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A study on the handloom weavers belonging to weavers' cooperative societies of Assam

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Abstract

In the present paper an attempt has been made to analyse the weavers of weavers' cooperative society of Assam. The study is based on a sample of 600 weavers from 120 rural and urban based weavers' cooperative societies. To find out the current scenario of weavers both primary and secondary data has also been collected from all possible sources. The study reveals that the weavers' social and economic securities were declining day by day. Only long term vision, strong policies and schemes can protect this age old industry.

Keywords: Weaver, Weavers' cooperative society, Attitude, Awareness, Development Programme

Introduction

Handloom is an ancient industry of making cloth by hand in India and is environment-friendly. Handloom sector is one of the largest occupation generators next to agriculture generating jobs in both rural and urban areas of India as well. Nearly 23.77 lakh handlooms provide direct or indirect employment to 43.32 lakh weavers and allied workers, of which 36.33 lakh workers stay in rural areas and 6.98 lakh workers stay in urban areas. Among them 10.13 per cent belong to scheduled tribes, 18.12 per cent to scheduled castes, 45.18 per cent to OBC and 26.57 per cent are from other castes. Nearly 78 percent of handloom workers are women, of which the state of Sikkim records the lowest in number, whereas the state of Assam records the highest (Handloom Census 2013).

Co-operation has a very important role to play for the economic and social upliftment of an economy like Assam. Weavers' cooperative society has been playing a vital role in the country's economy by forming part of its rich heritage, and exemplifying the artistry of the weavers. Handloom weaving is one of the skilled professions and is passed on generation. Weavers are the pillar and foundation of weaving community. In the current scenario, the handloom workers were the poorest of the lot, least respected, socially and economically deprived and living in debts.

Materials and Methods

The study was conducted in the twelve districts of Assam. Tinsukia, Dibrugarh, Sibsagar, Jorhat, Golaghat, Nagaon, Morigaon, Kamrup, Darrang, Lakhimpur, Dhemaji and Sonitpur were selected purposively, in view of the prevalence of practice of weaving in those districts. 120 active Weavers' Cooperative Societies were selected for study. Out of which, 60 were rural based Weavers' Cooperative Societies and 60 were urban based Weavers' Cooperative Societies.

The numbers of selected weavers were 600 out of which 300 weavers were from Weavers' Cooperative Societies rural and 300 weavers from Weavers' Cooperative Societies urban.

Data were collected personally by interview method by using research schedule. The field data were supplemented by secondary data from various published and unpublished sources.

The collected data were analyzed statistically.

The following descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the data in the present study.

1. Frequency Distribution
2. Percentage
3. Mean
4. Standard deviation
5. Simple correlation coefficient test
6. Paired 't' test

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A scale was developed to measure “Attitude of member weavers of selected Weavers’ Cooperative Society towards development programmes” by using the technique of summated rating scale constructed by Likert (1932). These were then analyzed by working out with ‘t’ value.

$$t = \frac{\bar{X} H - \bar{X} L}{\sqrt{\frac{\sum (XH - \bar{X} H)^2 + \sum (XL - \bar{X} L)^2}{n(n-1)}}$$

Where, $\bar{X} H$ = The mean score on a given statement for the high group

$\bar{X} L$ = The mean score on the same statement for the low group

n= The number of subjects in the high or low group

$\sum (XH - \bar{X} H)^2$ = The variance of the distribution of responses of the high group to the statement.

$\sum (XL - \bar{X} L)^2$ = The variance of the distribution of responses of the low group to the statement

Finally 12 attitude statements with largest ‘t’ values were selected and considered valid for the scale. Both positive and negative statements are present in the scale.

The reliability of the scale was worked out by using the split half method as recommended by Edwards (1957). Correlation of coefficient was used to calculate by using the formula:

$$r = \frac{\sum xy - \frac{\sum X \cdot \sum y}{n}}{\sqrt{\left[\sum x^2 - \frac{(\sum x)^2}{n} \right] \left[\sum y^2 - \frac{(\sum y)^2}{n} \right]}}$$

Where, r = Karl Pearson’s co-efficient of correlation

x = Even number of statement

y = Odd number of statement

$\sum xy$ = Summation total of the product x and y

$\sum x^2$ = Sum of total of the square of x

$\sum y^2$ = Sum of total of the square of y

n = Total no. of respondents

The highly significant correlation co-efficient (r=0.84) between the two sets of scores on the same scale confirmed the reliability and internal consistency of the scales for measuring the attitude towards development programmes.

Results and Discussion

1. Membership strength of selected Weavers’ Cooperative Society

Majority of Weavers’ Cooperative Societies rural were having large type of membership strength consisting of 201 to 250 members but in case of Weavers’ Cooperative Societies urban, they were having medium type of membership strength consisting of 151 to 200 members.

