



COOPERATIVE SOCIETIES AND HANDLOOM INDUSTRY IN TIRUCHIRAPALLI DISTRICT FROM 1900-1947 A.D

Dr.(Mrs). R. Sathiyabama

Associate Professor of History Sri Meenakshi Govt.Arts College Madurai.



INTRODUCTION:

Cooperative life is way of life where people live together friendly or united. It is said that this kind of life was practiced ever since human beings inhabited the earth. Then the life was peaceful and the world was a happy place to live in and this life progressed among the people without jealousy, competition by unfair means and internal squabbles. As the time passed, people's eye fell on modernization and cooperative life gradually faded away.

But the cooperative life principle finds its expression in two distinct methods of association - one of which underlies the system of cooperative credit while other is the foundation of cooperative purchase, sale, production and insurance. In the former, several persons combine to furnish a collective guarantee by which they are enabled to secure money at lower rates of interest than they could obtain individually. In the latter, a similar combination is made in order to effect economics in the preparations or disposal of finished product.¹

Passing of Cooperative society Acts

Economically, well developed nations firstly had in their economic setup; people had similar kind of deficit. To solve this problem only, the cooperative societies were formed by the common people's approach. They were saved from the groups of unfair money lenders who levied heavy interests. By following these lines to help weavers, farmers who were suffering from generative debt problems and famine in the year 1904, the landlords and master weavers collected their loans from the people by charging exorbitant rates of interest and in certain cases, they seized the lands of poor people for their debts.²

In order to safeguard the welfare of the Indian people, the government passed "Cooperative Government Societies Act 1904" and many 'G.S.' were started all over India. In addition to that, in 1912, the government of India passed cooperative societies Act of India.³

As a result, after many struggles, in the year 1932, cooperative societies Act was made for Madras state and too other surrounding districts such as Tiruchirapalli, Kumbakonam, Madurai etc.⁴ This act paved way not only to help farmers but also to erase the problems of the handloom weavers. Due to this, many cooperative societies were established one by one in Tiruchy to aid the handloom weavers.

Formation of Handloom Weavers Cooperative Societies

At that time, there was a position which the handloom weavers in Trichy who were caught in the clutches of their owners (Master weavers) could also raise their financial position in the year 1932, but they realized this fact only after four years and then only, they indulged in such an effort to form cooperative society in Tiruchy district. As a result, at Woraiyur, firstly Handloom Weavers Cooperative Societies was established by Thiru.P.V.J. Muthusamy Chettiar on May 7th 1936.⁵ From that time onwards, weavers cooperative societies became the producer's cooperatives. It was the producer's cooperative societies

because it was organized and administered by the weaving communities like Devangas, Padmassalas, Kaikolars, Vadugars and patunulkar as etc.

This Woraiyur Devanga Handloom weavers Cooperatives Society was started with the initial capital of Rs.747/- In the beginning stage, it received loans and advance from Government, Reserve Bank of India, Cooperative bank and State Weavers Society etc. The main features of this society was to provide continuous job facilities providing fair wages to its workers, distribution of projects to its workers, distribution of profits to its members, etc, In the initial stage, it was started with 34 members but before the attainment of independence the number rose to 203. To this weavers cooperative society, the presidents (during that period from 1936 to 1950) namely Mr.Ramalinga Chettiyar, Mr.Rathinasamy Chettiyar, Mr.Subramania Chettiyar, Mr.Ramalinga Chettiyar, Mr.Sellandy Chettiyar, Mr. Dhandapani Chettiyar, Mr.Veeraman Chettiyar, Mr.Eswaran Chettiyar, Mr.Angaiyan and Mr.Muthukrishnan Chettiyar contributed their whole life time for the improvement of this society⁶

