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## A Study on the Problems, and Issues of the Handloom Industry; a Special Reference of Maruthamunai Area

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**Abstract:** *The handloom industry is one of the oldest industries in the world. From the earliest times it has been seen as a profession intertwined with human life. Manpower is seen as more essential than capital to the handloom industry. As a result, the industry is gaining ground in more populous countries where man power is readily available. As far as Sri Lanka is concerned, most of the people living in rural areas are engaged in weaving here. Nowadays, however, weavers encounter many problems, and challenges. In the Maruthamunai, handloom industry has been chosen to explore this, explore the challenges, and issues they face. Based on this, this study aims to identify ways to improve this industry. In addition, the sub-objective is to identify the problems in advancing the weaving or handloom industry, and to come up with solutions. Field visit, observation, interviews, and questionnaire were the primary data collection method of the study. The questionnaires were distributed in random sampling method to 638 handloom small scale weavers among 8 Grama Nilathari Divisions of Maruthamunai, in order to achieve the sub objective of the study. Statistical reports, and annual reports of DSD, and GND, published articles, magazines, books, and internet sources were considered as the secondary data for the study. As well, the first, and secondary data thus obtained are analyzed through ArcGIS 10.3, and presented as graphs, tables, and diagrams. The study area Maruthamunai has identified a number of issues in various fields such as raw material products, and appropriate solutions have been proposed.*

**Keywords:** *Handloom Industry, Workers; Raw Materials, Weaving Problems, Maruthamunai*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The weaving industry is one of the oldest in the world. It dates back to the earliest days of human life. Tamils have been wearing cottons, silk, and woolen garments since ancient times, and weaving lace-lined garments. Vijayakumar, (2013) have mentioned that enterprise development is almost universally promoted in developing countries, and is often justified on



the grounds that the emergence of entrepreneurs is an important mechanism to generate economic growth. Gamage (2003) demonstrated that the World Bank defines enterprise size in Sri Lanka based on the number of employees: those with fewer than 49 employees are small; those with 50-99 employees are medium-sized; and those with more than 100 employees are large. Sinnathurai (2013) explored that it is the fact that in developing countries, most important, and crucial issue is to generate tremendous employment opportunities for the vast labor forces because unemployment problems vitally affect the people that lead to severe poverty hidden condition.

Sri Lanka's handloom industry has a history of more than 543 BC. The Mahavamsa states that when prince Vijaya visited Sri Lanka, Kuweni had loomed. Thus, it is also an important industry in rural areas. At present, the weaving or handloom industry is seen as a complex situation. Handloom weavers are more common in Kurunagale, Baticaloa, and Trincomalee districts of Sri Lanka. Amaradiwakara et al., (2016) referred that therefore, it is clear that although there are large numbers of SMEs in Sri Lanka, their contribution to the national economy in terms of output, and share in employment has been very low. Sri Lankan fashion craft industry, which comprises mainly of handloom, batik, beeralu, and embroidery, is one of the main income generator for rural communities, and differently able people. (Dissanayake et al., 2017). The financial potential of the community based handloom textile industry is well understood, there are many barriers resisting to the growth of this industry through CEB development phenomenon to an economically plausible level. (Wanniyarachi, 2018).

CBSL, (2012); Gunatilake (2016) reported that as a result of high borrowings, during 2010, and 2011, the Sri Lankan economy grew by 8%, and 8.2% respectively, and that was the highest GDP growth rates recorded in over three decades. According to the banking survey done by International Finance Corporation (IFC) in 2006/2007 of the SME market, in Sri Lanka, SMEs constitute 80-90 percent of industrial value added, and around 70% of employment opportunities have been generated, (Wijetunge, n.d). The public sector dominated the spinning, weaving, and finishing sector which of comprised three categories; mills, power looms, and handlooms. (Weerakoon & Thennakoon, 2006).

