

Bringing Design Perspective in Handloom Cooperatives of Odisha: A Case Study

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Abstract: Handloom is the oldest known form of making cloth by hand. It represents a very early stage of cloth production. Handloom is now the source of livelihood to several millions of artisans and their families all over the world. Handloom products are not merely merepieces of decoration but also they symbolize the cultural ethos and the aspiration of generations of people to preserve the best part of their culture and civilization. The handloom industry of Odisha is quite famous for its age-old tie and dye work. The present situation of handloom weaving calls for in depth exploration to bring design perspective in their approach. Handloom weavers, in their individual capacity, being small unorganized, and scattered, are unable to secure even the bare minimum work needed by them on fair and reasonable terms. This called for organizational support, which could bring them all the advantages of the economies of scale; and protection from middlemen. It is primarily for this reason that weaver's co-operative societies had been organized in the country. Co-operatives however face problems from time to time and govt. has assisted them by introducing schemes and new supportive policies. While proper management has gained a great degree of acceptance as a problem-solving tool in this sector, design is never seen as an important element in the development & viability of handloom co-operatives.

A better understanding of the problems and their solutions may be achieved through a design-oriented approach when clubbed with the existing interest in management and marketing approaches. This case emphasizes design as a major input which could help the co-operative structure to achieve its potential. Design should be integrated into the development perspectives adopted by the Handloom Co-operatives of Odisha.

Key words: Design perspective, Management, Handloom cooperatives, symbol, Culture.

Date of Submission: 12-03-2020

Date of Acceptance: 27-03-2020

I. INTRODUCTION

Handloom is the oldest known form of making cloth by hand. It represents a very early stage of cloth production. Handloom is now the source of livelihood to several millions of artisans and their families all over the world. Handloom products are not merely merepieces of decoration but also they symbolize the cultural ethos and the aspiration of generations of people to preserve the best part of their culture and civilization. India is one of the foremost countries in preserving and developing the decentralized handloom industry. Next to agriculture, the handloom industry in India is the largest cottage industry providing employment to rural population. Handloom as an 'industry' – as opposed to a product for self consumption- being unorganized has, from the very beginning, faced a number of problems related to finance, raw material, technology and marketing. The handloom industry of Odisha is quite famous for its age-old tie and dye work. The present situation of handloom weaving calls for in depth exploration to bring design perspective in their approach. Handloom weavers, in their individual capacity, being small unorganized, and scattered, are unable to secure even the bare minimum work needed by them on fair and reasonable terms. This called for organizational support, which could bring them all the advantages of the economies of scale; and protection from middlemen. It is primarily for this reason that weaver's co-operative societies had been organized in the country. Co-operatives however face problems from time to time and govt. has assisted them by introducing schemes for grants and new supportive policies.

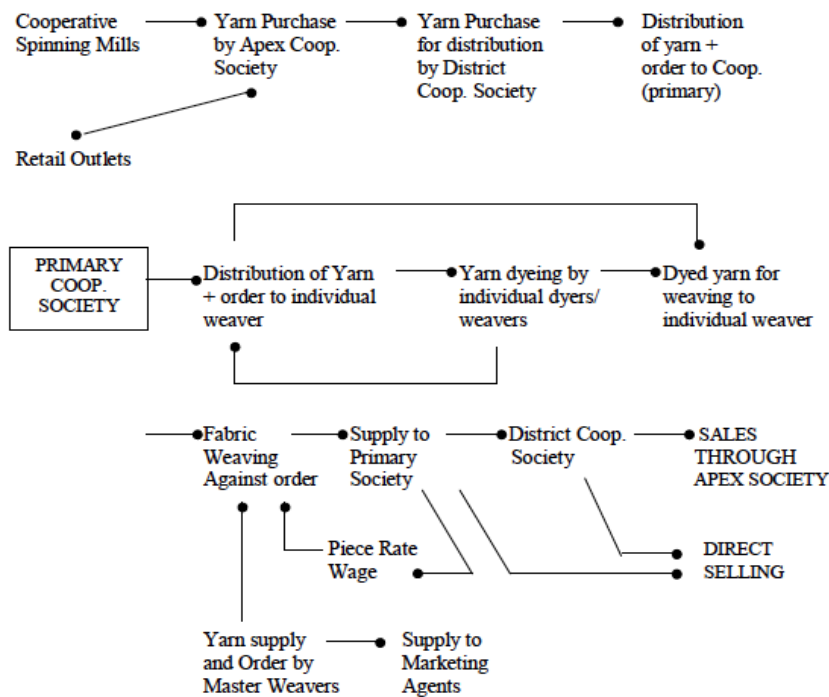
While proper management has gained a great degree of acceptance as a problem-solving tool in this sector, design is never seen as an important element in the development & viability of handloom co-operatives. A better understanding of the problems and their solutions may be achieved through a design-oriented approach when clubbed with the existing interest in management and marketing approaches. This case emphasizes design as a major input which could help the co-operative structure to achieve its potential. Design should be integrated into the development perspectives adopted by the Handloom Co-operatives of Odisha.

