Chapter 7

SUMMARY AND SUGGESTIONS
The present chapter makes an attempt to bring together all the relevant observations made in the previous chapters of the study of empowerment of women in handloom sector in Nellore district. It also presents conclusions drawn hitherto and measures to improve the economic empowerment of women weavers.

In our country nearly 70 percent of the population is still lives in rural areas with wide disparities in their living standards and they are depending on agriculture. Being a seasonal activity, agriculture provides only seasonal employment to the many people. So they have to search for alternative source for their livelihood in off seasons. The basic solution for the development of agrarian economy is to improve the cottage and small-scale industries in rural areas which can provide employment and income. Among various types of cottage and small-scale industries the handloom sector places an important role for providing the employment and earnings to a considerable segment of the population.

Handloom sector occupies a distinct and unique place in Indian economy, besides being the largest generator of non-farm rural employment. This sector provides direct and indirect employment to about 125 lakhs people in India. It produces about 22 percent of the total production of the textile industry in India. It meets one third of the total cloth requirement of the people in the country. This sector also makes substantial contribution to the export earnings of the nation. It has been recognized as a powerful income and employment generator as it stimulates growth of number of subsidiary industries like loom manufacturing, chemical and spinning industries. It provides employment opportunities to a number of skilled, unskilled people in the process of pre-weaving, weaving, marketing and distribution of handloom products. India is the foremost among the nations preserving the ancient art form of hand-weaving, hand-printing, hand-dyeing and hand-finishing.
The weaving community in India is among the weakest communities. Illiteracy, poverty and lack of knowledge of the latest weaving technology are the major factors contributing to their retarded growth. This unfortunate situation is further worsened by lack of institutional support. Consequently weavers, particularly, women are subjected to exploitation by middlemen as money lenders, traders and contractors. Basically women weavers are economically poor and they are almost always in financial difficulties. They are unable to maintain their families due to scanty financial resources and invariably accustomed to borrow money from money lenders who keep them perpetually poor and indebted. It is no exaggeration to say that Indian weavers are born in debt, grow in debt and die in debt.

The women weavers are facing varied problems in the area of production, marketing and the finance and the handloom co-operatives have not been working for the welfare of them. Several studies and surveys were conducted in these areas to enquire into the problem faced by the weavers. In addition to these, various committees and commissions have been appointed by the government to assess the economic empowerment of women weavers and to suggest measures to improve their socio-economic status. Accordingly the central and state governments have taken various policy measures in the area of finance, production and marketing to strengthen the handloom industry and announced various development programmes and schemes.

Women Empowerment

Empowerment of women gains significance in the Indian context owing to their profuse participation in development activities. The empowerment is immensely influenced by socio-economic, political and cultural factors. The economic status, therefore, is assessed in terms of material wealth, power and influence of women in the society. Literally empowerment means 'to invest with power'. Power is defined as the ability to influence the behaviour of the others with or without restraint. Empowerment endows women with the ability to gain control over resources, develop physical and
psychological capacity to challenge the prevailing gender norms and ensure change. Women empowerment and gender justice put social transformation at the centre of the agenda of human development and progress. Women contribute greatly to the proliferation of the economy. They are pioneers in various professions. Women are working in different sectors as craft women, weavers, domestic helpers, self-employed women, doctors, engineers, lecturers and white-collared executives. Employment of women is an index of the status in the society. They are engaged in a wide variety of sectors like agriculture, dairy, animal husbandry and home based industries like handicrafts, handlooms, garment making, designing and textiles.

The women empowerment is not meant for domination over others but to acquire power to achieve goals and ends. It involves not only changes in access to resources but also an understanding of ones rights and entitlements. It also implies that gender roles can be changed and gender equality is achieved. Women empowerment involves economic opportunity, property rights, political representation, social equality and personal rights. Historically, the world over, either by law or custom, the status of women is undermined by personal relationships in decision making social rights and access to resources. Women in many countries still lack rights to inherit property, own land, get education, obtain credit, earn income and control their family. It is believed that women are subordinate in household decision making process. They feel that their long term security lies in subordinating their well being to that of men.

