

Informal Learning among Handloom Weavers: A Case Analysis of Chinnalapatti, Tamil Nadu, India

Abstract

Informal sector contributes 50 per cent of the national income and it contributes 40 per cent of the exports of the country. Among the informal sectors, handloom weavers are the significant communities and they continue to struggle for their livelihood despite the efforts of the governments both the centre and the states through their development programmes by building the skill of the weavers. Yet, these communities are strong in adhering the age-old practices, as they are oriented in informal learning to acquire this skill to safeguard their livelihood security. Against this background, it is to be understood that the skilling process among weaving communities is highly problematic. The present study conducted among weaving community in the semi urban area of Tamil Nadu using mixed methods brought to light some of the revealing facts. The study has developed conceptual framework using informal learning theories. The study found that the skills have been transferred through informal learning and yet it has not increased the income as envisaged. Those who are in the private never face such problems. It is only those who are in the clutches of the government face many problems. In this context, there is an urgent need to improve technology along with formal learning system. Location specific policies may provide intended results rather than evolving uniform policies for the entire country.

1 Introduction

India has highest number of people employed in unorganized sector when it is compared with other countries in the world (Bairagya 2012). The unorganized sector contributes 50 per cent of the national income. As per the study of an important policy agency, informal sector contributes 62 per cent of GDP. 50 per cent savings come from only from unorganized sector. Even for exports, it contributes 40 per cent (ILO 2013). In such a way, it plays an important role in building up the economy and providing livelihood opportunity through employment to the poor. However, the conditions of the poor who are in the unorganized sector continue to be problematic and it requires the concern of the policy-making communities to improve the livelihood conditions of the poor in the informal sector. In this regard, the report of Sengupta is an eye opener (National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector 2007) on the conditions of the poor in the informal sector. Steps are on to find out remedies to the problems of the poor in the informal sector. Of the remedies, formalizing the skill set available with the workers in informal sector is one and important as it will increase the capacity and thereby it will enable them to earn more through formal system of employment. Though, it is an announced policy option, to put it into practice it will take time as changing

the mind-set of the people who are in the informal sector is difficult as the Indian society follows the tradition of caste system linked with skills. Certain skilled works are to be done only by certain castes and in which one could see the hierarchy. This hierarchical system is slowly disappearing through formalising the skill related activities. Both the centre and state governments are working towards the goal. To break this belief system the state, political parties and the civil society organisations have to work together. Skill India is not only a concept and scheme pronounced by the Prime Minister of India, but it is a movement by itself. By formalizing the skill development activities in India through an appropriate model of skill building (like German Model) India can achieve the goal of uplifting the poor from poverty, hunger, malnutrition and vulnerability (Palanithurai 2011).

Of the informal sectors, the weavers are one among the craft communities continue to face problems in their livelihood because of the competition of the mills produced fine clothing material at a cheaper cost. Once these communities were respected as their jobs were considered as symbols of liberation from colonial yoke. But now in the recent past the livelihood conditions of this community became deplorable. As a result, the weavers had organized several agitations against the state to protect their livelihood. Not all weavers are in one category. There are many groups among the weavers. Weavers who are on their own deal with market directly and have to equip themselves to face competition. They stand in competition by building up their skill commensurate with the needs of the market. They are not the problems to the government and policy community. They are connected with private traders. They are up to date in producing products. They constantly upgrade their skill and produce goods based on the demand in the market. However, the weavers who are poor and tied up with the cooperative societies are in the web of the livelihood problems. This category of weavers is doing this work as their job is linked with their caste. They feel that they are born to produce cloth. They never developed a perception that it is their responsibility to upgrade their skill to compete with others in the market and earn more. They continue to do the work in a protective environment as the state government provided social security through cooperatives. Thus, they have been brought under the umbrella of the cooperatives. Now they face problem as market forces are marginalizing them. In the present context, how these groups face the challenges in the market, as they do not have formal training is the question the present study investigates. By taking a micro unit in a geographical location, which was known and popular at once for a particular type of sarees, produced, for analysis. It tries to analyse the problems of the community involved in weaving. Since the community follows the traditional methods of weaving and learning the skill informally. It tries to look at the problems of the weavers in the backdrop of the skill they acquire and use.