## **2. MATERIAL AND METHODS**

### **2.1. Study area:**

Maruthamunai is the only village producing handloom garment in the District of Ampara, and is very well known to Sri Lanka for its handloom products, (Mubeen, n.d). There is no evident as to how many years the weaving industry was started in Maruthamunai. While it is not possible to say exactly, how long this has been done, it is safe to say that it has a history of about 150 years. There is no disagreement that weaving is the first industry in the village. The story of the relocation of the sector from Neelavanai to Maruthamunai for the convenience of the weaving industry also confirms this period

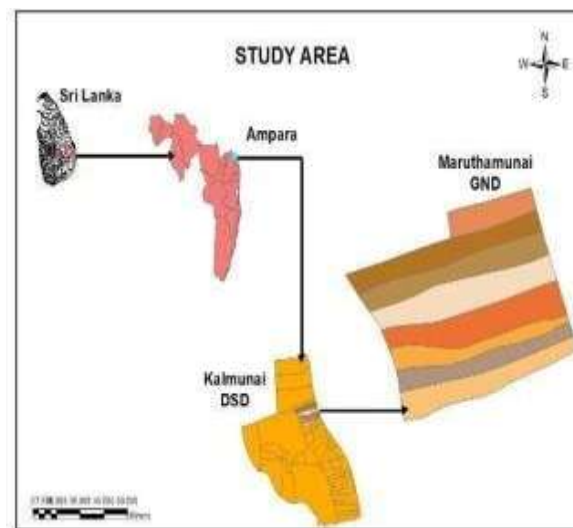


Figure 1: Study Area Maruthamuna

Raw materials are sourced from India, Pakistan, and Egypt. For this, equipment such as molds, paste, tape, and tube were also made by them. Currently imported from India, and China. The weaving industry was badly damaged by a government's open economic policy. In 2004, 1064 families were involved in the weaving industry. 366 families were affected by the Tsunami. 768 lot loom, and their inputs. 6.82 million Due to this. Losses have occurred (Al Maruthamuna, 2006).

The study area Maruthamunai is town, bordering Kalmunai Municipal Council of Ampara district. The population is 17453 of these, 8609 are males, and 8844 are females. Main purpose of the study is to identify ways to improve the endangered weaving or handloom industry, and to take steps to increase the production. Further, the sub objectives includes to identify the problems faced by the weaving industry ahead, and to identify suitable solutions to solve the problems faced by weavers, and work out ways to solve them.

## 2.2. Methodology:

Primary data for this study are obtained through the techniques of interviews, questionnaires, field visit, and observation. Data were collected through handling structured, and unstructured interviews techniques, especially the weavers, weaver entrepreneurs, developments officers, *Samurthi* officers, and senior residents. Accordingly, the data from questionnaire is collected as 2 questionnaires for Maruthamunai 1, in Maruthamunai 2, 4 Questionnaires, in Maruthamunai 3, 23 questionnaires, 3 questionnaires, in Maruthamunai 4, In Maruthamunai 5, 5 questionnaires, in Maruthamunai 6, 10 questionnaires, 18 Questionnaires for Periyaneelavanai 1, and 5 questionnaires for Periyaneelavanai 2. Thus, 70 questionnaires have been distributed accordingly.

On the other hand, the secondary data for this survey is gathered through previous studies, journal articles, and data bases, statistical, and annual reports of DSD, and GND, and books.

## 2.3. Data Analysis

The data collected for the study are characteristics, and quantitative based on descriptive data, and qualitative data based on statistical analysis. ArcGIS 10.3, MS Excel-2013, and presented as graphs, tables, and diagrams.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

According to the study, the following problems have been identified in the Maruthamunai Division in handloom industry.

