents were selected using simple random sampling technique from each selected district. Thus a total of 120 handloom weavers were selected. Data were collected through personal interview method. Rank-based quotient (RBQ) technique (Sabarathnam 1988) was used to rank the constraints of the weavers.

RESULTS and DISCUSSION

It can be inferred from the data given in Table 1 that the calculated RBQ values ranged from 92.92 to 53.00. The highest RBQ value corresponded to the problem: middlemen involvement (92.92) followed by competitors from power loom (87.25) and low profit (86.42). However the high cost of production was ranked as least important constraint with RBQ value of 53.00.

The involvement of middlemen had the highest score among the fifteen constraints often faced by the weavers (RBQ value 92.92). It was found that the intermediaries played a major role in the weaving society between the consumers and the weavers. Even some weavers were restricted to sell their products directly to the consumers without the knowledge of the intermediaries. The competition from power looms (RBQ value 87.25) affected the weavers more as their orders were reduced due to the emergence of power looms. Due to unhealthy competition and changing consumer preference towards trendy clothing, many weavers were shifted to power looms. The power looms had required very less time than handlooms for weaving a saree or a towel. Hence the power loom products gradually gained the market potential over handlooms which consequentially reduced the profit level (RBQ value 86.42).

Weavers were in lack of proper government support (RBQ value 85.25). They were not getting their subsidies in case of purchase or establishment of handlooms (Surayya et al 2015). Some of the weavers who were registered in government cooperative societies were shifting towards private textile agents for getting better profit. Despite various government schemes and incentives provided for the promotion of handloom products, the artisans materials were not getting higher profit from their looms. This might be because of the lack of awareness about the government schemes and handloom policies among the weavers (RBQ value 82.83). The weavers suffered from various health issues (RBQ value 76.17) such as asthma, joint pain, nausea, back pain etc. The lung disorders were due to the dust particles emitted during the weaving operation. The sitting position of the weavers caused joint pains and back pain for those who worked for longer hours.

Table 1. Ranking of the constraints faced by the handloom weavers

Constraint	RBQ value	Rank
Involvement of middlemen	92.92	I
Competitors from power loom	87.25	II
Low profit	86.42	III
Lack of government support	85.25	IV
Lack of awareness about government programmes	82.83	V
Health problems	76.17	VI
Debt	74.67	VII
Inadequacy of loans and credit facilities	72.67	VIII
Lack of innovative fashionable designs	71.00	IX
Delayed payment by the buyers	67.42	X
Scarcity of good quality raw material	67.08	XI
High initial investment on infrastructure	62.67	XII
Excessive burden of work	58.50	XIII
Lack of technical expertise	56.42	XIV
High cost of production	53.00	XV

Most of the weavers were not even earning sufficient wages to run their day to day life which made them dependent on the money lenders. Hence the money borrowing and returning back were formed like a permanent loop for the weavers and they came under debt (RBQ value 74.67). Many financial institutions were not ready to provide loans or credit facilities for handloom weavers as they were financially unstable (RBQ value 72.67).

Most of the handloom weavers were following the traditional designs (RBQ value 71.00) which were transferred from generation to generation which showed country's heritage. But preference of people was changed according to the modern era. Consumers' preference was gradually shifted towards the power loom products than the hand-crafted materials as they were more innovative.

The delayed payment of money from the intermediaries or consumers was another limitation in the handloom sector (RBQ value 67.42). The deferred payment by the buyers made the weavers to wait for the purchase of raw material for their next weaving. The price of the handloom products would depend on its quality. The shortage of good quality yarn and silk (RBQ value 67.08) would drastically reduce their selling percentage as well as the profit (Shamitha and Balasubramanian 2018). The initial investment cost of handlooms was high (RBQ value 62.67) which included the loom cost, transportation and establishment cost. The low-income weavers were unable to own a loom because of the high initial investment.

Unlike power-looms, handlooms were labour-oriented and time consuming. A handloom weaver might require a minimum of two days to weave a single saree. Hence the weavers had to work hard to weave at least 10-15 sarees per month. This excessive work burden was also a constraint of the handloom weavers (RBQ value 58.50). Handloom weavers were not getting any consultancy services or technical expert advice in order to overcome their constraints or to improve their standard of living (RBQ value 56.42). The cost of raw material (RBQ value 53.00) required for handloom weaving such as yarn, silk, cotton, jute etc was high and the weavers could not purchase it on their own. The high cost of raw material was least important problem of the weavers.

CONCLUSION

Rank-based quotient method was used to analyse and prioritize the constraints faced by the sample weavers in the weaving and weaving-related industry. Some of the significant problems of the weavers in the weaving industry were collected from each respondent and RBQ technique was performed. From the results it could be concluded that involvement of middlemen was a major constraint faced by the weavers followed by the competitions from power loom sector and low profit of the business. Since the involvement of middlemen was the major constraint of the sample respondents, government should take measures to reduce the role of intermediaries which would pave the way for entrepreneurship as well as better standard of living of the weavers.

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