2 Importance of the study

It is a significant study as to understand the skilling process of a community, which is traditionally a community of weavers in the context of the fast changing conditions of the market through a process of competition. Basically, the community is relying on only informal learning process. They have been in informal sector for a long period. But now they

are organised through cooperative societies to save them from vulnerability. Both the governments the centre and the state are taking earnest efforts to upgrade their skills to compete in the market for their survival and to enhance their income. Yet, they rely on mostly the informal learning and they continuously exert pressure on the government to get some relief. Government is insisting that they have to upgrade their skill needed to the market and for which government is willing to support. Only a few are moving towards the formal training. Why they are not using this opportunity to enhance their skill to face the market, is a serious question to be pondered over. By analysing the issues of the weavers, the study is able to meaningfully suggest ways and means to improve the livelihood conditions of the poor weavers.

3 Background of the Study Area

Chinnalapatti is a major hand-weaving cluster traditionally known for a fine variety of art silk saree weaving for the last two centuries. The place is located in Dindigul District of Tamil Nadu in southern part of India. Earlier the cluster was producing cotton sarees with hand created micro designs called as 'Bhuttas' with contrasting colour combinations against the ground colour. The coloured sarees were fine and catered to the needs of the nearby districts like Madurai, Ramanathapuram and Trichy in Tamil Nadu. There were ranging from 4,000 to 5,000 families practicing hand weaving in this cluster. Later in 1940s, the viscose filament yarn came into the yarn market and the weavers of this area started producing art silk sarees under the fold of master weavers. Master weavers procure yarn, hire weavers and produced finished products. They were all collected by the master weavers and marketed across the state. The viscose filament has lustrous property replicating pure silk in appearance. Thus, weaving of art silk sarees have been dominant from 1950s to 1970s. It was called as poor man's silk with low cost and gained popularity and attractions among women in the state of Tamil Nadu. After 1970s, MFA (Multi Fibre Agreement) brought a major threat to Art silk weaving and many weavers could not continue this due to shortage of yarn inputs. Later co-operative support was brought into this weaving trade with a hope to supply yarn with credit and selling by Co-optex the apex marketing body for hand woven textiles in Tamil Nadu with the interventions of Co-operatives. The weavers were forced to weave as per the market requirements of Co-optex. It was a protection given to the weavers by the government. This has resulted in producing low value added products and consequently, the wages have not gone up enough to meet their livelihood needs.

From the year 2000 onwards, there was a shift in customer needs and attires that has helped the Chinnalapatti weavers to take up weaving of Tie-dye / Kora silk sarees. It is because of the impact of globalization. To augment their skills, block level cluster approach has been introduced by the Ministry of Textiles, Government of India in 2006-2007. As a result of the change in approach, the looms have been modernized with metallic healds and reeds and improved designing tools like dobbies and jackquards were supplied for multi design and multi-colour outputs to attract the customers.

Thus, the weavers of Chinnalapatti have acquired their basic weaving skills in pit looms through their parental motivation and guidance during their early stages. To support their family incomes most of them completed primary and secondary level of school educations and they could not take up any job or go for higher education and continued the hand weaving in their households. Thus, informal mode of skill training is predominant in the study area.

Few of the hand weavers acquired specific skills through formal mode of training (three to six months) through mega cluster inputs to weave in frame looms and designing with jacquard devices. These formally trained weavers could earn more wages as they have skills in production of different varieties of outputs with multiple designs. At present, 1,000 families are practicing hand weaving in Chinnalapatti cluster and dominated by female weavers. The hand weaving process is organised through three modes: 1. Under handlooms cooperatives; 2. under master weavers and 3. independent weaver - cum - entrepreneur. In this study, we concentrate on the weavers in cooperatives.

