Women Empowerment Through Power loom Industry:  
A sociological Observation From Salem district in Tamil Nadu

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ABSTRACT

The weaving or power loom industry is the largest cottage industry in the country. The weaving sector plays an important role in the country's economy. Handwoven fabric is the product of Indian tradition, the inspiration of the cultural ethos of the weavers. The textile industry occupies a unique place in our country. This sector is very important from the point of view of its size and employment potential. It provides direct and indirect employment to over 13 million weavers. The power looms weavers who make traditional items such as saris, dhotis, bedsheets, and towels, etc., have been hit the hardest and contribute to the production. Out of the 38 million people employed in the weaving industry to 33 percent are concentrated in this declining part of the sector. It also gives employment to a lot of women and plays a role in women's empowerment. The textile and power loom industry plays a crucial role in empowering women in the present situation of the time. Women empowerment means self-reliance by the women in their own capabilities. Women empowerment refers to increasing self-decision regarding education, participation, mobility, economic independency, public speaking, awareness,
and exercise of rights, political participation. This study mainly focuses on understanding the process of economic empowerment/financial autonomy by women through engagement in the textile and power loom industry. Weaving activities play an important role in creating self-employment and income generation. Further, it provides employment opportunities to earn weaver’s livelihood and improving their skills, the standard of living and contributing support to their families. Economic empowerment refers to increasing the spiritual, political, social or economic strength of individuals and communities in society.

**I. Introduction**

The textile industry satisfies one of the basic needs of mankind namely clothing. India ranks to be the fifth country in textile production. It is the only industry in the forties, which shared know-how from Japan. India is also considered a pioneer in this industry. The Indian textile industry is nearly 186 years old, with the first mill on modern lines having been set up in 1817. From small beginnings and against heavy odds, it has made phenomenal growth, especially after the country gained Independence. Today, it has not only grown to be the largest segment of the country’s industrial sector accounting for about 20 percent of the total industrial output. The industry has a complex and varied structure. At one end of the spectrum is the hand spun, hand woven sector and on the other is the sophisticated, capital intensive, high-speed machine sector. There is also an intermediate segment consisting of
small scale power loom units, dispersed mostly in the semi-urban and the rural areas all over the country.

**II. Women in power loom Sector**

The division of work in the handloom sector is similar to that of the power loom sector. The considerable presence of women in power looms and handlooms are largely due to the lower forms of technology which permit labor-intensive production processes. There is substantial empirical evidence that women’s labor is inexpensive and it works to the advantage of employers and contractors to employ them. Where production accesses to family labor, women seldom get paid for their labor. In India, hundreds of women who weave cloth by hand. They work from their cottages, often in very remote, rural areas. Their looms are at home so that they can attend to their household duties and nurture their children a while and at the same time, earn an income for their families. Man provides partnership in this demanding live hood mainly by selling and taking all the credit. The textile in India is a neglected national treasure like the Indian women.

**III. The study area Salem District – Jalakandapuram**

Salem is a district of Tamil Nadu state in southern India. Salem town is the district headquarters of Salem district. The other major towns in the district include Mettur, Omalur, Attur, sankagiri, and Edappadi. Salem is surrounded by hills and the scenery scattered with hillocks. Salem has a vibrant culture dating back to the ancient Salem Nadu ruled by Mazhavar kings. because a district, Salem has its meaning in different aspects; it is
identified for mango cultivation, silver ornaments, textile, sago industries, and steel production. As of 2011, the district had a population of 34,82,056 with a sex-ratio of 954 females for every 1,000 males. Salem is one of the main cities in Tamil Nadu. The Salem power loom industry is one of the large amounts of ancient cottage industries and producing quality sari, dothi and angavasthram out of silk yarn and cotton yarn.

**IV. The methodology**

The authors have interviewed 350 women respondents by using the tool interview schedule. After the several scientific processes, the researchers have adopted the Systematic Random Sampling technique to select the respondents from the Jalakandapuram. Since the article concentrates on the Women Empowerment the villages like Malyampalayam, Savuriyur, Kattampatti, Surapalli, Vandimedu and Nariyampatti and. The researcher has interview method to collect the data in a face-to-face contact processes. The collected data has been processing editing, coding, classification and finally tables have been prepared.