Following the footsteps of this society, many handloom weavers cooperative society was established in other parts of Tiruchirapalli. In 1937, 'Jeyakondacholapuram (Udayarpalaym (Taluk), Handloom Weavers Cooperative Society' by Thiru.P.V.M. Velasamy was set up to furnish the materials handloom weavers in this area because one society at Woraiyur could not entirely concentrate all the handloom weavers in Tiruchy. Moreover, under this Jeyakondacholapuram Society, 'Udayanatham H W C S ' in 1939 and by the following year 1940 'Siruvayal H W C S '* was organized for the benefit of the weavers.⁷ Because in Tiruchy, the handloom weavers were exploited by the master weavers for a long time. To save the handloom weavers from the exploitation of master weavers within Trichy area, many cooperative societies were started. In these three societies nearly 60 members were joined together as members. These societies produced sarees, dhotis, towels, napkins, pillow covers etc. This societies during the Second World War, joined with other societies, and produced 'Danger Bandage' & Exported to countries which were involved in war.

In the meantime, on 13th, 1940 "Thattingarpettai Handloom Weavers' Cooperative Society' was formed to aid the weaving community of Musiri taluk for providing employment, fair wages, good quality raw materials to the weavers. This society was established by Mr.P.K. Muthibalu Chettiyar. This society was started with only 20 members but before the attainment of independence, the numbers increased to 190 members. The main handloom products were sarees, dhotties, Angavastrams , towels, etc., In this society, Mr.P.K. Muthibalu, Mr.N.V. Thiyagarajan, M.P.V.M. Velusamy and Mr.Sakarabany, Mr.T.V. Balasundaram became the presidents. These above mentioned people played a vital role to mould and shape the existing conditions of the society which is highly remarkable. This society showed a slow and gradual benefit in production year after from 1939-47.⁸

Year	Benefit in Production	Loss
1939-40	---	22.8
1940-41	138.9	--
1941-42	396.13	--
1942-43	2933.9	--
1943-44	162.7	--
1944-45	4400.14	--
1945-46	22798.12	--
1946-47	11701.7	--

Under this co-operative society, Pilladurai Handloom Weavers Co-operative society at Pilladurai (1943), 'Pilladurai Cheran Chenguttuvan Handloom Weavers Cooperative Society' (1945) 'National Occupation Handloom Weavers Co operative Society' at Devanoor (1946) were established to help the handloom weavers within Trichy area.⁹ These three societies received all financial aid & raw materials from the main branch (ie) Thattingarpettai handloom weaver's cooperative society.

With that in 1945, "Turaiyur Handloom Weavers Cooperative Society" was established by Mr. Ramalingam Pillai to relieve the distress among the weavers due to the Second World War, because by the establishment of this society, many unemployed weavers were became the members of this society in this particular area and produced good handloom articles in a grand manner. Generally, all these cooperative societies undertook the responsibility of marketing the goods produced by the weavers. All the products produced by the weavers were taken by the society. The members were only paid by wages on price rate basis. Then, they got considerable amount of bonus, calculated on the wages and the dividend for the shares hold in the society by them.

OBJECTIVE OF THE COOPERATIVE SOCIETIES

The main aim of the cooperative societies in Trichy district was the improvement of the handloom industry and the economic condition of the weavers residing in the operation of these handloom weavers cooperative societies in this district for the purpose of attaining these objects, the societies had the following objectives: ¹⁰

- ❖ To raise the money required for the society from weavers and others by issue of
- ❖ shares and by borrowings by way of deposits or otherwise from government and the others.
- ❖ To purchase necessary raw materials and appliances for weaving and supply it to the weaver member for cash as well as credit.
- ❖ To purchase yarn and other raw materials and advance the same to weaver members who shall convert them into finished goods and deliver them to the society to pay for the marketing of finished goods to the best advantage of the societies.
- ❖ To act as the agent for the joint purchase of the domestic and other requirements for its members and for the sale of their finished products.
- ❖ To purchase and hold in common or let or hire improved appliance connected with the industry.
- ❖ To start the necessary or sales units or depots in places selected by the Board of Directors, subject to the previous approval of the Registrar.
- ❖ To run a dye-factory for the benefit of the co-operative societies weavers and to dye the yarn of other weavers in Tiruchy area.
- ❖ To open sales depots of the societies at the required important centers for the products which produced by the societies.
- ❖ To buy or acquire land by purchase of gift or otherwise in order to provide housing accommodation to the Weaver members of the societies.