The socio-cultural changes play an important role in creating empowerment of women. The following factors which lead women to seek employment in the country are,

- The inadequate income of the principal earner which forces women to work and supplément the income

- Mishaps, like incapacity or death of the bread winner.

244
Woman’s longing for economic independence or for securing high standard of living.

The strong desire of women to give expression to their own talent and skills.

Indian constitution has guaranteed equality to all sections of people in the society through suitable economic policy and social welfare programmes. Even after six decades of independence, women constitutes around 50 percent of the population have faced the problems of social discrimination, violence, oppression, and marginalization. The women in social and political life are equally and immensely important for their integration in the developmental process, because development is not merely economic but also participation in social and political life. The significant relationship between the role and the status of women and the ultimate economic well-being of the family is reflected in the bulk volume of literature on women studies. However, in view of the special nature of the most of the works done by the women and their total contribution towards the family and the national economy, employment of women increases day by day.

There is a tremendous historical change in the status and position of women in Indian society. But the change from a position of utter degradation of women in the nineteenth century to a position of equality in the middle of the twentieth century is a great progress of women in the modern era. The constitution of India provides equal rights and privileges for men and women. It also makes special provisions for women to help them to improve their status in society. Special provisions and policies have been formulated to improve the status of women in the society. Many socio-economic programmes are started under the five year plans for providing special facilities to women for education, health, training and opportunities for gainful employment. These programmes provide those essential services for women which are not covered under the general development programmes.
The social and economic conditions of women are not considerably improved in many respects. The women have been denied their due place in the economic, social and political sphere. The social legislations and socio-economic programmes for women in India have not succeeded to bring out of them from traditional hold. The main reason for women’s subordinate status is that they are economically and culturally exploited in the society. Women’s subordination in all walks of life manifests itself in the marginalization of women in the economy. Today, the nation requires socio-economic development with women’s participation. There is a need to create congenial environment and conditions for women to develop in the modern world. The empowerment of women is an important aspect of rural people particularly women weavers, which is gaining a lot of significance in recent times. Therefore, the vital aspects of potentialities and capabilities of women have to be tapped to improve the women empowerment in handloom sector.

The Handloom Sector in India

The weaving activity in India came to light at the beginning of Indian civilization. During 1500-1750 A.D. the textile industry gained momentum in both domestic and international market. The British rulers destroyed the handloom industry by importing, textiles from Lancashire. Due to Swadeshi movement during freedom fight and resultant boycott of foreign fabrics gave a boost to the Indian handloom sector. Subsequently the government of India appointed Thomas Committee, to suggest measures for the development of this sector. But no positive action was taken towards this direction. After independence, the government of India made efforts to improve the handloom sector. The government also announced subsidies and concessions to develop the handloom sector.
Religious and cultural aspects of weaving

Religious traditions claimed for their rituals the finest creations of the skilled weavers. Painted clothes, which told the stories of Gods, astrological charts and attractive paintings on cloth appeared in temple shrines were offered to God. In south India cotton cloth is offered to Lord Siva and silk to Lord Vishnu. Indian heritage weavers linked with religion mirrored existing cultural patterns and the rituals that bound people with invisible links to their ancestors and to God. This accounts for the cotton clothes which sprung up around Siva temples and silk looms around Vishnu temples.

Institutional support

The government of India has established various institutions to support the weavers for providing both financial and policy net work. They are Development Commissioner for Handlooms, All India Handloom Development Board, National Co-operative Development Corporation, National Bank for Agricultural and Rural Development, Indian Institute of Handloom Technology, The Handicrafts and Handlooms Export Corporation, National Institute of Fashion Technology, Handloom Export Promotion Council, Training Facilities for Handloom Personnel and Weavers Service Centers.

