

CHAPTER III

INDIA'S HISTORY WITH REGARD TO SILK WEAVING

Indian handloom industry dates back to the Indus Valley Civilization. Spindles and spindle whorls have been found during the excavation indicates that spinning of cotton and wool was very common in those days. Spinning of silk has been recorded in the Vedic literature indicates that textiles have been occupying a prominent place in the Indian society.

Although silk is recorded to be discovered by the Chinese in the 14th century, many historical proof hold that the Indian had been spinning silk mostly Tusar silk from time immemorial. It is believed that, when Alexander the great invaded India in 327 BC, he was so impressed by the Indian weaving skills, that he took back with him some of our finely woven silk.

The Indian craftsmen had mastered the skill of embroidering the silk linen with pure gold and silver threads as early as 3 BC. This art is evident from the painting found in the Ajanta caves. Ever since brocade work in pure silk fabrics, has been a benchmark of the Indian Silk Weavers.

Further it is said that Marco Polo who travelled extensively through Asia in 1290 AD found that every household in India used to prepare clothes in order to be self sufficient, at least in clothing, thus spinning was a family occupation.

Thus handloom industry and especially silk handloom has been an important occupation in India and was greatly responsible for making the Indian sub-continent an important and integral part of the ancient world trade and advancement of civilization.

3.1 Downfall of the handloom Sector:

The introduction of the Spinning Jenny in England in the early 18th century, struck a mortal blow to the handloom industry across the world, and India in particular. But the Silk Weavers were not affected by this new invention as the silk thread was too delicate for the spinning Jenny. Hence the Indian silks continued to hold a prestigious stand both in India and abroad.

The 18th and 19th century saw the establishment of power looms reducing the cost of production of textiles and yarns considerably, dwindling the export of cotton textiles and increasing the import of fabrics. This sudden boom in textile industry saw mills producing cheaper and better quality products, thus, making silk textiles seem more expensive and reducing the demand for silks only for ceremonies, festivals and to the elite of the society.

This pathetic condition of the handloom industry was looked upon by the government only by 1940s. In 1941, a Fact Finding Committee was appointed and based on the committee's report on 'All India Handloom Board' was set up to look into the socio-economical conditions of the Handloom weavers. The Silk Weavers were also included, but much of the welfare schemes of the board were directed towards the cotton handloom weavers.

Post independence, a protected market was created for handloom products by a policy of reservation; by this act certain items like saris and dhotis were exclusively reserved for handlooms. But this restriction did not last long due global crises; the government of India was force to revoke its restriction on textile markets, with a compromising policy, benefitting the textile and the handloom sectors.

With a weak business environment prevailing in India from 1960 to 1980, the handloom industry was declared a Sick unit, and various governments tried to revive it from time to time with new reforms, but met with little success. Many of the handloom weavers abandon their skill and took up new occupation to sustain their Quality of Work Life and socio-economic status.

This was the scenario with the cotton textile weavers, and most of the policies were directed toward them and the Silk Weavers were completely neglected. This did not bother Silk Weavers so much so, as their skill and trade were unaffected, as there was no equal substitute to their product. Further with the steady growth of the Indian economy the demand for silk apparels increased, providing sufficient job opportunity for the Silk Weavers.

3.2 Down fall of the silk weaving:

The Indian silk weaving industry has experienced decline since the early 1990s. Policies to promote free trade have harmed the industry. Cheaper textile imports have gained prominence with the advancement of the Negotiations on Non-Agricultural Market Access (NAMA) by the World Trade Organization, which led to freezing or decline of import tariffs including on textiles such as saris.

In 2001, India removed its quantitative restrictions on silk imports. This opened unrestricted import of Chinese plain crepe fabrics- a direct substitute for hand-woven silk saris, having a crippling effect on the silk saris. Further there is decline in demand of silk clothing due to economic slowdown. And weavers too are neither getting sufficient means to meet both ends meet nor the social status through weaving.

With population growth among weavers, there is more supply of skilled labour and much less matching demand. It leads to unjust price/wages to weavers. Further fluctuating silk price and artificial shortages created by the suppliers have put weavers in a precarious situation. Also, the power looms are snatching the work from handloom weavers. Middlemen are living like parasite on their earnings.

Fashion market is denoted by fast changing fads and styles. Today's fashion is marked by convenience and low cost of production. Gone are the times when uniqueness of the creation was appreciated and patronized at a great cost has perhaps lapsed. Now, in this changing scenario, large volumes of saris with low quality are produced that are available at cheaper rates. Also the saris are less demand to western outfits, even for traditional ceremonies and functions.

In addition, weaving industry is facing crisis due to problems in availability of raw silk. This scarcity is often created by Traders. Weavers find buying even one bundle i.e., 5-6 kilograms of raw silk, with a strain. This reveals that they do not have enough business, reducing their purchasing power. Prior to 1990, silk was available for ₹100/- per kg, but now it is over ₹1,500/- Ironically, scarcity of raw material exists despite the free-trade policies.