Weavers’ cooperatives:

The idea of forming a weaver’s cooperative society first came up in 1907 as stated by B.B.Trivedi. The distinguishing feature of a weaver’s cooperative is that it is largely village based. Weavers’ cooperatives were set up with an objective of relieving the weaver artisans from the clutches of the traditionally exploitative middlemen, master weavers, moneylenders and yarn traders. Indian govt. has encouraged to adopt a cooperative model, policies and also facilitated the formation and working of PCS at village level and Apex societies at State level. Individual weavers were also supported by state handloom cooperatives in processing yarns and also helping them in marketing of final products (20). The cooperatives, by supplying yarn, undertaking the marketing and providing continuous employment opportunities, provide a much needed support infrastructure to the weaver members. This includes undertaking a process of integrated development of weavers to solve their socio economic problems by promoting their economic interest. Apex society and primary society are two forms of handloom cooperative structure. Majority weavers are part of primary cooperative societies (d).

The primary cooperatives society is formed by a group of weavers. Funds are raised as a share capital from member weavers with additional deposit and loans from cooperatives and commercial banks. The management committee is elected by the members and the chairman is elected by the managing committee. These cooperatives provide yarn to the members and arrange for marketing of fabric produce by them. Some selected varieties of the fabric are procured by the apex society while some others are sold directly to cloth merchants, vendors, etc. The society also works for the welfare of the weavers. Such primary societies are affiliated, as member of an apex society, of which there is normally one in each state.

The cluster map



The apex society provides the employment round the year to the weavers through supplies of inputs to primaries and through procurement of the cloth from them. It provides new designs to the primaries for adoption in cloth production. The apex society markets the fabrics procured from the primaries through its sales outlets all round the country. The institution receives assistance generously from the Govt. of India, state governments, National cooperative development cooperation, Nabard etc towards share capital, working capital for trading, yarn procurement, marketing of cloth, for opening and renovation of showrooms, construction of dye houses, offices, godowns, creating marketing facilities, marketing and design development projects etc.