Development in plan period

The government of India appointed several commissions and committees to study the various issues of women weavers in handloom sector and to suggest measures for their development. With a view to develop and promote the weavers in handloom sector, the government formulated separate programmes ever since the beginning of the five year plans. The first five year plan made a good beginning for the development of handloom sector. During this plan village and small scale industries including handlooms were assigned a central place in rural development programmes. The second five year plan gave much importance to industrial development and an amount of Rs.36.50 crores was allotted to the handloom sector. All India Handloom Board was
established during this plan period. In the third plan, emphasis was made on the organization of co-operatives to improve the productivity of the weavers. Fourth plan focused attention on the development of labour intensive and village industries and an amount of Rs.27.08 crores was allocated for handloom sector. During the fifth five year plan the handloom sector was included in the 20 point economic programme and an outlay of Rs.99.92 crores was fixed for this sector. The sixth five year plan was concentrated to upgrade technology for improving the quality and design of handloom products. An outlay of Rs.310.93 crores was envisaged for this sector. In the seventh plan some subsidies were given to weavers and an amount of Rs.512 crores was envisaged for the development of handloom sector. The eighth plan emphasized on exports, employment generation and backward area development. During the ninth plan a high power committee was setup to look into the problems, and to suggest measures for the growth of handlooms. The financial outlay envisaged for tenth five year plan was Rs.400 crores. Some of the states are not in a position to get maximum benefits in the implementation of schemes and programmes in this plan as they are not in a position to contribute their share to the schemes.

**Government policies**

The government of India has announced various policies since 1978, with a view to improve economic status of weavers and to increase the production of handloom sector. The aim of textile policy 1978 is supply of hank yarn to the weavers. It is also recommended that around 60 percent of weaving population should be brought to the co-operative fold. The textile policy 1985 emphasized an increase in the production of cloth to meet the growing demand of the population. The policies relating to promotion of handloom sector was given priority for the development of the decentralized and centralized sectors. So, it is expected that the textile policy would provide more employment in handloom sector. The Abid Hussain committee laid a greater stress on the interest and economic status of handloom weavers. The
new industry policy of 1991 had made provisions for the development of village and small scale industries where in some new initiatives for handloom sector are incorporated.

Weavers welfare Schemes

To create congenial atmosphere, and to improve the living conditions of the women weavers, the government of India has announced various welfare schemes like Integrated Handloom Development Scheme, Modernization Scheme, Interest Subsidy Scheme, Thrift Fund Scheme, Work-shed cum Housing Scheme, Health Insurance Scheme, Old age Pension Scheme, Free Rice to Weavers and Calamity Relief Scheme etc.

Handloom Sector in Andhra Pradesh

Andhra Pradesh is famous for wonderful zari saris produced by handlooms which have good demand in both national and international market. There are about 5 lakh families directly and 20 lakh families indirectly depend on them. As per the identity cards issued by Government of Andhra Pradesh, there are 250805 handloom, silk and wool weavers both within and outside the c-operative fold. The handloom cloth served the consumers through centuries and acquires a name in the market for their durability, quality and designs. From tombs immemorial Andhra Pradesh textiles have found their way to the west as well as and own the hearts of the people of the world. Inherited but unrivalled skills and the knowledge of colour chemistry have brought name and fame to the weavers of Andhra Pradesh in the society.

Handloom Sector in Nellore District

The Nellore district is a place of importance for handloom industry. Venkatagiri and Patur are important handloom centers famous for their traditional hand crafted for fine cotton and silk saris embroidered with pure zari. Apart from cotton and pattu saris other handloom products like dress material, dhoti and lungis are also produced in Nellore district.
Socio-economic Profile of Women Weavers

The weaving activity depends upon the multiple factors like socio-economic status, empowerment and other related aspects which affect the weavers' attitude to their work, their working conditions and their skill. The various socio-economic and empowering factors which influence the women weavers will form the basis to know the reasons to motivate the women weavers. The socio-economic profile of the sample women weavers reflects the overall socio-economic conditions of the families in the weaving community.

Caste

Weaving population is fairly large but weaving activity is confined to a limited number of castes. Among Padmasali, Kaikala, Karnasali, Devangula and Thogata castes engaged in weaving activity in the district the Devangula caste dominates with 45.43 percent followed by Padmasali 28.15 percent, Karnasali 9.38 percent. It is found that the weaving activity in Nellore district is not evenly distributed among the different weaving communities.