4 Methodology

Mixed methods have been used to collect data from the field. One set of respondents are weavers being trained in their families through the family members. They never move out to get training to improve their living conditions. There is yet another group moving towards institutions to be trained formally. Respondents have been selected from both the groups. While selecting respondents adequate care was taken to draw respondents from all clusters and cooperative societies. An interview schedule was prepared and it is administered with the weavers those who are informally trained. Respondents have been selected from yet another group to collect data by conducting focus group discussions. All the respondents have been informed that we are getting data from them for the purpose of a research. The cooperative societies have selected respondents for this interview based on their willingness and the level of awareness on the subject on which interaction takes place. Respondents have been identified by the cooperatives.

5 Conceptual Framework

Informal learning has been defined by different individuals and institutions differently (Mitra 2002; Mehrotra 2014). But UNESCO has given a broader definition 'Informal Learning is unintentional learning that occurs in daily life, in the family, in the work place, in communities and through the interests and activities of individuals. Through the recognition, validation and accreditation process, competencies gained in informal learning can be made visible and can contribute to qualifications and other recognitions. The term experiential learning is also used to refer to informal learning that focuses on learning from experience' (UNESCO 2012). In India, craft communities are mostly following the informal learning. Mostly their skills are linked with caste identities also. In the present study, the weavers picked up this skill as they have been oriented in their family both men and women to learn

this skill in the looms they have in their houses itself. Even when they are young, they have been instructed to spend time in the looms and learn the skill of weaving. Since they spend more number of days, slowly picked up in a particular way and a specific type of loom, they are recognized by the society as a skilled person and enrolled as a member. When they are able to demonstrate their skill through a work of producing a product through the loom, they are recognized as a weaver. They are entitled to get all facilities to produce articles through the cooperative societies. They consider that it is a kind of skill they have acquired and it will fetch some income for their family. In the context of fast changing market scenario, it is identified that changes in the demand for goods and services are also expected to affect further employment and future training needs (Abrahart & Tzanntos 2000). As per the classification of Mitra, it is a household based sub sector where most of the activities are carried out by the members of the family (largely unpaid female labourers). This has sub sector to many different markets, activities, seasons and locations. Most of the families can break out of low incomes and poverty but some households catering to strong markets may evolve into more specialised enterprises.

Thus, the workers and households are located in a geographical location and locked up in a work based on their skill on their own. They upgrade their skills as and when market demands new designs and new products. They are being assisted by the government through cooperative societies, with an objective of lifting up from poverty trap. Though steps are taken by the government to formalize them through formal training, due to their mind-set and family conditionalities, they remain in the same work by following looms. There are a few they move out and join in the formal sectors through a process of training. Thus, the present study analyses the two streams of workers.

6 Results and Discussions

50 respondents have been selected and they were interviewed by the authors. 50 respondents are drawn from different handloom clusters. Most of them are still in traditional mode of learning and weaving. Yet another group consists of 16 respondents who have undergone formal training offered by the government. Three case studies have been conducted from the formally trained weavers. The responses of the respondents have been classified and analysed. The results are being discussed here under.

6.1 Section I – Informal Training

Table 1: Skills learnt through Informal Mode

Sl.No	Major Factors	Variables	Response	Percentage
1	Skill acquired through parents	Hand weaving	50	100
		Designing	20	40
2	Skills that helped for livelihood	Hand weaving	37	74
		Dyeing	-	-
		Designing	13	26

3	Scheme inputs/incentives A (mini cluster)	Skill regulation/upgradation/correction	14	28
		Designing)Tie-dye/dobby/jacquard)	39	78
	B (mega cluster)	Skill regulation/upgradation/correction	8	16
		Designing)Tie-dye/dobby/jacquard)	42	84

Source: Field data

All the respondents in the study area have acquired the hand weaving skills through their parental motivation and 60 per cent of them have also learnt the art of designing with simple tools. Of the total respondents, 74 per cent expressed that the hand weaving supported their livelihood requirements while 26 per cent expressed that designing skills learnt from the parents/peers helped to support livelihood needs in addition to weaving. The weavers explained that they have started learning this art and skill from their young age as they have been classified as weaver's community. The family tradition insists everyone that they have to learn the skill and help to produce cloth for the people. It is a family value. Beyond that, they have not developed a perception that through this process they can earn profit. Weaving is their family duty as stipulated by the community. When they started learning, they did not have any awareness on formal learning to acquire this skill. (Table 1).

