

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE INSIGNIFICANT

(Handlooms of Vidarbha : Problems and Prospects)

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At the outset let me thank the organisers of the Seminar for remembering the Weavers Community of Nagpur which in fact had led a foundation of Vidarbha Movement. People of this region would certainly not forget the staunch support rendered by this community to Late Lok Nayak Bapuji Anje and Shri Brijlal Biyani in early sixties.

APPROACH

As the purpose of the seminar is to go into developmental potentialities of the region the present paper proposes to make employment potentials of Handlooms as its focal point and weave some useful ideas around it.

The Present paper is based on the grass-root level studies with some data interspersed from Handloom Census and reports on Handloom activities. The reliance is placed on finding out the potentials scientifically rather than from secondary opinions.

The nature of Handloom Industry of Vidarbha region due to very traditional techniques used is very rigid and various constellations obtained have not changed over a period of time and therefore present paper is using the ratios from personal survey of 100 handloom establishments carried out in 1980. Added advantage is that it gives picture at constant prices.

GENERAL SCENERIO : PAST AND PRESENT

Prior to getting at the core of the things a very brief resume of the Handloom Industry in the Vidarbha region would not be out of place. The records of the Taverniers travel (1641-1658) speak very highly of Handloom Trade in this region.

The Handloom Industry of Vidarbha which has held its own proud place not only Nationally but also Internationally through the middle ages and had reached its peak during Shah Jahn's a regime was plunged into the gloom in the year 1871 due to the advent of 365 miles long Railway track which 'facilitated the supply of the foreign goods even to the small towns and villages'. This heralded the influx of cheap 'Manchester goods.' The crisis was so severe that 1871 census records migration of 10000 weavers from Nagpur City and took up job

as day labourers in Wardha Vally. This coupled with the subsequent famines filled the cup of misery to the brim for the Handloom Industry of Vidarbha. Then onwards it is a story of one continuous struggle without any hopes of prosperity so much so that an optimist in his own rights Mr. Ravindram, Former -Minister for Industries,. In communist Government of Kerala termed the struggle of Handloom Industry in India as a 'Long Battle'.

It is easier to blame the Britishers and Manchester goods but the post-independence growth of mill produced domestic varieties of modern times are no less responsible for the doom of the Cottage Industry in Vidarbha which once was exporting Handloom as far as Holland and other continental countries. A Nagpur Dhoti which could fetch Rs-500/- in 1867 does not even fetch Rs.50/- in 1993. This decay of the Industry revolves round the one and only problem i.e. competition - introduced by the Britishers and carried through by the Swadeshi Mills.

WAY OF LIFE :

Yet, paradoxically the Industry has survived through all these vicissitudes over century for simple reason that it is not merely an industry but a way of life for the weavers' community in Vidarbha. The man and the industry are ~~inseparable~~ inseparable from each other in more than one way.

Physically, the weaver is stationed in the unit itself and for weeks to month he does not leave the premises closing upon himself the outside world.

Mentally, it occupies every minute of the weavers time as they have to keep thinking and working upon a very engrossing schedule of 10 hours to 14 hours. I may not be exaggerating if I say that weavers speak and breath nothing but the industry.

Economically, the industry exacts more pressure on one's time and energy than any person normally can give and yet does not sustain that person's family.

Religionwise, the inclinations are more or less intense individually but superstitions are seen to rule on large scale. The poor economic conditions strengthen superstitions and the rural character is evident in their approach towards the problem of health and hygiene. The recourse to quack healers commonly noticed is the instance in point.

Culturally, industry is mainly shared by the two large communities namely, the Halbas and the Momins while a minority from scheduled caste happens to have adopted the business. Out of these Koshtis or Halbas seem to have resisted the advent of modern technology i.e. powerlooms while Momins switched over to it more easily.

Politically, vast populace of weaver specially Halbas seems to offer happy hunting ground for all political parties which have been mustering support from them.

Thus, it appears that the community is essentially poor, uneducated in the formal sense, politically susceptible to the emotional appeals.

COMMENT :

If this Community is to be roused further for the cause of separate Vidarbha then the initiators will have to assure the enrichment of their way of life in more than one sense if they are honest enough in their demand.

EMPLOYMENT POTENTIAL :

The virtue of handlooms lies in its employment potential. There is no other industry which provides an employment to a vast majority of people with the involvement of such a low volume of capital. According to the estimate of the Fifth plan, at National level, 39 per cent of the total employment in small scale sector is accounted for by the Handlooms alone followed by the complementary industry of Khadi which accounts for 27 per cent of the employment in this total. Thus, the Handlooms are significant despite their insignificance.