Imported Chinese silk is cheaper and is available at ₹1,100/- per Kg, and hence it has become the choice of most artisans. While multinational players are being given a free hand to operate, potentially weavers' friendly institutions such as cooperatives are being allowed to decay, at the cost of the marginalized weavers.

Further, power looms in Surat and Salem area producing artificial silk thread, are available at much lower cost. Duplicate powerloom woven silk saris are being produced using artificial materials. This has severely hurt the silk weaving sector, putting pressure to reduce the cost of original silk sari in the market. As the middlemen and shopkeepers do not forsake their profits, the weaker link- Silk Weaver has to bear the brunt, in terms of reduced wages.

3.3 Revival efforts:

To sustain the rich skill of silk weaving the government and many NGOs are working with the Silk Weavers. Central and State Governments are introducing many social scheme to improve the socio- economic status of the Silk Weavers. Some of the schemes which are being implemented are:

- Facilitating grants or loan at a low rate of interest for buying raw materials
- Increasing the wages of the Silk Weavers by 20%
- Increasing the pension of the Silk Weavers by 50%
- Setting up training centers, for training young artisans
- Providing marketing facilities like organizing exhibitions, opening exclusive showrooms etc
- Honoring the Silk Weavers with awards and citations
- Protecting the authenticity of the silk produce with silk marks
- Providing incentives for cultivating mulberry and rearing silk worms

Many NGOs have also have taken up the cause of revitalizing the socio-economical condition of the Silk Weavers. They invest their time and financial resources in helping the silk artisans to organize themselves, and revive the spinning of the traditional silk attire. The NGOs also support in finding a suitable market for this rich fabrics through e-marketing, exhibitions, boutiques, designers and so on.

Many individuals are also taking a keen interest in supporting the Silk Weavers. Time and again we come across many individuals, who along with their lucrative career are rendering a helping hand to sustain the dying art of silk weaving. Some corporates also do reach out to uplift the life of the Silk Weavers- one such company is the Taj Group of Hotels- they have made the Banaras silk saris as the uniform for their women staff employed at their hotels.

These are some of the initiatives taken up by the government, corporate and individuals to sustain India's ancient and exclusive skill. Much more is needed; especially a modification in the Organizational Culture of the silk weaving community has to be established so as to sustain the art of silk weaving and to improve the Socio-Economic Status and the Quality of Work Life of the Silk Weaver.

3.4 Global scenario of Silk:

Global silk production accounts for less than 0.2% of the world's textile output. Silk is produced in over 60 countries although Asian nations create most of the world's silk(Datta&Nanavathy, 2005). China is the biggest manufacturer of silk, generating over three times as much as the world's second largest, India.

The international silk market had a turnover of \$6.5 billion in 2000 and this continues to increase as India and other developing countries compete to increase their share of the market.

3.5 Consumers of Silk:

India is the largest consumer of silk and silk products, followed by Japan and the other East Asia Countries. Silk textile reflects the rich culture, rituals and heritage associated with these countries. Even today an Indian wedding is incomplete without silk saris and dhotis and a Japanese rituals without a silk Kimono.

In the west silk is related to luxury and sophistication. It is a pride to own a silk scarf, tie, blouse or a dress. Many leading fashions houses create contour collections with silk fabric. And the rich and famous gaze the catwalk to order their expensive piece of silk clothing.

3.6 Changing image of silk:

Introduction of artificial and cheaper substitute for silk has damaged the silk's luxurious image. New synthetic fibers are even-more sophisticated. They look and feel like silk, but are easier to care for. Viscose, polyester, rayon has taken a large market share of silk.

The pathetic state of minimal international promotion campaigns in addressing this issue reflects the lack of cohesiveness among supplies, traders and buyers in the industry. This has led to the dismantling of production centers. This trend is well underway in all the leading silk producing nations. Millions of families in rural China, India, Thailand, Brazil, Japan and Korea and other countries are now facing the Socio-Economic choice as to whether or not to continue producing silk.

3.7 Reviving silk:

(1) **Promotional Campaign:** A generic silk promotion campaign could be a solution to challenges in the industry today. Currently, there are no concerted efforts from Silk Producers, Converters and Traders to improve the image of silk in international markets. An example of what could be done can be seen in the European Union's campaign to promote linen as fashion material. Thanks to a decade long campaign, linen has taken its place among other fibers used in fashion.

A campaign should aim to reposition the image of silk, capitalize on new technologies and changing market demands and to encourage silk production. As campaigns require both coordination and investments and may take several years before they have an effect, an effective approach may be to work through industry associations in order to craft national campaigns in the largest consumer markets.