The weavers in the study area availed cluster inputs to augment their skills and wages in 2006-07 through mini cluster support provided by the Ministry of Textiles, Government of India. It was the first time, they got to know about a formal training. Even during that time, many might have understood the potentials of the formal training. 28 per cent of the respondents have used it for skill upgradation and 75 per cent acquired skills related to designing with the use of Tie-Dye/dobby based designing/jacquard based designing. In respect of mega cluster inputs of the Ministry of Textiles, Government of India during 2014-15, 16 per cent availed it for skill upgradation and 84 per cent availed it for designing with jacquard designing tools. This has helped them to face the competition from mill sector – through appropriate designing interventions in their outputs. Thus, periodic upgradation of designing skills was offered to the informally trained weavers of Chinnalapatti. It is obvious from the response of the respondents that the formal skill training helps the weavers to face the competition and protect their livelihood security and beyond it, it provides opportunity to earn more income.

Table 2: Scope and usefulness of the skills in the profession

SI. No	Variables	Response	Percentage	Mean Score
1	Higher skills	Moderately agree	62	3.38
		Agree	38	
2	Helped to earn higher wages	Moderately agree	40	3.98
		Agree	22	
		Strongly agree	38	

3	Helped to earn competencies in weaving frame loom	Moderately agree	58	3.58
		Agree	20	
		Strongly agree	20	
		disagree	2	
4	Existence of peer influence	Agree	82	4.18
		Strongly agree	18	
5	Informal mode helped in meeting customer demands and needs	Moderately agree	30	4.10
		Agree	30	
		Strongly agree	40	

(Scale Range: 5 = strongly agree, 4 = agree, 3 = moderately agree, 2 = disagree, 1 = strongly disagree). Source: Field data.

Considering the scope and usefulness of informal skills among the respondents, it was found that 1. the skills have attuned them to be in line with customers' needs with a mean score of 4.10 out of 5, 2. the skills have helped them to earn higher wages with a mean score of 3.98 out of 5 and 3. it has helped them to enhance their weaving related competencies with a mean score of 3.58 out of 5 as most of the weavers favoured strongly on the above aspects.

However, informal skills helped the weavers to enhance skills in frame looms moderately with a moderate score of 3.38 out of 5. Thus, informal skills have predominantly helped the weavers in the study area in above domains to support their livelihood needs (Table 2). One can easily infer that the informal skilling is also useful to earn their livelihood and it has got scope to upgrade their skills to face the market competition from the above analysis. It is further inferred that through continuous upgradation of skills, they can retain their livelihood options.

Table 3: Favourableness to Sustain with Informal Training

SI. No	Variables	Response	Percentage	Mean Score
1	Society input	Moderately agree	50	3.5
		Agree	50	
2	Ability to produce new design and understanding customer preferences	Moderately agree	40	4.2
		Strongly agree	60	
3	Family support	Agree	20	4.8
		Strongly agree	80	
4	Prevalence of good working environment	Moderately agree	48	3.52
		Agree	52	

(Scale Range: 5 = strongly agree, 4 = agree, 3 = moderately agree, 2 = disagree, 1 = strongly disagree). Source: Field data.

The questions posited through interview with the respondents of informally trained weavers sought the favourableness of the respondents to sustain with the informal mode of skilling for their livelihood and it was found that the confidence gained in designing variety of motifs and figures matching to customers' needs had a very high favourable impact in continuing with informal mode of training with a mean score of 4.2 out of 5 (Table 3). Recently, Government

of Tamil Nadu has constructed work shed cum housing for the weavers of Chinnalapatti cluster and the prevalence of good work environment had the next favourable impact in continuing the current system with a mean score of 3.52 out of 5 (Table 3). Lastly linkages with the handloom societies also generated adequate favourableness to sustain with informal mode of training / learning with a mean score of 3.5 out of 5 (Table 3) favourableness to sustain informal training inputs in hand weaving was dominated by three factors namely, ability to produce newer designs that can meet customer needs, and the work environment out of newly constructed work sheds and linkages with handloom society.

