

PLIGHT OF THE MAT WEAVERS SWITCH OVER TO OTHER JOBS IN PATTAMADAI OF TIRUNELVELI DISTRICT: A STUDY

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Abstract

This study explores the dynamics of local-level trade in plant-based mats in Pattamadai of Tirunelveli District. These dynamics include social aspects of harvesting, redata tenure and trade. Additionally, and perhaps of major importance, the study attempts to explore the contribution of the trading in mats. The Mat weaving sector plays an important role in the economic development of the rural areas. It contributes significantly by generating more employment opportunities and providing bread to the rural poor. Despite several measures taken by the government by the way of institutional support and direct financial assistance to the Mat weavers, they are suffering miserably due to myriad problems and are sustaining continuous low income. It is a well known fact that the Mat weavers in some parts of the state are starving. This paper focused on what are reasons to switch over to other jobs by the mat weavers in the district.

Introduction

The State of Tamilnadu, The traditional Pattamadai Mat (pai) is made from reeds that grow on the banks of the river Tamiraparani in southern Tamil Nadu woven with cotton or Mat threads. Pattamadai alone produces such fine mats because of the cultivation of a particular kind of grass (*Cyperuscorymbosus* Rottb) in the village. Pattamadai pai for sleeping or sitting on the floor! This mat is a wall hanging from famous Pattamadai, a village on the bank of Tamraparni River in Tirunelveli district of Tamil Nadu. The communities that make the mats are predominantly Muslim and have been in that region for a long time. Traditionally women weave these mats in hand looms and depending on the length or fineness one mat can take up to couple of months. This is the only place where they make the Mat (pattu pai) with very fine grass bunch and Mat threads. The mat weaving industry used synthetic dyes for coloring its internationally acclaimed rugs, is all set to use an eco-friendly colorant. The traditional colours used are red, green and black and the weaves can reach up to the maximum 140 counts in the Mat or pattu mat. The old pattern consisted mainly of stripes at the two ends or streaks through the body (Resemble the Jamakkaalam).

It is world famous for its Korai mats. Many weavers have received national awards from the President of India for their unparalleled skill in mat weaving. Pattamadai Pattu Pai has been sent to Queen Victoria & Queen Elizabeth during the British Regime as the Royal Gift from India to highlight the quality and workmen ship of world fame mats. The success of this mat weaving is the closely guarded trade secret among the Muslim Community of Pattamadai from ages. Those mats are painstakingly weaved over a long time mainly for weddings.

Problem Focus

The mat weaving sector plays an important role in the economic development of the rural poor in the state. It contributes significantly by generating more employment opportunities and providing bread to the rural poor. Realizing its importance, a plethora of measures is undertaken by the government in order to promote the mat weaving sector.

Despite several measures taken by the government by the way of institutional support and direct financial assistance to the mat weavers, they have been in miserable district due to myriad problems and are sustaining continuous losses. These problems include improper supply of raw material, lack of proper marketing facilities, lack of market awareness and promotion, lack of proper financial redatas, involvement of middlemen, lack of modern technology, lack of prompt and timely support from the government and other allied agencies and so on.

The mat weavers change to other jobs due to lack of facilities as well as disproportionate earnings corresponding to their labour, in the weaving activity. The standard of living of the weavers is significantly low and they are leading miserable and pitiable life due to unemployment and underemployment. This situation prevails everywhere in our country. Tirunelveli District, which is chosen for detailed research study, is no exception to this situation. This pathetic condition of mat Weaving industry in Tirunelveli District demands thorough investigation into the problems and measures to plug the loopholes and find remedies to the problems confronting mat weaving industry.

Objectives of the Study

In the present study, an effort has been made to analyze the Plight of the Mat Weavers switch over to other jobs in Pattamadai of Tirunelveli District based on the following objectives:

- To assess the main problems faced by the mat weavers.
- To examine the adoption of new looms and production of mat weaving.
- To analyze the reasons for switch over to other jobs
- To explore the challenges and opportunities of mat weaving industry.
- To suggest some line of actions that may be necessary for an overall improvement of the workers engaged in this mat weaving industry.