The cooperative Society is having a Board of directors. It consists of 7 Members. The minimum qualifications for members are, they should know weaving and must be S.S.L.C. as their educational qualifications. Among 7 members one member is acting as a president and one person is acting as a vice – president and other five persons are the directors. Under Directors Control, Secretary, General Manager and Special Officer are working. Sales Section Administrative Section and manufacturing section are under the control of general manager, secretary and special officer. In sales section three persons are working. One is acting as a Clerk and the remaining two are peons. In case of administrative section two accountants, 5 clerks and one junior clerk are working. Under this control, attender and peons are performing their work. In manufacturing section (ie) in Dye house, five members are working, one is in charge for supervision and other four are acting as assistants. ¹¹

The membership of all the cooperative societies in Tiruchy District was opened only to weavers of the Devangas, Kaikolars, Padmalalas, sowrahtras, Vadugars etc. Other communities were not eligible. Only people residing within Tiruchy, could become a member. With that, a weaver must have attained the age of 18. No person could be admitted as member if he is bankrupt or insolvent. Each weaver must pay Rs.5/- as entrance fee. Each member had at least one share in the society but not more than 10 shares. Application for admission issue of shares is rested with the Board of Directors. The liability of a member is limited his share capital. ¹²

Member cannot withdraw any of the shares held by him in the society due to resignation of his membership before the expiry of three years. After three years, he can withdraw his membership provided that there is no debt due from him to the society. At the time of admission, every member should mention the name of nominee and the nomination should be signed by the member in presence of atleast two witnesses. If the member died, the nominee will be admitted as a member by the board. If the member fails to give nomination, the Board can transfer the deceased member's shares to the legal heir of the deceased person. Transfer of shares should be done within one month of the death of the deceased member. These cooperative societies collected cash security and provident fund from their non-members who were working in the societies. With that, Tiruchy District central Cooperative Bank provides loans ever since the cooperative society for the handloom weavers was started.

Functions of the Societies

These cooperative societies used to purchase yarn needed for making 60, 80, 100 C.S. Sarees, from Madras District Cooperative society but when the necessary yarns were not available it used to purchase from the mills straight away from the open Market.¹³ In the meantime, the cooperative societies provided financial assistance and other raw materials needed for the weaving and to full weaving wages, on condition that they would submit the finished goods within two weeks, on this regulation, the society paid the advance to the weavers.

The wages were fixed by the society by taking into account the design, texture, quality, length, colour, breadth, weight and the price offered by other weavers cooperative societies and master weavers, moreover, the wages paid to weavers varied with the nature of cloth woven. towels, blankets, pillow covers, hand kerchiefs, dhoties, etc., Besides these products, in Tiruchirappalli, all the existing cooperative societies are clubbed with one another and produced "Danger Bandage" to the needed soldiers' during the second world war.¹⁴

Moreover, in these cooperative societies the handloom weavers expressed their opinion, that they wanted to produce artistic coloured sarees. As a result, the members (weavers) of the cooperative societies decided to give the sarees for dyeing to the registered dyers and Madras district weaver's Cooperative society. Before this, the weavers used to get its produce dyed from M/s. R.C. Rengaswamy Chettiyar and also from Woraiyur Salem Sri Murugan Colour Works. When the Woraiyur Devanga handloom weavers started to produce coloured sarees, other cooperative societies too wanted to produce coloured sarees.