Table 4: Contextualizing with current trends in textile industry with informal skills

SI. No	Variables	Response	Percentage	Mean Score
1	Sensing changes in customer preferences	Moderately agree	72	3.28
		Agree	28	
2	Assessing Competition from mill goods	Moderately agree	30	3.10
		Agree	40	
		Disagree	30	
3	Qualitative outputs	Strongly agree	56	4.56
		agree	44	

(Scale Range: 5 = strongly agree, 4 = agree, 3 = moderately agree, 2 = disagree, 1 = strongly disagree). Source: Field data.

The study further analyses the responses of the respondents on whether the weavers with informal skills can contextualize the current trends and changes in textile business (Table 4). It was found that the weavers with informal skills perceived could contextualize current market through qualitative outputs will meet with a mean score of 4.6 out of 5; sensing the changes in customers preferences and outlook that will be met by their novel designs with a mean score of 3.28 out of 5 and the ability to meet the competition from mill goods with their feasibility in producing varieties and colour options had recorded a mean score of 3.10 out of 5. Thus, the weavers with informal training in the study area have reported that qualitative outputs will help them to contextualize the current market trends with a high score of responses followed in anticipating the changes in customer needs and preferences and ability to face the competitions from mill goods.

Table 5: Difficulties faced by the weavers in skill acquisition through informal mode

SI. No	Difficulties	Response	Percentage	Mean Score
1	Learning inputs inadequate	Moderately agree	40	1.2
		disagree	60	
2	Poor Ventilation	Strongly agree	40	4.0
		Agree	48	
		Strongly disagree	12	
3	Lighting inadequate	Moderately agree	60	2.6
		disagree	40	

4	Guidance and counselling	Strongly disagree	60	1.4
		disagree	40	
5	Drudgery	Moderately agree	20	3.8
		agree	80	

(Scale Range: 5 = strongly agree, 4 = agree, 3 = moderately agree, 2 = disagree, 1 = strongly disagree). Source: Field data.

In respect of the major difficulties (Table 5) in the informal system of learning and training the responses were poor ventilation with a mean score of 1.53, drudgery (mean score 1.26) and inadequate lighting for conducive training. As the trainings were done through informal mode with the available facilities in the household hence the above difficulties are inevitable.

Table 6: **List of factors responsible for higher earnings through informal mode**

SI. No	Factors	Response	Percentage	Mean Score
1	Better weaving methods	Moderately agree	10	4.42
		Strongly agree	52	
		Agree	38	
2	Better design	Moderately agree	26	4.06
		Strongly agree	32	
		Agree	42	
3	Quality weaving	Moderately agree	50	3.7
		Strongly agree	22	
		Agree	28	
4	Upgradation to frame loom	Moderately agree	20	4.56
		Strongly agree	76	
		Agree	4	
5	Knowledge on technical advancement	Moderately agree	84	3.16
		agree	16	

(Scale Range: 5 = strongly agree, 4 = agree, 3 = moderately agree, 2 = disagree, 1 = strongly disagree). Source: Field data.

Table 6 presents the list of factors responsible for higher earnings through informal mode. It is a significant fact that their higher fetched from their job is due to the following factors namely, incorporating better weaving methods, followed by upgradation to frame looms from pit looms and better design options. Knowledge on technical advancement is also playing its role in wage enhancement.

Table 7: **Major issues in informal mode of training**

SI. No	Issues	Response	Percentage	Mean Score
1	Absence of literacy	Moderately agree	56	2.56
		Agree	44	
2	Lack of peer support	Moderately agree	48	2.48
		Disagree	52	
3	Lack of motivation	Moderately agree	70	2.7

		Disagree	30	
4	Low technological base	Moderately agree	38	3.84
		Agree	40	
		Strongly agree	22	
5	Lack of incentives	Disagree	86	1.86
		Strongly disagree	14	
6	Poor learning environment	Disagree	84	1.84
		Strongly disagree	16	
7	Scope for migration	Strongly agree	40	2.24
		Agree	28	
		Moderately agree	32	
8	No future for hand looms	Strongly agree	86	4.86
		Agree	14	

(Scale Range: 5 = strongly agree, 4 = agree, 3 = moderately agree, 2 = disagree, 1 = strongly disagree). Source: Field data.

Considering the issues affecting informal mode of training (Table 7), the weavers have expressed their opinion and observation. 86 per cent of the respondents expressed that there will be a bleak future for handlooms as they look at the market forces work in the given environment. The next major issue was that of low technology base in handloom weaving which has recorded a mean score of 3.84. Lack of motivation from business environment has recorded a score of 2.7. Absence of literacy among the weavers was one of the major issues with mean score of 2.56 followed by lack of peer support with a mean score of 2.48 and scope for migration with a score of 2.24. From the above it is inferred that the available technology for handloom is quite inadequate, lack of peer support, and absence of literacy to withstand in the market competition. Thus, it creates scope for migration to other jobs.

6.2 Section II

16 respondents were drawn from the same community but from different clusters. They have projected the problems associated with skilling process. They argued that they have transformed themselves and attended the training and enhanced their income from one level to another level. But it is not substantial even after attending the formal training conducted by the government. Handloom sectors are facing a severe threat from the big mills. This sector works and provides opportunity to the poor because of the support extended by the government. The community has got a distinctive character, as it will not move out to other jobs. There is a scope to improve their livelihood conditions. They know that by constantly building up their skill, they can face the challenges. But to face the challenge, skilling is the only way. While they are in the skill training, they need allowance for their family members. It is an irony that more number of people join in their group from the industrial sector to add stress (Rani & Unni 2009). People those who are in this community needs maintenance allowance when they are undergoing training. The stress has been increased.

6.3 Section III – Formal Training. Case Studies

A set of weavers of handloom families acquired formal training through a master trainer for a period of three months to six months in specialized areas provided through a scheme of the government. The master trainer was nominated by the Weavers' Service Centre, Ministry of Textiles, Government of India to train the set of weavers with the objective of enhancing their skills in frame loom weaving, design inputs through Jacquards, and Dyeing and Printing. From that group a few are selected for intensive interaction. The authors have several rounds of interactions with them and they are presented here as case analysis.

Case Analysis – I

Mrs. Devaki, aged 38, came to Chinnalapatti handloom cluster sometime around 16 years ago with imperfect skill in hand weaving as an allied activity. Handloom allied activities involve weft winding and folding of finished goods. These skills helped her to earn Rs.25/- per day in 2000-01 and her husband was engaged in full time weaving. Her earnings was quite low and her dream of providing good quality education to her children could not be met with. She has determined to enhance her income levels to meet the growing educational expenses of the children and she was looking for an appropriate opportunity to attend a formal training in improved methods of weaving. In 2006-2007, Ministry of Textiles, Government of India introduced Cluster approach for the development of handlooms in India to Dindigul Handloom Circle and Chinnalapatti got specific developmental schemes like skill upgradation in hand weaving; design weaving using mini jacquards and technology tools for weaving and so on. Ms. Devaki has shown keen interest in skill upgradation in frame loom weaving. She undertook training for three months sacrificing her household assignments with an intent of undertaking skill weaving in frame looms. During the period of her training, she learnt the nuances of hand weaving under the guidance of the master trainer. In the first month, her training the production rate was three metres / day in plain weaving. She progressed in the subsequent months and attained the benchmark level of five and a half metres or more in a day. She also was trained in multi treadle weaving 100 m against two pedal shedding devices. In addition, she learnt the art of handling and operating design devices like jacquard in her hand weaving process. After the training, she was given silk / cotton Kora silk saree weaving and she could reach the competence on par with that of a highly skilled weaver in Chinnalapatti. From 2007-08 onwards her fortunes have changed and she was in a growing track in respect of earnings and income levels. Right now, she is earning Rs.350/- per day through hand weaving and she could confidently meet the educational and family related expenses for a better prospect. She informed that formal mode of training has definitely helped her to earn reasonably good wages and she has adequate awareness on the customer preferences and demands and the need to produce qualitative outputs and opined that handloom can meet the competition posed by the mill sector where mass production at low cost is done in clothing. She also expressed that the drudgery out of handloom weaving has come down significantly through formal training and she continuous her profession in weaving. Currently her earnings were higher enough to support her family needs with skill improvement of 40 per cent over her basic skills.

Case Analysis – II

Ms. Mariammal had her basic skills in pit loom based hand weaving since her adulthood. Her family was a traditional weaver family and three members of her family have been practicing pit loom weaving for their livelihood. Pit loom weaving is a low productive equipment and uses traditional weaving tools like bamboo reeds and cotton healds, which may produce lot of dust and yarn breakages during weaving. The outputs from pit looms are prone to quality complaints affecting customer satisfaction levels. She could earn only Rs.60/- per day as wages until 2005. Thus, low earnings coupled with moderate quality outputs affected her earnings.

When the Ministry of Textiles, Government of India introduced the cluster support to Chinnalapatti hand weaving cluster, she took the training in frame loom weaving that taught her skill up gradation thro' master weaver for a period of three months. This has helped her to be in line with customer requirements and had skill enhancement in weaving with frame looms.

She appreciated the intervention of the cluster support that helped her to acquire skills and she received improved weaving tools like metallic healds and aluminium reed. These tools really helped her to produce qualitative outputs unlike with cotton twine healds and bamboo reeds. From 2008 onwards, her productivity was enhanced due to upgraded skills and currently her earnings is above Rs.300/- per day. She opined that handloom could withstand the competitive forces from mill sector due to qualitative outputs coupled with attractive design options. She is currently satisfied with the training offered during 2006-2007 and would like to take up additional training in newer tools like power jacquard weaving if offered to Chinnalapatti hand weaving cluster. She expressed that formal learning facilitated her to learn additional skills at a faster rate and skill correction during the training helped her in drudgery reduction.

Case Analysis – III

Mr. Rajendran (Age 58 years) born in a traditional handloom family in Chinnalapatty and his experience in weaving is rich by 30 years. He was weaving in traditional pit loom up to 2005-2006 and he was mainly producing art silk sarees using hand operated design tools, which were not quite precision and appealing. Further wage rate in such weaving was around Rs.75/- per day and he could not meet the growing expenditure of the family.

Hence, he decided to take up the skill-training programme that came along with cluster inputs to Chinnalapatti. He not only learnt the skills in frame loom weaving and learnt additional skills in designing and dyeing & Printing under a qualified master trainer. He had learnt the above skills in a duration of three months and enlarged his skill base. This training not only improved his own skills but he acted as a trainer for the weavers operating in and around his work shed. Thus, the formal training helped him to enhance his earnings from a paltry level of Rs.75/- per day to Rs.330/- per day and facilitated the neighbours also to get higher wages through his design intervention and skill correction.

He expressed that the current wage rate of Rs.330/- per day could not meet the escalating prices and costs. He requested that the Governmental support is needed in revising wage rates along with higher value addition thro' frame loom weaving. He favoured for switching to power loom weaving if such facilities are opened in his location. He identified few issues in hand weaving through formal training that the duration has to be extended and even with skilful artistic saree production, he could not enhance the wage earning beyond Rs.350/- per day. He also expressed that hand weaving requires focused attention in completing the given task and could not pay attention to other activities and hobbies and cautioned that lack of attention while doing hand weaving will result in quality defects and variation in the designs. He reported that the youth in their families would like to take up employment avenues in hyper textile show rooms like Pothys, RMKVs and Chennai Silks where they can earn the salary equivalent to that of hand weaving with moderate effort and with the textile related knowledge base known to them. This is quite true as the booming retail business in Textile / fashion shops provide necessary job opportunities for the youth belonging to handloom families. Hence, the opinion of Mr. Rajendran that job migration in hand weaving is quite inevitable due to low wages and drudgery.

Thus, the handloom activity with low value addition and weaving of low cost items may not have any scope in future but higher value added outputs may have sustenance thro' hand weaving like pure silk saree weaving as per the words of Mr. Rajendran.