**V. The discussion**

Most of the respondents represent the age group of 30-40 and this is the most productive age group. This particular age group is neither too young nor too old and this active and productive working-age group to the total number of 350 respondents in the study area. The productive workforce has more innovative minds. The basics of productive working-age women workers establish the production of power loom fabrics. This number expresses the
capability of women weavers in power loom sectors who are available for making the power loom fabrics to contribute around 70.00% of the total jobs in the textile industry. Power loom industry is currently Across the country the employees including women is prepared with approximately 2.701 million registered looms producing 54,000 square meter fabrics and the studied district of Salem is also part of it. More than half the proportion of the respondents (57.43%) belongs to the Backward Community, 41.71% comes from the Most Backward Communities and the remaining a meager percentages hail from the SC and ST. Not even a single respondent hail from the so-called forward communities and though there is a minuscule proportion representation from Scheduled Castes and Tribes they never make significant contributions for power loom weaving. The backward and most backward communities dominate in the power loom sector in the study area which is obvious for its power loom weaving and produces great volumes of fabric textile items that find a market in every nook and corner of the state and even in the country. The women power loom weavers from the mentioned communities have been producing different textile items of basically cotton material meant for the domestic market. A sizable proportion of the respondents (80.86%) are married, 14.00% are widows, 4.28% are separated and divorced, and the remaining minuscule proportion of the respondents (0.86%) are unmarried. We can conclude that nearly one-fifth of the respondents (19.14%) are widows, separated, divorced and unmarried have the jobs in the power loom industry. The widows are perceived as being a burden on society and ill-fated to the
family. They still have to contend with the “triple burden” in the form of disgrace connected with their status, ruthless limitation on access to resources and sexual vulnerability. Gender disparities make them one of the most marginalized and vulnerable communities in India. If they are in a position to work for monetary benefits for the families, they may be developing self-confidence, motivation and a kind of encouragement. This aspect is very obvious in the study area where the single women are sharing the economic chores of their respective families. According to most of them, the power loom industry makes them happy and to develop the skills, interactions with fellow workers and life are meaningful. An overwhelming proportion of the respondents (96.85%) earn rupees 4,000 and above as monthly income 01.43% earns in between Rs. 1,001-2,000 and a similar proportion (01.43%) gets a range of rupees 2,001 to 3,000 and solitary respondent earns rupees less than 1,000 as monthly income. There is a positive association between the women’s income and children’s development, positive health of the family members and academic performance of the children. This relationship is a crucial factor in the socio-economic status of the respective families. The women’s contribution is helping the families to overcome the financial constraints and they have the chance to think about the savings for the children’s future and maintenance of health. The women have expressed that though their contribution is meager, but it helps them to develop confidence in them and they too help the families financially. Further, they want to use their labor to generate the money and the resultant power and authority which the woman loves. The economic
prosperity comes through the women by using their labor consistently gets along with their spouses. Except for solitary-family and the rest doesn’t have any other source income. The socio-economic status is depending upon ‘how to maximize the income’. But the table expresses that except the income from the power loom industry another source of income is nil in almost all the families in the sample. According to George Herbert Mead, money is a media of token of wealth in the process of exchange the gesture, symbol, and language as in the other fields. The majority of the respondents’ families confine exclusively to the power loom sector and they never try for another source of income. However, in and around Salem district we can in numerous silver ankles works are progressing well as a family-based economy. The women and elders are vividly involved in these works and share the economic burden of the families concerned

**V. Conclusion**

Functioning of the power loom industry in the selected areas of Salem district of Tamil Nadu, where women are also contributing along with the men for the survival weaving. The few summarized data discloses that the education is not at all an important variable amongst the studied families. The realization about the relevance of education is not at all taking place much because this labor intensive industry keeps the same in the back seats. Except a miniscule proportion of the respondents most of them do not know the other occupations than the power loom. It may be the lack of motivation and morale building aspects amongst the looming families. They never realize that
knowing more than one occupation can increase the economic status of the family as expected. Size of the family is medium in the study areas amongst a considerable number of families need for more income they have more number of members.

Reference:


