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Training Need Assessment of Weaving Community in Phulia, West Bengal, India: a Case Study

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Abstract:

An eminent traditional weaving activity centre Phulia of Nadia District is regarded as a renowned centre in the scenario of handloom and weaving industry in the state of West Bengal. Numerous artisans in various parts of this area and artisans from the other parts of the state are traditionally attached to this trade for centuries. Interventions from Government level at various stages of manufacturing have been an ongoing process at various weaving zones in West Bengal. Most of the weaving units of Phulia act as the site of dyeing and manufacturing of various handloom cotton and silk sarees and other allied products. Handloom development cooperatives at Phulia, involved in promoting the handloom units, have been extending their support in various fields through making scopes for training, product diversifications, marketing for the further development of traditional handloom industry. The actual training need assessment of the experienced traditional weavers of the area and decentralized training programme may substantiate the future prospect of the legendary industry. This paper attempts to assess the requirement of further training for the traditional weavers of Phulia for betterment of quality of their own products leading to profit maximisation.

Keywords: *Designing, Dyeing, Handloom, Traditional weaver, Training, Weaving*

1. Introduction

Traditionally handloom sector plays an important role in the Indian economy in the context of economic and livelihood development and employment generation as well as this sector facilitates foreign trade of India since ancient time. The traditional weaving activity not only restore the rich cultural heritage but these units still have immense potentiality to increase the income levels and quality of life of rural people which in the long run can be proved as substantial alternative way in reducing poverty of the country. The handloom sector has been playing an active role in provisioning alternative livelihood option from the early period of civilization. In later period this sector facing stiff competition from mill and power loom sector. The traditional handloom units conventionally produce cotton and various silk products. But after facing strong challenge from mechanised sector non-cotton and blended products are also being produced by the handloom units to endure in competition. However, the potentiality of this sector may be used as a powerful tool of rural industrialization which can boost up the rural development process of the state. None can deny its many-folded solving ability in addressing the problem like livelihood development in nonfarm sector in rural and semi urban area and waning foreign trade. Besides the basic arguments like output, employment and export, there are so many arguments that will go in favour of such units (shodhganga, 2016).

The conventional weavers require training for up gradation of the quality of the products and to stay tuned with the present demand of the market of the wider areas. All over India training programmes for weavers are designed to impart know-how on different technical aspects related with the topics like design development, modern techniques for dyeing and printing, pre and post loom operations and managerial skills etc. In addition to these weaving techniques are also often remain as theme of the training programmes which is mainly conducted to promote the weaving activity among younger groups of the surrounding locality of the weaving centres. Under the purview of Integrated Skill Development Programme in India, 1600 persons would be given training in weaving and skill development, in Tamil Nadu. In the inaugural phase of the training programme of 40 weavers at the Intensive Handloom Project centre each person would be given 50 days training and skill development with stipend (Times, 2014). In Odisha also weaving is a notable trade engaging considerable number of artisans. As found in the Odisha Government website of ORMAS, improved technology and increase in productivity are key objectives (DSMS, 2008) for training of the artisans of Odisha attached with handloom activity.

1.1. Backdrop of weaving in West Bengal

The Arthashastra, written by Kautilya (Chanakya), mentioned about silk weaving in Bengal and its existence from the ancient times. The cultivation of mulberry silk and its weaving is carried out in the plains of West Bengal. The other districts where silk yarn is made are Murshidabad, Birbhum, Bankura, Maldha and Purulia districts. The district of Maldah on the north bank and Murshidabad on the south bank of the Ganga are the important centres for silk rearing in West Bengal.

Shantipur, Dhaniakhali, Begampur, and Farasdanga are the main cotton weaving centres which are involved in the weaving of fine-textured sarees and dhotis. Coarser sarees and dhotis, used for everyday wear, are found in Atpur in Hooghly district while fine textured sarees with a uniform weave of 100-112 counts in the warp are done at Shantipur and adjacent Phulia.

Among the cotton variety of Bengal Jamdani is a well-known variety which was primarily used as dress material for women and men but in contemporary lifestyle in ancient Bengal, the other eminent variety of cotton handloom product is Tangail originated in the Tangail area of present Bangladesh. There is a key difference in the weaving technique of extra weft designing between 'Jamdani's and 'Tangail's. The embroidery thread of Jamdani is inserted after every ground pick whereas in tangails the embroidery thread is inserted after two ground picks. Cotton 'Tangail's are very popular and continue to be woven by weavers originally from Bangladesh and a little different variety from Phulia and Santipur of West Bengal also recognized all over the world. Being light they are excellent for everyday wear in a tropical country like India.