Concluding the above, the formal training through master weaver was acquired for three months duration. They have enhanced their skills in frame loom weaving that have higher productivity than pit looms resulting in better wages. As per the responses, the skill upgradation was about 40 per cent in hand weaving and new skills in designing and dyeing. These helped them to enhance their earnings to fivefold from Rs.75 to Rs.350 per day. The female respondents were quite satisfied with the formal training that came with cluster support inputs. The male respondents have informed that low value addition in handloom weaving will not have any in future. The youth of the weaving families are taking up other avenues of employment in retailing. All the three have acknowledged that formal training has helped them to increase wages and quality of outputs with vast designs.

7 Finding and Conclusions

From the study, it is inferred that it is a traditional community strongly rooted in weaving as the community feels that it is their duty to produce cloth for the people and it should be done through hand. This value has been practiced in this community, which involves itself in weaving cloth. But the government has enabled them through forming handloom cooperatives to enhance their livelihood opportunities. Further, the Government of India and the Government of Tamil Nadu have got more of schemes and programmes to enhance their skill and providing needed technology to enhance their productivity and income. Slowly the community realizes the need of skill upgradation to face the market competition. Yet, they have more of barriers and impediments to enhance their skill level institutionally as they had

been oriented in family level livelihood work. Having realized the shortfall of skill, they take efforts to upgrade skill more through informal way. Of course, there are many realized that the upgradation of skill is need of the hour to face the competition in the market and to enhance their livelihood opportunity. A segment of the weaving community undergoes such a kind of institutional skill upgradation by making use of the schemes and programmes of the government. Majority in the community did not prefer skill up gradation through institution even though it is being offered free of cost by the government. Because they have inherent barriers in their family and community practices. But a segment of same community realized the need of such skill up gradation and participated in the skill enhancement programme. The difference between the two groups in terms of their skill enhancement process and livelihood enhance programme are analysed through this study.

Informal training has been acquired by the weavers to tune up hand weaving and designing skills that happened through mini cluster and mega cluster initiatives of Government of India. In respect of scope of the informal skills, it was found that the skills have helped them to attune their outputs in line with customer needs to enhance the wage earning capacity which is Rs.200/- per day currently and to enhance competitive in weaving related skills. The same was confirmed with positive correlation coefficients in terms of the scope of informal mode of training.

Considering the favourableness of the respondents to sustain with informal mode of training, the major factors were 1. confidence producing variety of designs; 2. reasonably good work environment created through recent government interventions of work-shed schemes and 3. cordial linkages with the handloom cooperative society. The same could be confirmed with correlation. Thus, the inclination and interest to sustain handloom weaving was evinced through factors as per the study.

The ability of the informally trained weavers in contextualizing the market forces, the weavers perceived that 1. ability to produce variety (flexible outputs) to meet the competition from mill goods have helped them; 2. sensing changes in customers' needs and demands and 3. qualitative outputs; the same have been proved by the correlation and regression analysis. The weavers with informal mode of skills have identified few issues impacting their current skills as 1. no future for handlooms; 2. low technology base in the current production system; 3. lack of peer support to continue the weaving; 4. absence of basic literacy among the weavers and 5. threat of migration to other jobs.

Thus, there is an urgent need to improve the technology of hand weaving, reducing drudgery and inspiring considered through periodical interventions and subsidies to sustain this sector in rural scenario. Needed awareness could be created among the weavers to move over to formal training. The formal training has to be given by the nearby institutions. During the period of training, a subsistent allowance has to be given to the families as the families lose income during the period. Centralized way of evolving scheme has to be changed to enhance the skill of the weavers; the conditions of the weavers vary from place to place.

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TVET@asia The Online Journal for Technical and Vocational Education and Training in Asia

CITATION:

Palanithurai, G., Seerangarajan, R. (2018). Informal Learning among Handloom Weavers: A Case Analysis of Chinnalapatti, Tamil Nadu, India. In: TVET@Asia, issue 10, 1-16. Online: http://www.tvet-online.asia/issue10/palanithurai_etal_tvet10.pdf (retrieved 31.01.2018).

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