

Abstract of Doctoral Dissertation

Role and Working of Handloom Industry in Western Orissa*

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Objectives

THE STUDY AIMS at to assess the economics of handloom weaving among different caste groups (as traditionally the industry is divided on the basis of caste) in order to identify the process of decline at work. The second objective is to assess the differential impact of competition on the different components of the handloom sector and differences between caste groups and relates it to the desertion of the weaving households. The scope of the study is thus limited. It attempts to identify the forces of decay within the handloom sector in particular and the textile industry in general.

Methodology

The methodology adopted for the study is the traditional demand and supply analysis. A sample survey of weavers' household was undertaken to assess the economics of handloom for both the Rural and Urban areas. A similar sample survey of household expenditure on cloth was also conducted to assess the nature and character of demand for cloth. Finally, the results of both the surveys were integrated and seen in context of desertion of weaving households.

Findings

The findings of the study are interesting and a contribution to the existing knowledge. Each chapter under discussion throws some new insights into the understanding of the handloom sector in particular and household industry in general.

The concern of the study of economics of handloom is to highlight the heterogeneity of handloom activities. It is achieved by bringing out the differences that exist within handloom industry. The analytical tools developed to study such differences are caste factor and working capital. The former gives the technique wise differences and the later, size class wise variation. The differences primarily arise because of specialisation in terms of Yarn-count and product group as each caste group under study is found to specialise on a group of product dealing with a certain specific Yarn-count category and therefore, each caste group operates with a specific technique. The chapters

* The thesis submitted for the award of Ph.D. degree to Sambalpur University in 1986 under the supervision of Prof. R.S. Rao, Head of the Deptt. of Economics, Sambalpur University, Sambalpur, Orissa.

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Submitted April '94, Accepted September '94

“Caste and specialisation” and “Intra-caste and inter-caste differences in performances” (i.e. ch. III and IV) provide a detailed treatment in this respect.

The study also discusses the structure of demand for cloth (Ch.V). It gives a through analysis of competition between handloom and non-handloom cloth in terms of income groups, occupational groups, Yarn-count categories and product groups. The enquiry thus highlights some new findings. The structure of demand for cloth has two components. The first meets the need of the poor and is essentially handloom. The second is non handloom which caters to the need of better off sections of the society. The basis of division, therefore, seems to be income in addition to the traditional view of Urban-Rural differences. Above all, the study is supported by a rigorous econometric model to explain the intra-occupational differences in income and consumption relation.

The economics of handloom and the prevailing demand conditions are integrated in a chapter called “Levels of living and desertion”. It studies the effect of competition on different components of handloom production and attempts to identify the process of decline in the handloom sector. The desertion/decay is studied by examining inter-generations desertion such as the present and past generations.

The first chapter introduces western Orissa and its handloom activities. It identifies a stability in the handloom sector of Western Orissa. The Second chapter formulated the methodology adopted in the study with a specific reference to the debate on the career of handloom industry in 19th century India. The last chapter concludes the study by locating the points of agreement of our study with the different arguments made in context of the debate and attempts to explain some of the hypothesis generated in course of the study.

The entire study is caste in a historical perspective so as to explain the emerging hypothesis. The hypothesis are unique contributions of the study. They have serious theoretical and policy implications.

Hypothesis Formulated and Explained

i. Some of the Weaving techniques have remained stable inspite of century old competition from the machine textile industry.

ii. The process of decay and decline of handloom activities is differentiated between caste groups over-time indicating that the stability of handloom activities is a mere case of differentiated decline.

iii. Given a pattern of differentiated decline of handloom activities between caste groups over-time, much of the substance of the debate on the career of household industry, especially the interpretation and re-interpretation given by Prof. D.R. Gadgil, Morris. D. Morris and Bipan Chandra have academic relevance only.

iv. Finally, the forces sustaining the differentiated behaviour of the weaving households seem to be the overall poverty and the traditional attitude of the people.

Analytical Superiority of the Study

A consistent system of findings and hypothesis are generated by adoption of certain innovative analytical tools and elaborate treatment of some aspects of handloom activities. One such analytical tool is the caste factor which makes the study inter-disciplinary. There may be some who would prefer to limit the emphasis placed on the caste factor. But, essentially, the caste factor represents a technique-wise classification only. The working capital is treated as an index of size or scale variation. Caste wise specialisation and performances have been discussed in details. A concept called net surplus defined as surplus or value-added net of consumption requirements of the weaving households has been introduced to study performances. This helped to highlight the self-exploitative feature of handloom production. The chapter in consumption contains Yarn-countwise and product wise competition between handloom and non-handloom cloth. The chapter on levels of living desertion undertakes a study of inter-generations desertions of Weaving households. The last chapter dealing with "Conclusion" presents an analysis of comparative cost advantages enjoyed by the handloom and non-handloom cloth which has a special relevance to a theory of specialisation and economies to scale. The question of accrual of scale economies has been discussed in context of intra-caste and inter-caste differences in performances. Finally the whole of the study is presented in a historical perspective to throw better insight into the process of desertion of weaving households.