Since 1990s, a new trend was initiated in Shantipur and Phulia. Apart from the weaving of traditional Bengal handloom sarees, new products like yardage, scarves and stoles for Export started and the weavers began to understand the tastes and preferences of foreign markets. Various complex and esoteric weaves which had been abandoned for their complicated techniques and high labour cost were revived as weavers began to get remunerative prices for their products. New experiments were carried out with yarn combinations like silk, wool and cotton. Natural and artificial yarn combinations were also used. Phulia in fact led the way in the export of high end handloom stoles and scarves. These were exported in large volumes. While the downturn in the economy hit exports to a great extent, production for export is still substantial. In recent years, a few master weavers have started incorporating this style into weaving Phulia and Shantipur sarees. One can nowadays see muted colours and a variety of textures using different yarn combinations in Shantipur and Phulia sarees. (Mukherjee, 2016).

In this modern era, the consumers taste and preferences are changing day by day and to meet the need, modern technology is being introduced in conformity with diversity and versatility of products. As per National Informatics Centre, the interventions made for development of weaving industry in Shantipur-Phulia Region are as follows:

- CAD / CAM (Computer Aided Design/Computer Aided Manufacturing) Centre has been opened in the year 2000 at Santipur
- IJIRA (Indian Jute Industries Research Association), a Govt. of India undertaking established a modern Textile laboratory at Santipur
- Govt. of West Bengal has given financial assistance to install 'Natural Dyeing Unit' at Phulia
- Modern Dyeing & Processing unit has been established at Phulia
- Two schemes viz. Design development of Handloom Fabric of Nadia & Development of kids wear using natural dyes are going to be introduced with the help of NIFT, Kolkata
- RTDC, Santipur has planned to impart training in modern improved weaving under financial assistance of Devolved fund
- With the help of Apparel Training & Design Centre and devolved fund assistance, production of quality apparel from Textile Fabric is going to be introduced (NationalInformaticsCentre, 2016).

1.2. Background of the Present Case Study

Glorious chronicle of handloom industry of Nadia district is closely knitted with the rich weaving legacy of the state of West Bengal since medieval period of Indian history. It is needless to mention that small scale and cottage industries may be proved as a potential source for self-employment in rural areas and in this context handloom plays a pivotal role in the socio-economic upliftment of rural areas of Phulia-Shantipur as well as added glory to the weaving craft of the state of West Bengal. The traditional production of Jamdani Saree of Nabadwip, Santipuri of Santipur and Tangail varieties of Phulia zone have been popular in the domestic as well as international market over decades. Traditionally trained skilled weavers of the area are engaged in production of traditional cotton produces along with value added fabrics which has cleared its entry in the global market. To improve the quality of work with the available material some sporadic training programmes have been conducted for the handloom weavers present at the area of the study at different point of time without distinct prevision towards making the present weaving activity as flourishing industry. There is provision of a wide range of training programme on behalf of the government for the handloom weavers which includes up gradation of looms, dyeing training, design development training, training on seed capital, training on proper marketing technique of the modern age and so on. The present study found that a few government departments have arranged one or two training programmes towards skill development on weaving activity of the traditional weavers in collaboration with some local cooperatives according to their own programme framework without assessing their actual training need. Moreover, the linkages of common weavers with the programmes designed by National Informatics Centre are still found feeble.

In the present study, a brief attempt has been made to assess the training need of the weavers attached with handloom units of Phulia area which aim to categorically investigate the type of training needed by the experienced traditional weavers in order to heighten their products and livelihood as well.

2. Case Study Conducted on Weavers of Phulia

2.1. Description of the Focus Area

State: West Bengal, District: Nadia, PS:Shantipur, Block: Shantipur, Gram Panchayat: Belghoria I, Village: Phulia

2.2. Objective of conducting the study

The focus group of the present study is the weavers of Belghoria-I GP located in the neighbourhood of Phulia. The present study has been undertaken to assess the specific training need of the weavers. At present, most of the weavers of the study area are engaged in weaving activity by using their traditional skills inherited from their predecessors. Under several programmes associated with weaving activity and rural development, district and local level offices of various government departments and some local civil society organizations have intervened to arrange training programmes in the area at preliminary level. However, the experienced weaver has further requirement to explore several other arenas to enhance the productivity as well as the quality of the product of the traditional handloom weavers. The involvement of various organizations supported the product enrichment to some extent which comes alongside the product diversification and also offered opportunity for greater marketability leading to higher profitability. The present case study has been carried out to assess the actual training need for the weavers of Belghoria-I GP adjacent to Phulia township of Shantipur block. The study is designed to point out the training needs categorically which the weavers consider as most beneficial in continuing their livelihood in more convincing way. The present study is intended to focus on two secondary objectives i) to know the status of training programmes already imparted to them till date and ii) to find out the precise training needs that the unit owners require in future for advancement of their units.