#### 3.1. The issue of small scale weavers:

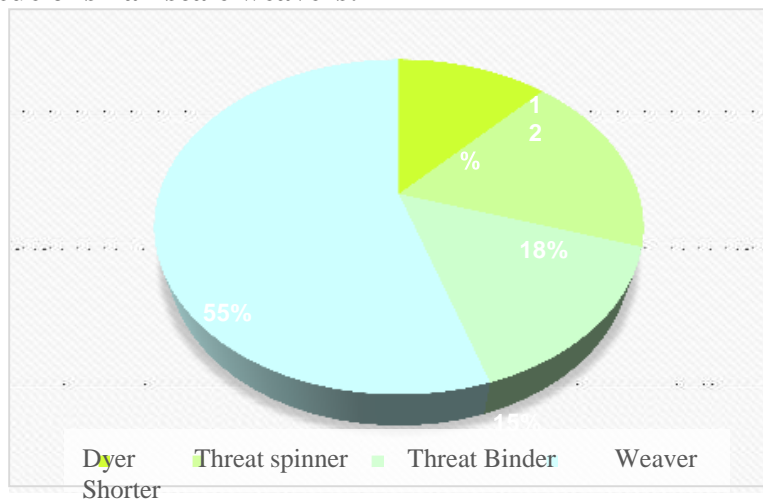


Figure 2: The issues of wage laborers

The figure 2 demonstrates the issues of wage of laborers by percentage. This data was recorded by the questionnaire given to the small scale entrepreneurs of handloom. The issues they encounter is vividly described below.

#### A. *The dyer:*

The figure 3, and 4 refers the processes of dye distillation in the study area Maruthamunai. The handloom industry, mercenaries are those who dedicate themselves to creating end products from raw materials. During this process, the laborers, and entrepreneurs undergo some issues physically, and economically. Those are explained below.



Figure 3 & 4: Dye distillation

It refers to those who dye for the clothes. The dyes are applied in the desired colors. This occurs in several steps. According to the survey 12% of the entrepreneurs encounter various issues, during the processes, those includes the concentration of the dye on the hand, and feet cause rashes, bruises, and itching due to chemicals. It is difficult to remove as more dyes get on the hands. When the dye is boiled they are subjected to physical abuse due to high heat. These were able to be observed by the researcher by direct observation.

*B. Threat Spinner:*

The weaver is the weaver who weaves yarn into strands, and threats using a saw. 18% of participants struggles when the threat spinning processes. The spinning machine was able to observe to progress of the duration system, and is now modernized. The below image 5 represents the threat spinning equipment, and which is captured in the study area Maruthamunai.



Figure 5: Threat spinning equipment.

*C Thread binder:*

The number of thread binders is currently declining. 15% of participants encounter leg pain by standing too long during thread binding process. The image 6 describes about the thread binding process. Here, the man is one of the small scale entrepreneurs, he must stand for long time till he completes the thread binding, thus cause the mentioned leg pain.



Figure 6: Threat binding process.

**3.2. The other issues of weavers:**

The weaving industry in Maruthamunai area has been seen as a cottage industry from time to time. Among all the small scale industries, the most prominent issue the entrepreneurs encounter is wage. The entrepreneurs mentioned some other issues, and those are categorized as wage shortage, time issue, physical abuse, and sound problem which are shown below in the figure 7

vividly.