Product group

As a traditional community Devangula dominates in producing all the products because their share in the total production of lungis is 75 percent, Dhoti 71.43 percent, cotton saris 45.04 percent, zari saris 38.51 percent, dress material 51.06 percent and pattu saris 47.22 percent as compared to the other communities. It reveals that the product group of weaving is not evenly distributed among all weaving castes.

Time of entry

Most of the women weavers in Nellore district who entered the weaving industry before 1980, the Devangula formed highest percentage followed by Padmasali, Karnasali, Thogata and Kaikala. Even among the units started before 1980, the Devangula, Padmasali and Karnasali formed the highest group. Other communities entered later. It is found that the weaving activity has not increased during the decades.
Pattern of units

Majority of sample women weavers 81.98 percent come from traditional background and the remaining 18.02 percent are from non-traditional background. In both pattern of units, the Devangula and Padmasali communities dominated the weaving activity. Therefore, most of the weavers in Nellore district have traditional background of weaving.

Ownership form of looms

Regarding the form of ownership of handlooms in Nellore district nearly 78 percent of the looms are owned looms followed by 15 percent rented looms and 16 percent Government assisted looms. Most of weavers wanted have owned looms as they think it is a permanent asset for their future.

Age of women weavers

The age of the weaver is an important indicator to evaluate the progress of handloom weaving activity. The weavers in between 31-40 years age (36.05 percent) dominated the weaving activity followed by the weavers in 41-50 years age (26.67 percent), 21-30 years age (22.47 percent) and only 4.69 percent are in the age group of below 20 years. The youth are not interested to continue their parental occupation because of the uncertainty of employment in handloom industry.

Age and product line

The age of women weavers has a profound influence on the products they have produced besides economic empowerment of the weavers. Among all the age groups 31-40 years (35.56 percent) are engaged in the production of all products followed by the age group of 41-50 years (26.91 percent), 21-30 years age group (22.72 percent). It is found that the age, experience and profitability made the age groups between 21 and 50 years to produce all varieties of products.
Earlier occupation

The success of women weavers in their profession depends largely upon their occupation before they turned into weaving. Among 405 weaver respondents, majority was reported (76.30 percent) weaving was their earlier occupation followed by agriculture (15.06 percent), business (5.19 percent) and others (1.23 percent). It is clear that most of the respondent weavers chose weaving occupation due to their hereditary and traditional background.

Parental occupation

Parental occupation is likely to influence considerably children’s choice of occupation in a traditional society. Out of 405 respondent weavers, parental occupation as weaving accounts for 69.38 percent followed by agriculture 13.33 percent, business 8.89 percent, employees 6.92 percent and others only 1.48 percent.

Weaver’s occupation Vs Line of production

There is a direct relationship between earlier occupation of women weavers and the products produced by them. Out of 405 sample women weavers 309 weavers nearly 76 percent came from weaving as their earlier occupation produced 40 percent zari saris followed by 30 percent cotton saris, 10.68 percent dress material, 10.36 percent pattu saris, 5.18 percent lungis and only 2.91 percent dhotis. So weavers who came from weaving as their earlier occupation produce all the products with their skill and experience.

Education

The weaving activity in Nellore district is dominated by the weavers with below SSC standard and SSC. Only few of them are graduates and technically qualified entered into this activity. But there is no significant relation between the educational background of the weavers and their line of production because for them weaving is a traditional activity.
Level of education and product line

Out of 405 respondent women weavers, 85 percent of the weavers are below SSC standard, SSC and illiterates seem to participate actively in the production of handloom goods.

Annual earnings of the weavers

Among 405 weaver respondent weavers, 40.74 percent are below 40000 income group, 20.49 percent are in Rs.40000-60000, 13.33 percent are in 60000-80000, 11.36 percent are in 80000-100000, 9.14 percent are in above 100000-120000 and only 4.94 percent are above 120000. On an average, a women weaver can earn 40000 per annum in the weaving activity.

Family structure

The size of family of weavers has its impact on the development of handloom industry. Family with a sound financial and educational base no doubt, contributes the development of handloom industry. It can be noted that the family which is small in size dominates with 63.45 percent of total sample weavers. The remaining families are large in size.