Another alternative may be for the silk industry to work with major retailers locally and internationally. Ideally, an industry wide action plan will have the most impact.

(2) **The image of silk:** In these modern days, the world is waking up to protect the environment and the tune in vogue, is green planet, eco-friendly goods and recycling of goods. Silk attributes to all the above description, as silk is a natural fiber. Its composition is nearly similar to the cell composition of the human skin. It does not contain any harmful chemicals. Further the zari of silk saris are made from natural metals like silver, gold or copper. These zaris have natural metals like silver, gold or copper. These zaris have resale value, which is why; a pure silk saree can be

exchanged for a new one or even money. In olden days, a silk saree was even accepted as a pledge for the loans from indigenous bankers.

This natural fiber is also safe on the skin and adaptable to any climatic condition. It protects our body from cold and also it keeps our body cool, when worn in hot seasons. This is possible only with original silk fabric. Further a pure silk material does not crumple; hence it helps in maintaining freshness. This can also be used as marketing mantra for increasing the demand for silk apparels.

Silk has both recycle value and also it is bio-degradable, it does not leave behind environmentally dangerous footprints. It also does not require any special treatment for disposal.

Also silk sustains the environment, as the primary raw materials required for silk is the silk worm. These worms require a lot of mulberry leaves to produce silk. Hence, cultivation of mulberry in large scale, for the survival of silk worm, also protects the land from soil erosion and increases rain harvesting.

With all these natural qualities, an awareness campaign regarding the image of silk should be reinstated in the minds of the people. There is a need to have a shift in the taste and preference of the customers towards silk so that environmental awareness is developed. Hence, the Silk Weavers, silk worm farmers and mulberry farmer should be bonded together, with the efficient and professional marketing agencies. Thus promoting, the factual image of silk- as a natural, eco-friendly, luxurious and green apparels; and reviving the lost sheen of the pure silk handloom industry.

(3)Silk Blend:

Silk blends are one way to answer the challenge from synthetic fibers. Lately, silk has been blended with other fibers, such as cotton, linen, wool and even polyester. Developing country silk producers have not yet progressed very much in this field. They need to develop their research and technology to offer competitive new products.

The silk blends use the silk yarns and manmade yarns to produce a range of apparels. This combination, withstands the speed of power looms, thus facilitating large scale production of photocopy of silk products, in a short time span.

China is making fast and successful progress with silk blends. They are creating soft, comfortable, casual and easy to maintain knitted silks. This has attracted a worldwide demand, as it has the advantage of a casual, yet quality and appearance of a silk product. A wide range of apparels like under wears, t-shirts, camisoles, polo shirts, ties and sweaters are made out of silk blends.

Silk blends are a success story even in our neighboring Pakistan. The silk blend is known as art silk there. The art silk fabrics have made rapid inroads into the field of textiles. This has been a world phenomenon of substituting natural raw materials by synthetic ones. Various types of art silk fabrics are produced in Pakistan. These are mostly consumed within the country and used mainly by Pakistan's female population.(Source: Textile Commissioner's Organization, Karachi)

Even in India, Salem district of Tamil Nadu boasts of silk blends. The small town of JegadirAmmanpalayam in Salem has a success story with silk blends. Once, this town was a handloom hub, with majority of population weaving silk. With the

advent of silk blends this community has shifted to power looms and is producing silk blend fabrics both as cottage industry and in large scale factories.

These silk blend saris are having a very close resembles to the original silk saris of Kanjeeपुरam and Thirubhuvanam. With the rapid down fall of hand woven silk saris, the Master Weavers of Kanjeeपुरam and Thanjavur, are buying and selling silk blend saris, along with the pure silk handloom saris of their Silk Weavers. Also these silk blend saris enjoys the advantage of consumer preferences because of its project excellence in the matter of wash and wear, longer life, cost efficient and better and more sparkling finish.

These silk blends from Salem are in demand by the readymade garment sector too, for making a wide variety of apparels, ranging from shirts, dhoties, lehengas, salwarkameez.

(4) Medicinal value of Silk:

As silk has the same cell composition as the human skin, large scale research are underway, to find various uses for silk in the field of medicine. The Indian Textile Journal reports, that FICCI, is actively calling out support for reaping success in this field. Data forecast a growth at 20% for medical textiles market. The Bangalore edition of The Hindu, dated 20th December, 2012, reported that research is in advanced stage on the use of silk in the medical field for applications such as sutures, bandages and scaffolds at the Central Silk Technological Research Institute (CSTRI), a premier research institute in the country.

Research work on silk as biomaterial applications in medical textiles arena is under way at the institute, as silk fibers are being tried to develop multilayer composite material by incorporating anti-septic and absorbent layers.