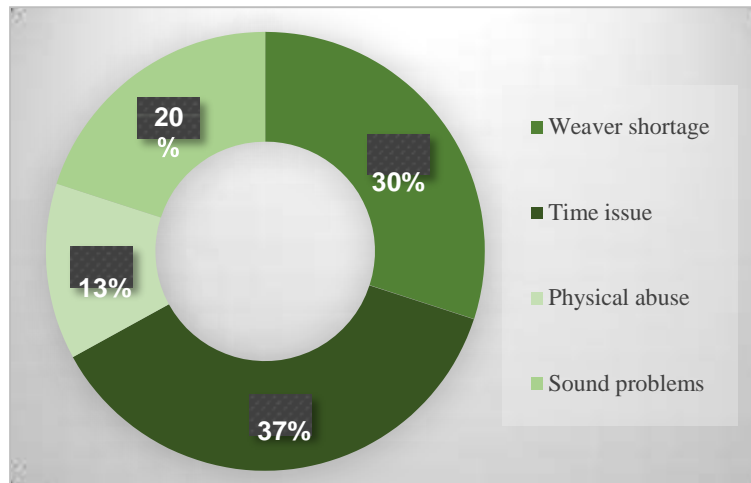


Figure 7: Wage related issue

a. *Weaver shortage:*



Figure 8 & 9: End product- saron

The shortage of weavers is increasing nowadays. In this age of modern technology, there is a shortage of new weavers, as young people are not interested in the weaving industry but seek other industries, service industries, and foreign employment for their livelihood. Consumers are paid less when they buy end products such as saron/ lunge, and linen products from the weavers directly. That, it is not sufficient for the cost of living at present for the entrepreneurs. The figure 8, and 9 represents the end products by handloom products in the study area Maruthamunai. The people (small scale handloom entrepreneurs) pointed (40%) that they get Rs,750 for weaving a saree, and Rs, 220 for weaving a saron/ lunge. Thus, they do not get the thread in a timely manner, and the threads get too close which is a massive problem. Moreover,



there is a shortage as the present generation has not come forward to learn this.

*a. Time issue:*

The handloom weaving industry is seen as a business where more women are engaged than men. There is less time when women do daily household chores, and weave. 37% of women entrepreneurs engage in handloom vocation in their homes. It is normally seen as a profession that works 10 hours a day.

*b. Physical abuse:*

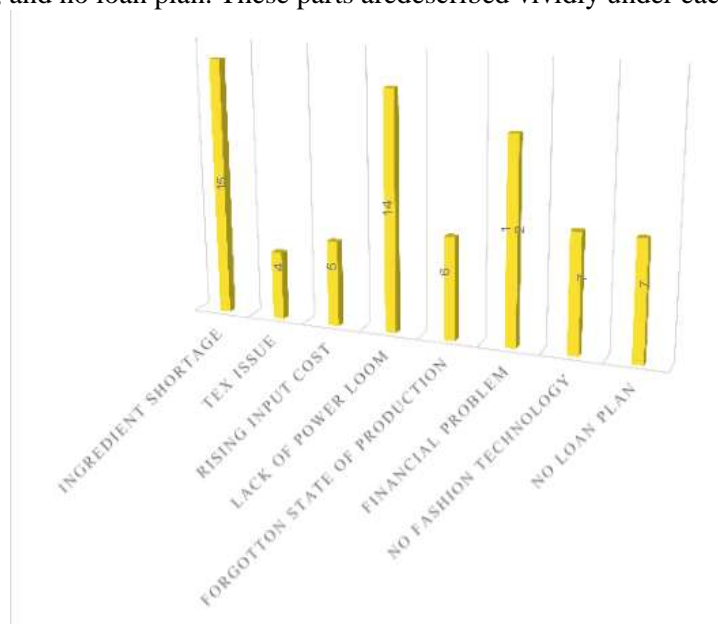
Twenty-seven types reported that women were more prone to hand, foot, hip pain, and fatigue due to weaving. 13% of women encounter physical issues when they engage in their profession thus, leads to hip pain, leg pain, hand pain, and fatigue. In an interview with the yarn weaver, he said that when there is a problem in spinning the yarn, there is difficulty in weaving the yarn. Also, it is difficult to do this alone, needs help, and physical exertion causes physical exhaustion.

*c. Sound problem:*

The sound of weaving makes it impossible to weave at night. The study found that 20% had timeproblems. The sound made while weaving in the weaving malls is disturbing to them, and makes it difficult for small children to fall asleep, sometimes causing too much noise, and anger, and the public is told that too much noise can cause headaches for weavers as well.

*d. Problems with raw material distributor, and end product consumers.*

Figure 10: Problems with raw material distributor, and end product consumers Ingredients distributors are those who receive, and distribute raw materials for handloom, and weaving. Ingredients buyers who buy end products saree, saron, and lungi they face many challenges in purchasing yarn, and end products, those are represented in the figure 10. The bar chart includes ingredient shortages, tax issues, rising input cost, lack of power loom, forgotten state of production materials, financial problem, no fashion technology, and no loan plan. These parts are described vividly under each subheadings below.