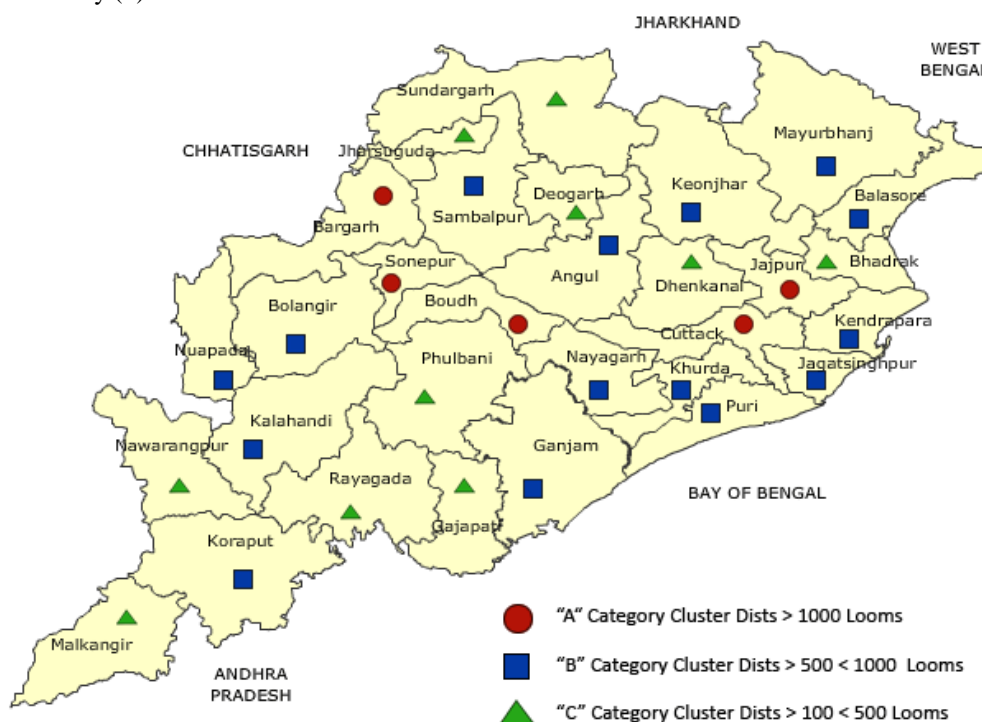
ODISHA Handloom Census 2009-10 Parameters	Odisha
Number of Handlooms	43652
Number of Handloom workers	114106

INDIA				ODISHA			
No. of Apex societies	No. of PWCS	No. of SHGs	No. of Individual weavers	No. of Apex societies	No. of PWCS	No. of SHGs	No. of Individual weavers
39	9642	6310	54226	2	430	2636	10884

STATUS OF HANDLOOM SECTOR FOR THE MONTH OF August 2015

Office of Development Commissioner for Handlooms.

The system of production in Handloom Cooperative societies is the very good. There is no exploitation in the production system of handloom cooperative sector. As per COOPERATIVE ACT, “All the member weavers are owner of society. They have legal right over the society management and share equal profit and loss. PCS supply yarns, dyes and chemicals to weavers at reasonable prices. Social security benefits such as medical relief, group insurance facility, old age benefits and modern weaving equipment are provided to all members of society (b).



HANDLOOMS CLUSTERS OF ODISHA

Source: <http://odisha.gov.in/textiles/index.htm>

There are looms under primary weavers’ cooperative societies in our country. The primaries are affiliated to apex handloom cooperative societies and regional / central handloom cooperatives societies.

Problems of Co-operatives:

Despite all this encouragement, the co-operative societies are believed to be in a miserable plight due to the following problems being perceived and reported by various functionaries, Government officials and their advisors. It has been observed that most of the societies are organised and registered without proper planning and adequate preparations for their success. They are organised without making proper enquiry as to the demand for their services, economic feasibility and scope for their successful functioning. This results in an increased number of dormant societies. Members of these managing committees lack the needed skills, that is, awareness of the principles and methods of co-operation. Timely procurement of raw materials at reasonable cost is the biggest problem. Some societies also face difficulty in this respect due to their location.

The existence of fake societies, and the procurement of yarn from the quota allotted to each such society causes shortages and black marketing of yarn and other unscrupulous means of exploiting government subsidies. The need for finance is the most important factor for production. Most of the primary societies do not have adequate finance for their working capital needs. Delay in obtaining finance from the co-operative banks proves to be a big hindrance.

Procurement officers from the apex societies need to be bribed in many cases, in order to procure the selected variety which otherwise would be rejected. Even after all these efforts to sell their fabrics, a stock is always left unsold with the primaries. At present, the apex societies are purchasing the fabrics from the primaries, adding a profit of 15-35% and selling the goods in their showrooms. Further, in the festival season there is a rebate of 30% which is recovered from the government. This alone would provide enough finance for paying their staff and running the organisation. Apex societies are just providing the work to the weavers but the weaver is not benefitted by the additional profit earned by these apex societies.