As to the local level, following attempt of the present author would give clear picture of potentialities of handlooms of Vidarbha region the basic figures are adopted from the only census of handlooms ever carried out in 1976 by the Directorate of Handlooms and projected further for arriving at recent status.

1976 Status.Table 1

Areas	Handloom Household Population	Working Looms	Hired Looms	Total work force	Total Looms.
Nagpur City.	65,301	36,434	26,951	63,085	19,883
Per 100 Looms.	(328)	(131)	(135)	(317)	
Nagpur Division	1,44,132	62,555	28,994	96,549	33,978
Per 100 Looms	(424)	(198)	(085)	(284)	
State per 100 Looms	2,19,805 (373)	99,888 (153)	61,207 (104)	151,095 (257)	58,621

Technologically handlooms are fixed proposition and have fallen in line with population growth. And in this region population seems to increase at 3% per annum. Projecting the growth of the population and that of handlooms with this rate the region by now would be housing 51,500 looms and supporting more than 200000 household population of weavers. Thus, the estimate would come to that 10% to 11% of the total population of Vidarbha is directly involved in the industry.

FEMALE EMPLOYMENT :

An interesting observation as regards female employment may be worthwhile at this state. For every 10 workers employed in handlooms there are 5 men, 4 women and 1 child working in the industry. This large percentage of female ~~xxx~~ workers is not only high in comparison with female workers in handlooms at other centres but is also high in comparison with female workers employed in any other industry in the city of Nagpur. There are only 27 female workers working per 73 male workers in other occupations.

It appears that the handloom is the best employment for women because it requires no physical strength or skill but only perseverance. The availability of job within the four walls is an added attraction for woman who can attend to the domestic simultaneously with jobs in handlooms. But for the jobs offered by handlooms these ladies would have reduced themselves to a status of the domestic servants.

INDIRECT EMPLOYMENT :

In addition to this directly related employment there are many more persons engaged indirectly in production of handloom parts, in the dying industry, in production and sale of yarn, in marketing the finished product who may amount to half of the

direct employment. It would mean more than three lac persons of the region directly and indirectly are dependent upon the industry. Thus centralisation of this industry around the Nagpur city offers an interesting example of centralization of cottage industry.

DISGUISED UNEMPLOYMENT :

Not only the actual employment but also the marginal employment must be accounted for. The present author after having taken into account the processes carried out in the handloom unit comes to the conclusion that 230 persons per 100 looms is the requirement of medium count weaving which is in vogue in this area (table 2). Taking this estimate Nagpur Division exhibits 54 persons in excess of this requirement as actual number is 284 as per census (Table 1)

----- Assessment of the per loom employment ----- Table 2 -----

Production Process	Labour days/persons.
Preparation of warp of 60 count	14
Preparation of weft of 60 count	15
Piecing-in warp any count	1
Weaving one warp (205 str. approx)	28
Carrying goods to market etc.	4
Sundry works related to industry	2
Total:	64

From this it would work out that to run a loom to its present capacity of one warp in 23 days it would require 2.85 persons leaving some margin for standard errors it approximates to 2.3 per loom or 230 persons per 100 looms.

CAUTION AND COMMENT :-

In general, the handloom industry has become a traditional sink for the inheritors of the industry who do not have anything else to do. Not the sentimental attachment but mere force of circumstances has sealed their fate with that of industry. In the absence of better alternatives, the unemployed within the families of handloom households naturally take a recourse to the inherited business. The growth of number of looms seems to have fallen in line with the population growth. Ch. Uma Rao very rightly says, "the village, the cottage and the Small Scale Industries may well turn out to be the residuary sinks into which any unemployed person may drift. As long as there is some assurance of Government help, such tendency is all the more popular."

Preventing the industry from turning into sink is prime need. It needs intensive programming instead usual quantitative one. Infact this was promise given as early as 1952 in the words of Dr.D.R.Gadgil "operation in relation to traditional - Industry was essentially a holding operation" and new entrants were not to be encouraged further.

PRODUCTIVITY AND ALLIED ISSUES :

The low productivity on the one hand and the high - employment potential on the other has made the cottage industry & difficult ground to tread on both for the economists and the Government who would argue in earnest and accept in principle that inferior technique and low production (with greater employment) must make a way for a superior technique and high production. This need not be incompatible with large scale employment. But the hope as hope would be, is still being frustrated due to self willed growth of the population. Production capacity of the handlooms of this part where 98% looms are pit looms is 185 mtrs. a month per loom and if we assume the growth rate of 3% (in line with population change of the region) in number of Handloom then total production would amount to 9.5 million mtrs. a month (priced at Rs.4.84 per mtr. on an average at 1980 prices) valued at Rs.46 million generating net income of Rs.9.5 million for populace of nearly 2 lac . The production of Vidarbha is 57% of the total production of the State. At the State level 35 varieties are produced while ~~at~~ Vidarbha level only 9 varieties are produced.