Collection of data

The study is based on both the primary and secondary data. The Primary data were collected from respondents directly with the help of structured interview schedule. Secondary data were collected from books, journals and websites.

Construction of Interview Schedule

The Interview schedule constructed by the researcher himself. The variables to be included are identified by the researcher in the pilot study. The variables identifies are converted into appropriate questions and they are included in the interview schedule. It is contacted with few mat weavers. In the light of recommendation from them interview schedule was modified.

Sampling Design

In the Tirunelveli District has famous for korai Mats (Rough & Fine) and craft korai grass shopping bags, place mats, runners, office folders etc. which are also exported to some foreign countries. The study is confined to 84 mat weavers' households in different category in the Tirunelveli district. They were selected at random by applying convenience sampling. Weavers are mainly categorized into independent weavers, Master weavers, weavers under middlemen, Cooperative weavers and Labour weavers respectively.

Limitations of the study

- This study covers only TIRUNELVELI city. This is the major limitation of the study.
- The needs, wants and other motives of respondents vary at different occasions.
- Numbers of the respondents are relatively small.

Types of weaver

Weavers of India are broadly classified into categories namely, independent weavers, master weavers, weavers under middlemen, co-operative weavers and labor weavers.

(a) Independent weavers

The independent weaver is totally independent of any outside agency. He has his own looms and he works in his own or rented house. He purchases grass in small installments from market and sells his mat to the customers directly.

(b) Master weavers

The master weaver is similar to the independent weaver in many aspects except that he employs outside labourer to weave for him. The master weaver should provide the looms, grass, and other things. He will give only labour charge for weaving.

(c) Weaver under middlemen

Some weavers working under master weaver or dealers and they are technically skilled and independent with their own houses and looms. The middlemen supply grass of mat to be woven. The middleman gives the piece rate system.

(d) Co-operative weaver

A weaver, who becomes a member of co-operative society and he obtains grass directly from the society he has to handed over the finished product to the society. The weaver obtains a piece wage for his weaving effort, in addition to wages he is entitled to have a dividend on his share capital.

(e) Labour weaver

The weavers who work under master weavers are called labour weavers. The master weaver constructs, work sheds and provide suitable looms with equipments to the labour weavers. The labour weaver gets only wages. The following Table 1 shows the category of weavers in the sample area.

Analysis of data**Table 1 Categorization of the Sample Weavers**

S.No	Type of weavers	No. of Weavers	Total (%)
1	Independent Weavers	15	18
2	Master weavers	6	7
3	Weavers under Middlemen	31	37
4	Cooperative Weavers	20	24
5	Labour Weavers	12	14
	Total	84	100

Source: primary data

Table 1 limelight's that 84 weavers are drawn into sample frame from the area of study (Tirunelveli District). Of the selected weavers Independent weavers were 15(18%), Master weavers were 6 (7%), weavers under middlemen 31(37%), Cooperative weavers 20 (24%) and Labour weavers 12(14%). So it's clear

that majority of the mat weavers are weaving under middle men from the area of study.

Techniques to Product Improvement**Table 2 Opinion of the Respondents to Improve the Productive Techniques**

S. No	Weavers opinion	Independent weaver		Master Weaver		Weaver under Middlemen		Co-operative Weaver		Labour Weaver		Total	
		No's	(%)	No's	(%)	No's	(%)	No's	(%)	No's	(%)	No's	(%)
1	Govt. Should Provide Grass	6	40	1	17	13	42	10	50	6	50	36	43
2	Reduction of Cost of Grass	3	20	3	50	8	26	3	15	1	5	18	22
3	Direct Purchase Of Raw Grass	2	13	0	0	5	16	3	15	1	5	11	13
4	Reduction Of Employees	0	0	1	17	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2
5	Technical Training is needed	0	0	0	0	1	3	4	20	0	0	5	6
6	New Technology Looms Introducing	4	27	1	17	4	13	0	0	4	20	13	15
	Total	15	100	6	100	31	100	20	100	12	100	84	100