The co-operatives are facing heavy competition from the organised mill sector and the power loom sector. These mill and power loom fabrics are superior in durability, cheaper and backed by solid marketing network. Efforts are being made to improve the quality and finish of the handmade fabrics. Government has helped the handloom sector by introducing the selective reservation policy. Some varieties are reserved for production on handlooms only, such as bed sheets, pure silk sarees, dhotis, lungis etc. In spite of all these advantages and supports, the co-operatives are still not flourishing while private enterprises in this field are earning high profits. These private firms are able to get more export orders than co-operatives.

The cooperative approach has not been successful in increasing the earnings of the weaver. The co-operative structure is not being utilised to achieve its potential. The problems perceived by various functionaries and Government officers are solved at various levels by providing assistance and implementing new policies (b). This is not able to assure the successful functioning of the cooperatives. Hence the problem needs to be looked into from a different point of view. Major draw back of cooperative system is that poor, illiterate weavers are not benefitted from the facilities provided by PCS, Master weavers manages the society as private enterprise. Because of the vested interest of nonweaver community runs their private business in name of cooperative society (Meher1992). There are no conscious efforts for design development. The design developments are basically dependant on the weavers. Limited feed back on present market trend to the weavers on design and colour aspects forces the ongoing motifs on use frequently with minor modifications. So far the cluster has no computer aided design center. This has also put a limitation to the supply of designs and experimentations with colour combinations.

Reasons for failure of co-operative sectors: -

- Ownership over the enterprise is at stake.
- Selection process of society members is biased.
- Mismanagement is result of unawareness of management system.
- Stakeholders are not benefitted by Govt. facilities.
- Corruption at every stage from production to marketing causing weakness of cooperative sector.
- Nonscrutination of trends of market, demand of consumers and contemporisation of designs are also reasons for failure in marketing of final products(a).

DETAILS OF WEAKNESS OF COOPERATIVE SOCIETY: -

1. Involvement of society members is conspicuous.
2. Nonrealisation of ownership. All the members are of viewpoint that cooperatives are Government organization.
3. Unawareness of rules and regulations of PCS.
4. Majority members are not aware of procedure of formation of society. They predict it as Government organization formed by Government of India.
5. Clarity of roles and responsibility of members of society are not clear among them (a).

Governmental Supports:

During the Second World War, the Indian handloom industry got a severe setback as the supply of yarn was insufficient to meet the requirements of the societies, rendering them ideal. After World War II these societies faced severe competition from mill made fabrics. The sharp decline of the demand for handmade cloth caused a mounting up of stock, which was unsold and resulted in severe unemployment among the weavers community.

In 1952, the all India handloom board was setup by the government of India. The board took up a massive programme aimed at the development of this industry on cooperative lines, thereby increasing the production and marketing of handloom fabrics. Assistance given by the boards was usually in the form of loans for working capital and for other commercial operations of the cooperatives.

Weavers' service centres were set up to evolve good designs and new patterns in cloth production to be adopted by the cooperatives societies. The board also sanctioned processing plants to the apex societies and dye houses to the primaries. Now more than 50percent of the weavers in the country have come into the cooperative fold.

Having experienced the gainful occupation of the millions of people in the handloom industry in rural parts the Govt. policy to encourage this industry is based on hard economic realities. This industry has an immense potential both in rural and urban areas, needing a comparatively low investment of capital with reference to its employment potential.

Govt policy in 12th plan (2012-2017)

For growth of handloom sector it is important to provide sustainable employment to weaver community.

Govt. vision is to focus on following objectives:

1. Delivery system of raw material
2. Financial freedom to weavers' community.
3. Marketing strategy of handloom products
4. Promotion of weavers welfare programs
5. Restructuring of development of clusters.
6. Monitoring of evaluation system of working of societies.
7. Partnership with private sector will enhance faster growth and efficiency.
8. Handloom brand promotion initiative
9. Product diversification, contemporized designs should be given more importance to enable all handloom products to meet changing trends of industry.

In order to fulfill objectives of growth of handloom industry Govt. of India has introduced some new initiatives (23).

Research Development:

Contemporisation of designs and product innovation can be achieved by R& D centers of handloom sector. There is requirement of setup of new research and development centers in all states. Government is releasing funds for the same.