#### I. Ingredient shortage

Yarn is one of the most essential raw materials for the textile industry. According to the survey, 15 respondents (~21.5%) mentioned that they struggle to get yarn for new products. Because this yarn was obtained from a free tree in the Maruthamunai area during the period 1860- 1870. But later, due to lack of land, and resources, and other industries, including the government Mills, and Private Mills were abandoned altogether. In addition, the import of yarn is mainly due to the fact that the cost of import is more profitable than the cost of production. This yarn is derived from countries such as India, Pakistan, and Egypt.

However, nowadays it is found in rion, and cotton imported from countries like India, and China, especially from India. Also known as Mumtaz, Sundaram, Sulaika, and Premium. Despite the unrestricted availability of yarn from abroad, there are problems in getting yarn in extraordinary periods. For example,

- Flooding in countries where yarn is imported.
- Labor strike (India - 2019).
- Customs strike.
- Traffic ban (COVID - 19).
- Natural disasters.
- Civil, and international war.

#### II. Tax issues.

The weaving industry became a cottage industry, and therefore the tax was abolished in 2002. The survey reviewed that 4 participants (6%) mentioned that there is a tax on dye imports.

#### III. Rising input costs.

7% (5 participants) of participants referred that weavers have been inconvenienced by the increase in its price because Linen inputs are also found to be more expensive than yarn, tube, and ribbon. Initially, bandages, pipes, and ribbons were produced in the Maruthamunai area. But now they are being imported. The rise in international stock market prices, and the fall in the value of the domestic currency have led to higher prices for yarn, bundles, tubes and ribbons.

#### IV. Lack of facilities for power loom (No technology).

Cotton is used in weaving industries, and as a short product. And there is not enough facility to cut the power loom. Also, there is no technology to run it. Apart from this, as it is a traditional industry, it is difficult for people to accept technology quickly. From the questionnaire survey 14 respondents (20%) responded as what kind of issues they encounter during the processes of handloom products, those includes,

- Marketing problem.
- Market information not available.
- Lack of awareness about product features.
- Lack of quality standardization.

Lack of quality standardization in raw material, production material for this industry is a massive problem. Lack of adequate competence can also be attributed to the standardization of quality production materials. For example, it is not possible to say with certainty that the product is 100% cotton, and does not dye. They do not



have the scientific technology for it.

Not everyone can make the best handloom products even though there are many cotton in town when it comes to improper management of handloom products. Only those who are trained for it, can create the best linen material.

V. **Forgotten state of production materials**

6 people (8.5%) respond that the products such as saron, saree, lungi, fabrics, bed sheets, handkerchiefs were found in the early period. But now the production of bed sheets, and handkerchiefs has been forgotten.

VI. **Financial problem.**

The handloom industry requires a lot of funding for raw materials supply, repair, and wages. In that sense, it is possible the industry could not continue when there is a shortage of funds. Predominantly, infrastructure, and investment are the most notable things for the handloom entrepreneurship, namely, 12 respondents (17%) have posited that infrastructure facilities required for handloom industry are scarce in this area. I.e. weaving mills, yarn weaving mills, modern dyeing equipment, and dye water purifiers are low. This is a massive problem for this industry. For example, dye water purifiers are found in only 3 of the 9 dye factories in the study area.

VII. **There is no fashion technology:**

Workers do not have the knowledge of fashion technology, knowledge of design, new fashion design method, etc. for this industrial activity. This is the main problem in this industry. Thus, in accordance with the questionnaire survey 7 respondents which is indicated as 10% have posited that they are suffering from the lack of fashion knowledge as well fashion technology in the study area. Due to this issue, they are unable to admire young people to buy handloom products.