Source: primary data

Table 2 highlights that the details of survey on the opinion of respondents about the techniques to improve production in the area of study. The survey revealed that majority of weavers of all categories (43%) opined that Govt. should provide grass, second majority

percentage of respondents (22%) preferred the idea of reduction of cost of grass, around 15% of weavers preferred introducing new technology looms, 13 % of weavers feel that the best technique to improve production is by direct purchase of raw grass, Whereas 6% of weavers felt that technical training is the only way to improve production. But only 2% of weavers felt the technique of reducing the number of employees is the best way to improve production.

So it's clear that majority of weavers of all categories from the area of study preferred the opinion that Govt. should provide grass is the best way to improve production.

Table 3 Reasons for Switch over to other Jobs

Sl. No	Problems	Independent weaver		Master Weaver		Weaver under Middlemen		Co-operative Weaver		Labour Weaver		Total	
		Nos	(%)	Nos	(%)	Nos	(%)	Nos	(%)	Nos	(%)	Nos	(%)
1	Creditor force	2	13	1	17	6	19	5	25	2	17	16	19
2	Middlemen involvement	1	7	1	17	7	23	0	0	2	17	11	13
3	Due to Power loom Mat	3	26	0	0	4	13	10	50	2	17	19	23
4	Lack of financial support	1	7	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	8	2	2
5	Price hike in grass	1	7	1	17	2	6	0	0	0	0	4	5
6	Lack of Govt. assistance	5	32	3	49	8	26	3	15	3	25	22	26
7	Lack of Marketing facility	1	7	0	0	3	10	0	0	1	8	5	6
8	Family low income	1	7	0	0	1	3	2	10	1	8	5	6
	Total	15	100	6	100	31	100	20	100	12	100	84	100

Source: primary data & Rank as per percentage

Suggestion

The Mat Weaving industry can be given fair weather treatment by the Government though series of steps, measures and programs which include strict reservation of viable items to the Mat weaving sector, providing necessary infrastructure for the Mat weaving industry, supply of raw materials in appropriate time at reasonable price, providing necessary capital and strengthening marketing structure for the mat Weaving products. Above all what is needed is a right approach to the industry from the view points of its place in the economy, its role towards the weaver sections without any other skills, and its significance in the labour surplus economy.

Conclusion

It is hoped that everyone will agree that the mat weaving industry under the informal sector is one of the major industries that needs immediate care and attention. The mat weaving sector is next only to agriculture in respect of employment potential and with this declining trend in the mat weaving sector the problems of unemployment will aggravate.

We found that most of the workers engaged in mat weaving industries in Tamil Nadu are illiterate in the sense that they have no idea about the various provisions of the Legislative and Welfare Acts. Almost all the looms used in this sector are less productive, and consequently, the workers have become victims of meager earnings as they are paid on piece rate system i.e. on actual production. Besides, low productivity due to lack of automatic looms, shortage of finances, and poor organizational efficiencies are identified as other problems. So we found that there is a lot of problems of the mat weaving industry in Tamil Nadu as well as of the workers engaged in the industry and until and unless these problems are solved, the overall improvement of the industry as well as the workers' living conditions cannot be achieved. So for the overall development of mat weaving industries it is required a wholehearted support with proper encouragement from both the State and Central Government.

So the planning people of Tami Nadu should realised the importance of mat weaving sector and allocate the required funds for the upliftment of rural mat weaving weavers to avoid starvation and the decline in mat weaving industry.

There are no proper promotional methods in the mat weaving sector in Pattamadai and no weavers' group can give advertisements. Very low percentage of weavers would attend the fairs and exhibitions to expose their products. The weavers face the problem of competition from mat weaving and power-loom products on one side and lack of promotional techniques on the other. This creates critical situation to weavers.