Encouragement to private participation:

For faster growth and high efficiency, participation of private enterprise is mandatory. It will enhance the supplementation of state resources.

Participation of weavers in cooperative societies:

Formation of self-help group of weavers should be encouraged. Weavers should be trained to understand rules & regulations and roles & responsibilities of members of cooperative societies.

The Design Perspective

Textiles are no more a domain of undifferentiated products. Even our conservative rural population is today becoming fashion conscious. Village have become very selective and they are looking for new designs. In the cooperative societies more importance is given to production and procurement. Handloom cannot survive for long if this same attitude continues.

Handloom fabrics lack new designs and attractive finish. To compete with mill made fabrics, handloom products must have a unique selling point. This calls for attention to the design aspect. The co-operative sector has so far dealt with design merely as a means of ornamentation. Design however has a far deeper significance. Design can play a major role here. Designing would mean going deeper into a variety of aspect other than merely suggesting new patterns for surface ornamentation. Handlooms have a lot of potential. They can accommodate our traditional skills like Ikat, brocades, etc. This unique feature of handloom has to be kept in mind. To enhance the competitiveness in export as well as domestic market new designs should be introduced, Sustainance of traditional designs, innovative technology should be adopted(23). Marketing of handloom products should be encouraged through ecommerce. Regular organization of exhibition of new designs developed during integrated design projects and workshops of designs. It will help to promote design innovation of handloom products among public thus branding will also be enhanced (23).

Jaslene Dhamija stated that "there is requirement for protection of health of weavers and revamping of State Government Institutes with the help of professionals for Design Studios, colour forecasts, strengthening of the existing Weavers Service Centre, which have become marginalized, by filling up the vacant posts, making funds available for contractual hiring of high class design & technical staff. There should be upgrading of the equipments for new designs". (23).

Case Study of Sambalpuri Bastralaya

During 1954, Sambalpuri Bastralaya was registered as cooperative society under OCS act and rules. The founder of society was Padamshri Krutartha Acharya. It started from Aug.1954. Head office of society is

based at Bargarh (Western Part of Odisha) It is the largest Primary Weaver cooperative society of Odisha which empowers rural area weavers including women. Business ethics of Sambalpuri Bastralaya has been recognized nationally as well as internationally. It has been achieving perfection in all fields of production and marketing of handloom goods within cooperative frame (c). Sambalpuri Bastralaya invited famous Indian national as well as international fashion designers Like.Sabyasachi Mukherjee and Rajesh Pratap Singh, Abraham and Thakur, Anjali Kalia and Orissa-born Bibhu Mohapatra, now based in US as part of state Govt. Project to contemporized Ikkat designs as per market trends (d).

The working capital of the society has been decreasing day by day due to continuous losses accrued during past years. This has affected reduces the transaction vis-à-vis employment provided to the weavers. The society has an accumulated slow moving stock of about 3 crores. (Accumulated from past years)

Sambalpuri Vastralaya have significantly improved their performance and improved their turn over. Subsequently Odisha weavers were benefitted by creating designers designs. These designs were showcased at Wills India fashion week and also exhibited at various platforms in India as well as abroad

More emphasis should be given to the production of the varieties which are not or cannot be produced by mills and power looms. and which has a distinct identity of the handloom sector, to improve its competitiveness in the market place. The designers role here would be in identifying the appropriate product to be produced, the creation of value added products by utilising the available resources, production techniques and skills to meet the market aspirations."Kotpad or Sambalpuri Ikkat fabrics are popular among public who values Indian culture as well as traditional textiles. "They will certainly be revived," the leading fashion designer **Sabyasachi**, stated after paying visit to Odisha(d).

As mentioned earlier primaries often lack proper planning. Design inputs for such societies can lead to the utmost utilisation of the available facilities with proper planning to yield best results.

Mill made fabrics have a low cost factor which works to their benefit, while handloom fabrics become more and more expensive because of their low rate of production and greater expenses. Design can contribute to making the product less expensive by introducing new techniques and materials. A design approach can help the cooperatives to look into the aspects of product development and diversification. The handloom cooperatives working for the weavers can achieve this and then the products can be marketed properly.