2. Selection of members of selected Weavers’ Cooperative Society

As regard the selection of members, it was found that the entire rural and urban based Weavers’ Cooperative Societies had no restrictions found in respect of marital status, literacy

level, cast and economic level but had restrictions in case of age group. The lower age limit for membership was 18 years in all the societies indicating that children were not exploited. Skilled labour got more preferences over the unskilled or semi skilled ones.

3. Gender participation and type of person engaged of selected Weavers’ Cooperative Society

It was found that 81.3% of weavers of selected Weavers’ Cooperative Societies rural were female and only 18.7 per cent weavers were male, whereas in case of weavers of Weavers’ Cooperative Societies urban, 92.8 per cent were female and 7.2 per cent weavers were male indicating a very high participation of females in comparison to males in both rural and urban sectors It was also observed that part time weavers were comparatively more in all the selected WCSs.

4. Age, education and marital status of selected weavers

It was found that maximum weavers (46.67%) of Weavers’ Cooperative Societies rural were middle aged (36 years to 52 years) and only few (24%) of young age (18 years and 35 years). In case of Weavers’ Cooperative Societies urban it was found that 46 per cent of the weavers were middle aged (36 years to 52 years) and only few (23%) were of young age (18 years and 35 years). Weavers are mostly high school passed and only few were graduate. Both married and unmarried weavers were seen in the selected rural and urban based weavers’ cooperative societies.

5. Awareness of selected weavers about developmental programme/scheme

It was observed that 66.33 per cent of weavers of Weavers’ Cooperative Societies rural had medium level of awareness about development programmes. While 67.33 per cent of WCSsU had high level of awareness about development programmes.

6. Understanding of selected weavers about society’s objectives

It was found that 65 percent of weavers of Weavers’ Cooperative Societies rural had high level of understanding and only 35 per cent had low level of understanding about society’s objectives.

In case of the urban sector it was found that 74.33 percent of weavers of Weavers’ Cooperative Societies urban had high level of understanding and 25.67 per cent of weavers had low level of understanding about society’s objectives.

7. Closeness of selected weavers with programme functionaries

It was also found that 66 per cent of Weavers’ Cooperative Societies Rural had medium level of closeness while majority 70 per cent of Weavers’ Cooperative Societies urban had high level of closeness with the programme functionaries.

8. Attitude of selected weavers towards development programme

Selected weavers had mixed attitude towards implementation of the development programme in the societies as well as the facilities received by the weavers through this programme.

It was seen that only 23 per cent of weavers from Weavers’ Cooperative Societies rural and 19.67 per cent from Weavers’ Cooperative Societies urban had a favorable attitude towards development programmes. Majority of them 59% from

Weavers' Cooperative Societies rural and 63% from Weavers' Cooperative Societies urban had a less favorable attitude.

9. Problems faced by the weavers of Weavers' Cooperative Societies

1. Lack of leisure time
2. Lack of skill development training
3. Not satisfied towards wages.
4. Lack of self confidence in case of weavers
5. Lack of formal education
6. Lack of support from family members.
7. Poor quality of punch cards
8. Inadequate design development
9. Non acceptance of designs by weavers due to low wage
10. Use of old looms.

10. Suggestions to the problems faced by the weavers of selected Weavers' Cooperative Societies

1. Government should arrange special education programme for the weavers' of Weavers' Cooperative Societies
2. Weavers should be trained for time management and confidence building
3. There should be improvement in the wage of the weavers and special health package for weavers.
4. Family members should also be invited to the awareness meetings and they should be asked for their support.
5. Replacement of old looms
6. Training on modern attachment such as Jacquard, Dobby, Draw-boy attachment and design development
7. Awareness programmes on latest technology

Conclusion

Both central and state Governments are providing a number of incentives such as scheme of supplying yarn at mill gate prices, Integrated Handloom Development Schemes, marketing and design support, health and life insurance schemes, etc. In spite of these we have seen that the real incomes of handloom workers have declined over the years. There is also a need for scaling up and intensifying both the Central and State Governments, interventions in the handloom sector.

The success of the Weavers' Cooperative Societies depends on the satisfaction of its members. But Weavers' Cooperative Societies could not satisfy its members to the extent required. Young generations are not showing interest to enter into the handloom weaving work. The majority of weavers of selected rural and urban based Weavers' Cooperative Societies were middle aged (36 years to 52 years). Continuity of work affects the health of elderly weavers. They cannot concentrate on their weaving work due to ill- health and high family burden. It is necessary to inspire new generation to take weaving as a profession by creating awareness among the youngsters about the demand of handloom products in the international market. One of the major findings is that the weavers are not efficient or educated enough to calculate the right costing and selling price for their products. Therefore, proper training should be provided on correct costing of the handloom products. Training should also be provided on time management so that weavers can plan their daily activities and can spend more time for weaving.

By encouraging and creating confidence in the weavers, this industry can flourish further qualitative production of cloth in the state.

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