As a result, the members of the cooperative societies decided to organize a "Dyeing Factory" within the area, because the weavers had to pay some more amount for the dyeing. So, they could not meet the expenses too. Finally, in 1948, in the premises of Woraiyur Devanga handloom weavers cooperative society, the Dyeing factory was established.¹⁵ It was organized to meet the dyeing needs of the society as well as to let it to outside jobs, to earn some profit. It was inaugurated by the Madras District Weavers' Cooperative society President M.P. Nanchimuthu in the Presence of Tiruchirappalli District Cooperative Bank, Vice President Mr.S. Sengamalam Pillari. From that time onwards, the society is still today dyed coloured yarn cotton, silk in this dyeing unit. It is too doing a profitable business.

Relationship between the cooperative, society and handloom weavers

Usually, in every field, one man cannot represent all the worker's problems to the concerned authorities. If a group of workers can ventilate their problem to the higher authorities, then they can achieve their goal. Realizing this fact, a number of groups of workers joined together and formed so many societies in the field of cooperatives. As a result, cooperative societies for the handloom weavers were started in Tiruchy district to represent all the weavers problems. At the same time, it rendered all the needed raw materials to the weavers.

During that period (i.e) from the beginning of the cooperative societies in Tiruchy district, the relation between the cooperative society and handloom weavers was cordial (still today the relationship between them is maintained very smoothly) These handloom weavers cooperative societies was started by the weavers themselves. Otherwise we can say that it was organized by the weavers, for the weavers, of the weavers.

Whenever the handloom weavers needed financial aid in terms of festival loans, housing loans, the society used to provide it to them because the society's main aim was to improve the socioeconomic condition of weavers in Tiruchy. Due to these loans, many handloom weavers in Woraiyur, Marudur, Thattingarpettai, benefited highly. At the same time, for drinking water, the Cooperative societies at Woraiyur and Jeyakondacholapuram made a tremendous contribution to the handloom wavers.

Moreover, though the country faced severe attack on non –availability of raw materials, the societies used to purchase the raw materials for a higher price from the open market for the benefit of the weavers to get even a square meal day. Besides these things, the cooperative societies within Tiruchy area undertook the responsibility of marketing all the produced handloom goods to other parts of India as well as abroad. Not only this, during festival season like pongal, Deepavali and New Year, the cooperative societies used to hold special 'Sales depots' or exhibitions at a cheaper price (ie) with rebate. In this rebate system, the societies would be received more benefit. That benefit was reached to the handloom weavers in the name of bonus.¹⁶

With that, the cooperative societies rendered valuable services to improve the education level of the weavers, because it encouraged the handloom weaver's children in giving special amount of money for those who got first mark in S.S.L.C. examination. Not only that, for those who wanted to study in coaching class for IAS, IPS, the cooperative societies provided financial assistance. And too, from general fund welfare, the society helped in giving aid viz., the fields of medicine, pollution control etc. Thus, from the above mentioned factors showed that the cooperative society and handloom weavers had maintained a cordial relation with one another, though they had misunderstanding between them now and then.

Marketing

The handloom articles which was produced by the weavers before the formation of cooperative societies in Tiruchy, were taken to the master weavers. They with the help of Madras Handloom weaver's cooperative society sold the articles to all parts of India. Not only this, even, they exported to foreign countries. Moreover, they used to sell the products within their own building itself. But this method of marketing, the weavers could not get much benefit. The cooperative society was formed in Tiruchy and it undertook the responsibility of marketing the entire finished goods of weavers. It collected the finished products from all the weavers then it sold these in the following three ways.

- ❖ Sales to the Co-optex
- ❖ Direct selling or counter sales.
- ❖ Sales of all India Handloom Fabrics Marketing cooperative society.¹⁷

Nearly 60 per cent of the finished goods were taken over by the Co optex. Co optex was the prime market for all the weavers societies and other societies in the state. Co optex assured a definite market for all the primary cooperative societies and other cooperative institutions and those societies which were taken part in the share of Co optex.