Research on silk reinforced composite material for wound dressing application has shown promising trend, a release said. Stating that electro-spinning of silk fibroin is the latest research topic worldwide to produce fibrous nonwoven web, a press release said that such nano silk webs are of immense importance in the medical textile field for applications such as scaffolds, nerve regeneration tissues and artificial blood vessels.

Sustaining the Quality of Work Life and Socio Economic condition of the Silk Weaver, the government, NGOs, and corporate, need to take emergency steps in creating awareness among the Silk Weavers, of the future hope for silk. Also the strong Organizational Culture, prevailing among the weaver has to be analyzed, so as to help the weavers to break free from the strong cultural rituals they have spun around them, also to help them to reap benefit, through their special skill of silk weaving, not only the traditional saris and dhoties, but also other products, with the help of both handlooms and power looms.

3.8 History of Silk Weaving in Tamil Nadu

In ancient Tamil Nadu, weaving flourished along with farming. There are references of weaving of cotton, fine material, extremely fine materials (presumably Silk in the famous Tamil literature of Puranaanooru). The ancient texts have no reference to where the silk thread came from. Nor any mention of sericulture.

The later stage of the 18th century, British government records shows of active mulberry cultivation in the Madras region. British tycoons were successful in rearing silk worm in Vepery, Seevaran, Chingleput, Pallavaram. Perhaps, these mulberry plantations, has made Kancheepuram the silk hub of South India.

Thanjavur too has a long history with silk. The great Chola dynasty had established silk weaving, and the Silk Weavers were highly patronized by the rulers. They were given the privilege of setting up their homes and looms in areas in and around the grand temples, the kings built. Even today a large majority of the Silk Weavers continue to dwell there.

There are references of HyderAli and TipuSultan , acts of encouragement in setting up sericulture in Trichy and Thanjavur, so as to facilitate the local weavers. Records state that Tipu Sultan had even sent two Silk Weavers to Bengal, to learn about the silk trade.

Sericulture interested King Serfoji too, and in 1821, on a visit to Beneras, he had sent worms form Bengal to Thanjavur, with instructions on how to rear them; so as to make raw silk locally available for his weavers.

Thanjavur's rich culture and weaving tradition, has been recorded in the Jury on Silk and Velvet in 1857, as the "evident desire for improvement in the already good quality of silks from Tanjore shown by departure from the old pattern". Even Dr. Forbes Watson's list of silk from South India talks of "silver and gold embroidery and silk piece goods from Thanjavur".

As Kancheepuram captured the heart of a wedding bride in the northern part of Madras province, the southern wedding bride, was waiting to adore herself with the wedding saree from Thanjavur. The silk saris from Thanjavur are commonly known as “Thirubhuvanam Silk Saris”

The silk saris from Thanjavur mostly come from small hamlets in and around the temple town of Kumbakonam. The popular silk weaving villages are Thirubhuvanam, Darasuram, Swami Malai, Thugili and Saurashtra Colony. The weaving community predominantly belongs to the pattunool community of Saurashtra, whose ancestors migrated to Tamil Nadu from Gujarat, centuries ago.

The hand woven silk saris of Thanjavur use two ply thread for the warp, and three- four for the weft. The Master Weavers procure yarns from Karnataka and Surat. Dying of yarns, designing and spinning of the saree is done in Thanjavur, under the guidance of the Master Weaver. The Silk Weavers have the freedom to choose the color of yarn and sometimes, even the design.

By default, silk saris from this region; have only a single side border, but double side borders are made if orders are placed. The design are a mix of the traditional and contemporary, but the saris come without blouses, as there are no takers for the saris with blouses, and the Silk Weaver has to sell the saree at a loss.

The specialty of the Thanjavur silk saree is the way they are folded. They are pleated and folded, so that when unfolded, the pleats fan out, giving it the name Visirimadippu. This would make it easier for a bride to drape the saree, because the fold is such that the lines of the pleats are clear. All she has to do is to pleat it along the lines of the fold. Finally only pure zari is used in the Thanjavur silk saris.

These rich towns have lost their shine, as the demand for pure silk saris have reduced, causing a blowing impact on the Socio Economical Conditions and Quality of Work Life. Many Silk Weavers have abandoned their traditional skills and even some the ancestral properties and have moved on to find alternate employment, to sustain their family and themselves.

Most of the Silk Weavers are refusing to pass on the ancestral skill to the next generation. Instead they are encouraging them to study well and take up professional careers. The pathetic condition is that even the existing Silk Weavers; have to take up alternate employment to make their ends meet. These Silk Weavers feel that the government grants are only alms, and provide temporary relief to their life, but they are pleading for permanent solution to improve their socio economical condition, Quality of Work Life and Sustainability of their innate traditional skills.

Historical perspective explored thus far, paved the way for obtaining primary data in its actual state to display Organisational Culture and Quality of Work Life of Silk Weavers. The statistical analysis as presented in the following chapters shall establish empirical evidences.