2.3. Data Source

20 weaving units of Belghoria –I GP have been randomly selected and a structured interview has been conducted separately with the owners of the selected weaving units who are themselves engaged in weaving activity.

2.4. Study Findings

While receiving the reaction from the respondents it has been found that the artisans are working under different setups according to their interest and availability.

Type of Unit setup	Attached with Wholesaler	Attached with Cooperative	Independent unit	Total
	11(55)	8(40)	1(5)	20(100)

Table 1: Distribution of respondents by categories of units under different setups*

*Figures in the parenthesis showing the percentage

It has been found out from the sample survey data that 95percent of the weavers are attached with either cooperative or the wholesaler for marketing their product. Only one unit has been found as working as self-employed. Most of the units only weave their products as per the requirement of cooperatives and wholesalers and marketing of the product is totally done by mastering units. Majority of sampled units are working under the direct monitoring of the wholesalers. The wholesalers and even the cooperatives suggest them the pattern of weaving for better market acceptance. It has been found that it is general trend that the weavers are formally or informally attached with the wholesaler/cooperative for their trade. The designs are basically supplied by the wholesalers and the weavers are entirely separated from the design providers. They weave according to the order of wholesaler who is the only person to maintain and respond to the market demand. They want to be self-employed so that they can have a better standard of living and hence improved livelihood.

Households having less than 3 handloom machine	Households having 3 handloom machine	Households having more than 3 handloom machine
7(35)	1(5)	12(60)

Table 2: Distribution of Studied Units According to Numbers of Handlooms*

*Figures in the parenthesis showing the percentage

The weavers of the selected units have a varied range in terms of having handloom machines as one handloom machine produce only one saree in a day; therefore, the number of handlooms largely determines the production potential of the units. Moreover, the number of handlooms also decides the labour employment for weaving activity and majority of the labours are from Coochbehar district who are also traditionally attached to the activity by generations. The labours of the unit also participated in training whenever arranged by the different organisations in Phulia and adjoining areas.

Received training	Did not receive training
7(35)	13(65)

Table 3: Status of Training Availed by the Weavers of the Selected Units*

*Figures in the parenthesis showing the percentage

During the present study, it has been found that training has been conducted by the Tantubay Samabay Samiti for 10 days in last year and only 35 percent of the weavers availed the opportunity to take part in the training session. The main reason behind as per the respondents was that the training programme was on basic weaving training and as they are the traditional weavers they did not opt for this type of training. As per the respondents all the trainings conducted in recent as they recall were conducted to impart basic training on weaving and the experienced weavers are not at all interested to undertake such training. It has also been observed that out of the 50 trainees attended the last training programme 86 percent were women and only 14 percent are men. As the primary weaving activity is mainly done by the male members and male labourers also preferred the fact reveals that the women of the weavers' community particularly who became member of the weaver household through marriage want to be self-sufficient for better living and want to contribute to their family business in more active way.

Most of the weavers have strongly expressed their urgent need of a well-designed training programme with a variety of requirement. It was found that only 15 percent of the weavers do not need training as they are either trainers or they are well experienced. Still the veteran weavers expressed that training would be more useful for young weavers as they have further scope to develop.

	Yes	No
Need of training felt by the respondent	17(85)	3(15)

Table 4: Responses on Requirement of Training*

*Figures in the parenthesis showing the percentage

While examining the main attribute of the present study, the training need assessment a variety of training need of the studied weaver group have been found. The training need assessment focuses on the type of training required as well as the preferred mode of training determined by the weavers. As the weaving provides basic livelihoods of the households it would be difficult for the weavers to participate in long-term training.

	Designing	Quality Improvement of Weaving	Handloom Machine Repairing	No specific Training Requirement
No. Of Persons Who Require Training	10 (50)	5 (25)	2 (15)	3 (10)

Table 5: Responses on Need on Area of Training*

*Figures in the parenthesis showing the percentage

It has been revealed during the present study that 50 percent of the handloom weavers who are respond positive to undertake training expressed their fervent necessity for design development training while 25 percent of require the training for quality improvement of weaving and of the sarees that they used to produce. Among the rest some require training for repairing of the handlooms as they often face problems in case minor repairing of their handlooms because they have a crisis of handloom repairing personnel and they have to hire them from the other area which is not at all cost effective and production also became hampered particularly in peak season.