Direct selling or counter sales was performed by the cooperative society to certain extent. That is when compared it to the sales of the Co optex. Only 25 to 30 per cent of the finished products were sold through counter on cash basis. No credit was allowed for individual as well as for the institutions. The counter sales by the society was performed in the following retail selling unit-Counter at the Head Office Woraiyur, Counter at the Branch of Woraiyur at big bazaar Street, Trichy. Counter at the Head office, Thattigarpettai Counter at the branch of Jeyakondacholapuram at big bazaar st.etc.¹⁷

Sales in these retail selling unit was high only during the festival periods or rebate periods. At other times, sales were very meager, An important rebate period were as follows – Deepavali, Pongal, Handloom Festival week in the month of May every year and any period which Government stipulates as rebate period. The all India Handloom Fabric Marketing Cooperative Society occupied a second place next to Co optex by receiving the Devangas, Kaikolars, Vadugars, Sowrashtras and Patumulkaras, etc.,Co operative societies finished handloom goods. Thus, though the society is faced many problems regarding marketing, purchase of raw materials, financial problem, etc., the society is running its wheel very smoothly.

SUGGESTIONS FOR THE IMPROVEMENT OF CO OPERATIVE SOCIETY

- ❖ The main Problem of the society and its members is inadequately of qualified raw materials. For this, the society should give direction to Co optex to supply good quality yarn.
- ❖ In order to maintain or retain the member in the society. it should give fair wages to the member in order to meet out their cost of living.
- ❖ Steps should be taken to provide all facilities to the members in order to improve the standard of living of the members.
- ❖ Proper steps should be taken by the society to increase its efficiency to get profit. Then only it can pay dividend to its members out of Profits.
- ❖ In order to satisfy the members, the society should provide adequate facilities for supporting activities such as warping, sizing etc.,
- ❖ Importance should be given to new designs, patterns, colours etc., to attract the customers.
- ❖ To raise demand for its products the society should take proper steps to minimize the cost of production. Then only it is possible for the society to fix the price at a reasonable price.
- ❖ To increase the sales, the society should give adequate importance for sales promotional activities (eg.) advertisement.

CONCLUSION

Thus the cooperative societies have to be revitalized and strengthened for fast progress in handloom industry. Good design and technical quality are two most urgent needs for the revival of the handloom industry. Even in this competitive world, the handloom industry stands its own and depicts the glory of the handloom weavers who have undertaken this job as a permanent one and also to make them to step out from their isolated world to share and reveal their innate and latent interest to the world.

END NOTES

1. Report of the committee on cooperative Societies in 1922, P.5.
2. Report of the Committee of Cooperative Societies in 1915, P.18.
G.S. – Guarantee Society
G.S. – Guarantee Scheme
3. Ibid., P.20.
4. Report of the Committee of Cooperative Societies in 1933, P.28.
5. G.O. No.539, Development, dated 7th May 1937.
6. Annual Report of Woraiyur Devanga Handloom Weavers Cooperative Society, 1949, P.20.
7. Annual Report of Jeyakondacholapuram Handloom Weavers Cooperative Society, 1938, PP.2-3.
8. Annual Report of Thattingarpettai Handloom weavers Cooperative Society, 1941, PP.8-10.
9. Ibid., PP.13-14.
10. Annual Report of Tiruchy Handloom weavers Cooperative Society, 1947, PP.13-17.
11. Tamil Nadu Economic appraisal, 1975, PP.28-29.
12. Tamil Nadu Handloom Cooperative Society Annual Report, 1949, P.4.
13. Indian Cooperative Review, New Delhi, National Cooperative Union of India, Jan.1957, P.180.
14. Annual Report of Tiruchy handloom weaver's Cooperative society, 1948, P-3.
15. Annual Report of woraiyur Devanga Handloom Weavers Cooperative Society, 1949, P.22.
16. Journal of Indian Industries and Labour, Part I, 1922, P.79.
17. Tamilarasu, 1.57, dated 28th Jan. PP.10-12.
18. Ibid., PP.28-30.