VIII. **No loan plan.**

Probably a factor as to why they are doing so poorly. Production of saron, lungi, saree is for those who are sold by the employers to invest more by paying the corresponding wage. Occasionally, there is scam in repaying the loan. This is the biggest problem in this industry. 10% of people effected due to no loan facility in the study area. In countries like India, those engaged in the weaving industry are given a pension of one thousand rupees per a month. But that is not the case in Sri Lanka. Thus people are not interested in this industry, and are dependent on other professions. Home loans, auto loans needed for people's daily lives; despite the provision of agricultural credit, the loan scheme for weaving is yet to come into effect.

### **3.3 Environmental issues.**

a. *Groundwater contamination*

There are 9 dye factories in Maruthamunai area. Of these, one factory is in the vicinity of the pond, and the other 8 dye factories are in proximity to the sea. The dye water purifier is found in three factories, and it is worth about Rs 23 lakh. Water in the ground becomes polluted due to untreated. Thus mixing chemicals into neighboring wells. Thus the p<sup>h</sup> value of the water in



those wells will vary. Thus being susceptible to disease. Therefore, Studies should be carried out to know the value of the well water.

*b.* Biodiversity impact

Dyeing is seen as an important part of this industry. In that way, the wastewater that comes after dyeing is discharged directly into the estuary at Periyaneelavanai, which is detrimental to the living organisms there. Similarly, animals, and plants are affected by the release of dye water into the pond from factories near the pond. This is what biodiversity is all about is said to be vulnerable. This has affected some freshwater fishing industries. In addition, snakes, and frogs in the water can be seen proliferating in the city.

*c.* Air pollution:

The cotton produced during weaving pollutes the air. Thus those on the side are subject to sneezing. This is also a major problem in the textile industry at present.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

Small scale industries are needed to the country to develop the life, and livelihood of the populace. In accordance to the study, handloom industry is famous since the ancient years. Unfortunately, the decline of the weaving industry due to the passage of time was seen to be high, and rapid. Nevertheless, it is wonder that there are so many small scale weavers, and people in various regions of the country. It is noteworthy that the people from middle class, and low income families, especially in the Maruthamunai area, are more involved in the handloom or weaving industry despite the fact that there is no specific amount of profit. Although more, and more people are involved in other industries, and professions the middle class of few, and few families are engaged in this craft to meet their daily needs, and other needs. They too are facing many hardships. It is also noteworthy that environmental issues, and health related issues, as well as wage, and labor related issues, are also present in the handloom industry. Governments, and other NGOs in developing countries such as Sri Lanka have come forward to promote smallscale manufactories who are engaged in such activities by encouraging the people, and raising awareness of the importance of this weaving industry to other people. School children, and growing community by providing them with the facilities they need, and the best profit can be made through this industry. Therefore, the study was able to identify the problems faced in the weaving industry, and identify the reasons for it. Therefore, it is necessary to take steps to denigrate such problems and continue to advance this weaving industry.

The following are suggestions, and suggestions for actions to be taken to deal with the problem of wage labor in the weaving industry at Maruthamunai, the problem of end-of-life material resources, the problem of state-owned enterprise, the environmental problem, and the political problems faced through this study.

- Use gloves, and socks when dyeing.
- Providing knowledge about chemical composition.
- Use of modern techniques to brew alcohol.
- Wearing a mask while spinning the thread.
- Providing adequate wages to weavers.



- Encouraging the people with government assistance to produce raw materials in the country.
- Providing market information to weavers.
- Teaching quality standards.
- Marketing Promotion Program.
- Establishment of weaving mills in the town, and training of unemployed youth.
- Calling people to fashion technology by techies.
- Provision of pension.
- Providing loans to the people for weaving.
- In universities, technical colleges, and schools should teach weaving, thereby enriching employment.
- The dye is purified from the water, and then released into the ground. Carry out further studies to find out the pH value of ground water.
- Sound proof in weaving malls to reduce noise caused by weaving.
- Making government assistance available to the people.

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