Reasons for opting design development training	No. of respondents
Do not know the process of design creation	3(30)
To improve marketing and increase sales	5(50)
To develop quality of saree	2(20)

Table 6: Responses on Reasons for Requirement of Design Development Training*

*Figures in the parenthesis showing the percentage

Among the "Yes" respondents of Table 4, Most of the new generation weavers wants to learn the process of design creation and specially the computer aided designing process as they are educated enough to acquire the techniques. But the main factor for requirement of design development training is that the changing market demands and changing taste of the mankind. Moreover, the need for design development is that the weavers have very less profit in production and if the designs are in accordance with the market then they may have a higher profitability by increase in demand as well as sales. The other fact is that as they work on the demand of the wholesaler they could not show their hand works of the styles of their own. If it has been on them they could produce one more saree from the threads used now for two sarees more efficiently. And this in turn could improve their standard of living.

Areas of modernization	Responses
Design	7(35)
Modernized Machine	8(40)
Dyeing of thread	2(10)
Designing and Modernized Machine	3(15)

Table 7: Areas of Modernization and Training of Handloom*

*Figures in the parenthesis showing the percentage

Among the “Yes” respondents of Table 4, majority of the weavers want to modernize the designs and in respect to this the machines are also to be modernized in order to increase the production. There is also a demand for improvement in the colour of the thread as the threads are to be coloured with organic colours instead of chemical colours. This is because the organic coloured products are of high demand in the market as this does not cause any skin diseases and eruptions.

	Yes	No
Need of training felt on design development	18 (90)	2 (10)

Table 8: Responses on Training Need on Design Development*

*Figures in the parenthesis showing the percentage

Among the “Yes” respondents of Table 4, 90 percent of the weavers require design development training but the rest who do not want design development training is because either they do not have enough time to participate in training session or they do not have enough education to take the training.

Preferred pattern of training		
In Classroom setup	In Workshop setup	Others
6(30)	12(60)	2(10)

Table 9: Responses on Preferred Pattern of Training*

*Figures in the parenthesis showing the percentage

Among the “Yes” respondents of Table 4, Most of the weavers want workshop based training as it is the most effective way. But some of them want classroom based training as they think they are expert to implement those only by off the job procedural training.

2.5. Training Need Assessment/Analysis Result

The ultimate result of the training need assessment/analysis for the handloom weavers is that they all want to upgrade their designs / patterns in sarees according to the market demand. They want to create their own designs so that they can easily apply techniques to reduce the cost of production as well increase their profitability. The present handloom unit owners being less educated do not have any ability to get computer aided design development trainings. But they want their young generation members to take these trainings so as to uplift their status and income. Moreover, if they create their own design they can in turn upgrade the quality of sarees which may increase the marketing and as a result increase in incomes.

2. Conclusion

Thus, the survey for Training Need Analysis was conducted in the village of Phulia, an age-old place of traditional weavers for creating marvellous Sarees which are well renowned beyond the boundaries of West Bengal, has shown remarkable results. The objective of the survey was to find out the requirement of the training of the weavers. The training need assessment actually pointed out their skill requirements which are essential in the manufacturing process to develop the quality of the products.

Since the Designs of the Shantipur and Phulia Sarees are having a traditional background and are mainly designed by the artists on the sarees so with the gradual passage of time the weavers took a mind to create their own designs. Even they want to apply modern computerized systems of designing and also to come out of the traditional designs in order to create market driven modern designs which in turn will lead to increased income along with better standard of living. For this, training need assessment was felt to be a major tool for knowing their demands of training so that its implementation might serve the purpose of the artisans in need of social and economic upliftment.

This particular weaver unit deserves attention from the Department of MSME, Government of India as well just because it has its legacy as well as potential to flourish further. This may be mentioned in this context that in Varanasi district of Uttar Pradesh, numerous Clusters involving Saree manufacturing have been intervened by MSME (Ministry of Micro Small & Medium Enterprises, 2016). The similar initiative may be executed for this age-old cluster of Phulia after conducting a proper review study on possibilities of taking up particular cluster activity by the concerned Directorate of West Bengal to make the weaving industry of the area more flourishing. Providing training in the field of various fields viz. designing, dyeing, embroidery etc., whatever has been asked for by the artisans, may be thoroughly looked into and training need assessment may be performed at the Government level followed by conducting of training programme. If the weaver cluster of Phulia gets any support from any level of Government in forwarding and in achieving their training need, then this effort of Training Need Assessment will be fruitful.

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