Considering the present situation of the cooperatives one can see a need for restructuring their function. Design becomes a very important aspect, complimenting the marketing inputs that are already in place. Design and marketing should hence go hand in hand.

Marketing is identifying and creating needs and satisfying them at a profit. Here weavers need to earn more wages and the buyer's need for appealing and good quality fabrics has to be considered. So design should become an integral part of the marketing process. Due to improper planning and lack of design inputs, the primary societies have a mound of unsold fabrics. This means held up finance and idle looms, which could be avoided.

At this stage, the master weaver comes in. He is the person who has an understanding of the market and the sales outlets. He provides work to the weavers by giving them wages for producing fabrics of the provided specifications and sells the produce outside, for his own profit. So it becomes unfair to call him an exploiter, because he is providing work to the idle weavers and showing a way to the co-operatives but without any Government support.

One can see a need to re-structure the primary co-operatives, changing the approach where marketing is not the last stage of operations but the first stage, production being done according to the marketing brief. The apex societies are usually busy in setting up their production / procurement targets. Being a marketing organisation, the apex society handles marketing by selling the product of the primaries through their sales outlets. Huge stocks of the unsold fabrics lie in the godowns for a period of two to three years and then these stocks are cleared out at throw way prices by inviting tenders.

In spite of having a good stage network, few efforts are made to collect the information. There is a need for understanding the market and developing a system for collecting marketing information to guide the marketing personnel for placing the right product at the right time. This also calls for a linkage between the marketing and research and development section. This market information would help the designer to design and select the right product for the right market. Designs to be produced for apex societies by the primaries are selected by a committee, which usually lacks the right market information and design knowledge.

Need to say, the consequences are faced by both the apex and the primary societies. The latter gets effected the most and through them the weaver. At the apex sales outlets we sometimes find that the sales personnel are not trained. There should be incentives and adequate training to hold a prospective customer. There is a need for improved public presentation, exhibition cum sales and mobile sales outlets to reach the rural population.

Export can help in finding good markets for handlooms. The apex society should pay more attention to design for the export market. The services of the professional designers in the field should be taken for this purpose.

Advertising is very important for marketing concern. At present 5% of the total expenditure of the apex society is utilised for publicity. Looking at today's situation, there is a need for more advertisement expenditure of a higher quality. Co-operatives can also look into the aspect of recycling the waste-yarn waste, fabric rejects, water and chemicals from dyeing and processing houses etc.

Identifying the problems, analyzing and designing measures, collecting market information, consumer behavior, details of competitors, planning, forecasting, improving sales methods and policies should constitute a part of management activities undertaken by the apex societies for the benefit of primary societies and co-operative handloom sector at large. The need for professional management and the involvement of capable design intervention is perhaps the only way to make a weavers co-operatives the vibrant and viable force that they could very well be.

II. CONCLUSION

Handloom industry of Odisha has retained its place of pride for unique and innovative creations internationally. Handloom products are one of the richest medium of ethnic expression. Handloom weavers are not just weaving cloth for commercial purpose but also represent their philosophy of life. It is important to recognize socioeconomic importance of handloom industry in India's economy. Govt. should formulate policies for handloom sector in such a manner to ensure growth and development of industry nationally and internationally. Sustainable growth of handloom industry can be enhanced by modern technology, designs. Younger generation should also be encouraged for their contribution in growth of industry.

Linkages with key designers in the cluster cooperatives who can provide creative designs within the Ikat design framework.

TEACHING NOTE

Q.no. 1 why it is important to Co-opertisation the weavers.

Q. no. 2 Is trend forecast important to create new designs every season, if yes explain why.

Q.no.3 How important it is to bring design perspective to cooperatives.

Q.no.4 How marketing of handloom products can be made sustainable.

Q.no. 5 What steps can be taken to increase export of handloom products.

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Prof. Monika Aggarwal. "Bringing Design Perspective in Handloom Cooperatives of Odisha: A Case Study." *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)*, 25(3), 2020, pp. 10-17.