The Vidarbha Handloom Industry caters mainly to the needs of women folk by producing 6 yards sarees (96% handlooms of this region are devoted to the production of sarees with border designs which are changed once in two years or so)

INCOME GENERATION :

Any discussion on the employment potential will be absurd unless it refers to the pecuniary gain out of it. Following table could indicate sectorwise earnings of weavers at 1980 prices which speak for themselves.

The organizational set-up of the industry is four-sectoral. The four agencies controlling different number of looms are (i) Independant Owners, (ii) Co-operative Societies (iii) The Handloom Corporation and (iv) Master-Weavers . The master Weaver is an institution which finance the handloom owners and obtains a lien over the product. This organizational setup is peculiar in the sense that looms are owned by the individuals and pooled into a sector as per their needs of the time and hence number of handlooms in each sector is constantly in a flux.

Income Distribution in the sample(100 establishments)
(Data for one month at 1980 prices)

Sector	Total Income Rs.	Total family members	Per capita Income Rs-	Total working persons	Income per working person.
Private	23839	391	60	171	137
Co-operative	5433	142	39	72	76
Corporate	9289	266	35	120	77
Mixed	553	25	63	21	75
Total	39817	824	48	384	104

COMMENT

Thus the employment is most ungainful and requires radical changes in production pattern, improvement in technique and qualify of product if it is to be gainful one.

CHOICE OF TECHNIQUE:-

The choice of the handloom industry is limited. The Government or the society can not afford to lose this industry without which the vast increasing number may not simply be absorbed elsewhere hence conversion to powerlooms is besides the question. Within the limited scope there is a wide margin for increasing surplus generation capacity. Following exercise will show different capacities of surplus generation for different models.

Adopting the formula given by Dr.A.K.Sen the rate of returns is worked out in case of select techniques as below:

$$p = \frac{A - R}{K + nR}$$

where

A = value of annual output

R = annual recurring costs

K = Fixed capital

n = ratio of lag to one year

In handloom 3 months recurring cost is required as working capital hence n = 0.25

Pit loom (1 loom units)

$$p = \frac{12084 - 12192}{600 + 0.25 \times 12192} = (-) 3 \text{ per cent}$$

Pit loom (2-ooms Units)

$$p = \frac{9321 - 9216}{600 + 0.25 \times 9216} = 3.61 \text{ per cent}$$

Frame loom technique

$$p = \frac{15100 - 14300}{2500 + 0.25 \times 14300} = 19.43 \text{ per cent}$$

Semi -automatic loom

$$p = \frac{21141 - 18496}{5000 + 0.25 \times 18496} = 27.48 \text{ per cent}$$

Powerloom Technique

$$p = \frac{58705 - 55489}{15000 + 0.25 \times 55489} = 11.13 \text{ per cent}$$

In conjunction with capacity of generation if we consider the productivity of different models then some practical programme of refurbishing the old models can be made viable the gainful.

Following table gives productivity of different models:

PRODUCTIVITY OF DIFFERENT TYPES OF LOOM Table 3

<u>Name</u>	<u>Picks/minute</u>
1. Semi-automatic loom model	
S -90	125
S -90 A	125
S -91	125 (Suitable for 120 count even)
S - 92	110-130
2. Banaras Semi -Automatic Loom Model.	100
3. Five wheel Take-up motion model	80-84(Suitable for terrycot)

normal picks are 60 / minute.

Combining the two it is very clear that surplus generation and productivity could be enhanced if semi-automatic model with five wheel Take-up motion model (Table -3) is adopted then productivity will go up by 40% yielding more surpluses. During the study, 2- looms and 5 looms units were found optimum ones. Fact to be borne in mind while talking about refurbishing for gainful employment.

DIFFICULTY IN TRANSFER OF TECHNIQUE :

To conclude the discussion on the choice of technique the problem does not meet with a permanent solution. As said earlier, it involves extra economic considerations such as displacement of labour and resultant unemployment. Even when there is no likelihood of any unemployment resulting, the distortion of the original structure is bound to create some problems. The new technique may not be adoptable to the present working force and it may adversely effect the production or increase the burden of training . The adoptability and flexibility are the two main things to be considered while replacing the old techniques. With the surplus agricultural ~~xxxx~~ population any technique that employs less number of workers is without support. But here a caution must be exercised that just for its a labour intensive technique irrational growth of it is not advisable.

COMMENT :-

Switch over to different types of looms at least for new entrants must be made compulsory with use of terene yarn.

MARKETING :

The marketing seems to be the Achili's heel for the cottage and Small Scale production not only in India but also in most of the countries of the world including that ardent champion of small unit namely, the Japan "wherein a high rate of - mortality is obtained on account of the competition from the large scale sector in the country." Therefore, the Governments contemplating the industrialisation through decentralised units must incorporate a plan for marketing development of the sector otherwise any amount of aid given at the production level will amount to a waste of national resources. The sustained production without markets either becomes a drag on the treasury of the nation or ruins the enterprise. This is a common experience all over the world , and the Government has to perform a tight rope walking of supporting the - production and finding the markets as well. At the same time a caution is to be exercised that the sheltered industries do not crave for the protection for all the time to come. Thus, the marketing is not only a problem for the management of the small units alone but also is a matter for Governmental planning. The approach of the Government towards the problem of the marketing together with entrepreneur's deft and insight in the implementation of marketing plans determine the course of the industry.

The export development in many a times hinted as saviour of the industry but practicalities work against such schemes and moreover it is found that it does not yield additional income to the weavers. Following example will illustrate the truth of it.

F.O.B. Bombay price(1979)	Rs-5.50	
Sea Freight & Insurance	0.60	Rs.6.10 per yard
Import duty 20 per cent	1.22	7.32 "
Clearing charges 5 percent	0.37	7.69 "
Whole seller margin of profit; 20 per cent	1.54	9.23 "
Importer's profit 100%	9.23	18.46 "
		2.30 "

And exports is remote idea till there is a switch in production pattern because "when 52% of the global trade is in synthetic and blends no amount of expatiation of ~~xxxxxx~~ merits of cotton fabrics can win for the country any place in international markets."

OTHER PROBLEMS :

Yarn supplies is the major problem both at the level of quantity and quality. Yarn consumption and shortage : Yarn consumed per loom is 33.20 Kg per loom. There is 18.96% shortage of warp and weft yarn while shortage of border yarn is 20.10% Compared to other divisions of the State this shortage is less. Problem of quality is more important than that of quantity.

The supply of good designs and printing technology is another short fall of the industry. All these could be remedied if a technological and research institute of Banaras type is installed in the region.

Pathetic Finance and indifference of Nationalized Banks would require a separate session.

The solution for many of these problems is sometimes suggested to be co-operativisation or a formation at corporate body. Both these have been tried in Vidarbha but have not resulted in desired effects. (As rightly predicted by Lakshman Konde Babuji long back in 1955). He opposed the setting up of Corporate bodies. In Vidarbha Tidke Commission felt statewise. The handloom Corporation so set up is reddled with the problem of stock piling, (30% to 40%) meeting tax expenses and yarn shortage. Only good that has come out is that it had united the disgruntled weavers. The cooperativisation tried in Vidarbha was not proper and lacked the pace. Out of every nineteen looms only two are in the Co-operative fold. In Hyderabad, for instance, 90% of the total looms are brought into the orbit of Cooperatives. That, at little loss of freedom this could be done on a large scale within short time by vigorous drive is clearly evident from the experiments carried out at Shilapur .

COMMENT :

The problems are age old and requires the same solution and ARE bending for want of appropriate Government initiative. With every new scheme the hopes of handloom industry in Vidarbha went up sky high but ended on rock of frustration. Will this promise of separte Vidarbha different from earlier promises is the question nagging the minds of many and the solution is purely political . Government may be of Maharashtra or may be of Vidarbha it is the traditions of the Government that matter. Otherwise, " it is trust that many of our plans have foundered on the rock of implementation . Many a new ideas may not see the light of the day."

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SUMMARY

It is not merely an industry but a way of life for the weavers' community and that the community is essentially poor, Uneducated in the literal sense, politically susceptible to the emotional appeals. If this community is to be roused/further for the cause of separate Vidarbha then the initiators will have to assure the enrichment of their way of life in more than one sense if they are honest enough in their demand for separate Vidarbha. Industry may well turn out to be their residuary sink into which any unemployed person may drift. Preventing the industry from turning into such sink is the prime need. It needs intensive programming instead usual quantitative one. The employment in Handlooms is most ungainful and requires radical changes in production patterns, improvement in technique and quality of product if it is to be gainful one. Switch over to different types of looms at least for new entrants must be made compulsory with use of terene yarn. The Marketing seems to be the Achili's heel for the cottage and small scale production not only in India but also in most of the countries of the world yarn supplies is another major problem both at the level of quantity and quality. The Problems are age old and require the same solutions and are pending for want of appropriate Government initiative. With every new scheme the hopes of handloom industry in Vidarbha went up sky high but ended on rock of frustration. Will this promise of separate Vidarbha be different from earlier promises in the question nagging the minds of many and the solution is purely political. Government may be of Maharashtra or may be of Vidarbha it is the traditions of the Government that matter. Otherwise many a new ideas may not see the light of a day.