Ambition Vs professional joining

Ambition among other things motivates the women weavers and activates them towards a goal and helps to make their lives meaningful and purposeful. Among all ambitions self employment takes first rank and to earn money ranks second. Among other ambitions to continue family activity of weaving played a significant role.

Reasons for entering into weaving activity

Among the reasons for entering into the weaving activity to make use of traditional family occupation ranks first, to have self dependence and unemployment ranks second and third respectively.
Opportunity factors

The factors like technical knowledge, cost, education, occupational experience, Government policy and encouragement from weaving community and so on facilitate the profession of women weavers. Of them the occupational experience ranked first, Government policy, encouragement from weaving community are placed in second and third rank by the weavers. On the whole occupational experience appears to be the most encouraging opportunity factors for them.

Weavers in co-operative societies

Women weavers working under co-operative fold would have more benefit than weavers who are not the members of co-operatives. Among the various attracting factors to work under co-operative fold for the sample weavers fair wages stood in first rank followed by financial assistance ranked second, continues employment, regular supply of raw material and bonus with third, fourth and fifth ranks respectively.

Caste-wise desire to make their children as weavers

Majority of the weavers are not in favour of seeing their children as weavers in the study area. It is clear that out of 405 weavers of all castes, 53.58 percent are not interested to continue their children in weaving activity and only 46.42 percent of the weavers are in favour of it.

Performance of Handloom Co-operative Societies

The analysis of efficiency of an organization enables us to assess its performance in its business operations. It has been done in the case of weavers' co-operatives using tools like ratio analysis, trends in business operations and covering their overall progress in terms of membership, women empowerment, share capital, sales, operational results, the financial strength and other related performance indicators.
Progress of weavers co-operative societies in Nellore district

Regarding women membership, the societies of Gudur division have better progress than Kavali division whereas there is no progress has recorded in the societies of Nellore division during the study period. In share capital mobilization there is a substantial growth in the sample co-operative societies of three divisions i.e. Gudur, Kavali and Nellore. The number of societies running on profit shows an increase in Gudur and Nellore divisions but there is a considerable loss in the societies of Kavali.

Operational efficiency

The operational efficiency can be measured by studying the performance in purchases, sales, operating expenses, gross profit, net profit, establishment and contingency charges, turnover ratios etc.

Purchases and sales

The amount of purchase of raw material of the selected co-operative societies of all the three divisions shows a growing trend during the study period. The purchases depend on the demand for the products, the availability of finance and the attitude of the weavers towards undertaking the weaving activity. From their responses it is clear that there is no specific policy evolved for purchasing of raw material. The sales of the co-operatives depend upon the quantum of production which forms a major source of finance for them. The sales performance of the societies of Gudur and Kavali divisions is some what satisfactory where as a declining trend in sales in Nellore division.

Gross profit ratio

The gross profit in relation to the sales total of the selected handloom co-operative societies in Gudur division of Nellore district showed a positive trend, where as in Nellore and Kavali divisions showed negative trend.
Capital turnover ratio

This ratio reveals that how best the handloom co-operatives are utilizing the available funds in order to improve their sales performance. The capital turnover ratio of the societies of Nellore division recorded a positive growth and negative growth recorded in the societies of Gudur and Kavali divisions.

Current ratio

This an absolute measure of liquidity. The ideal current ratio is 2:1. The handloom co-operative societies in all the three divisions of Nellore district have not yet reached the standard ratio of 2:1. It indicates their unsound liquidity position.

Division-wise profitability

During the year 2008-09, out of total 15 societies in Gudur division, 7 societies are in loss zone and 8 societies are in profit zone, out of 4 societies in Nellore division, 2 societies are in loss zone and 2 societies are in profit zone and out of 8 sample societies of Kavali division, 5 societies are in loss zone and 3 societies are in profit zone. It may be noted that more than half of the societies in three divisions of Nellore district are in loss zone.

Factors influencing production

Among the various factors influencing the production are Government finance ranked first followed by demand in the market, fair price of the product, new and attractive design, guaranteed market and consumption pattern of the consumers.

Cost of production

Among the various factors influencing the cost of production is low quality of yarn which is the major one followed by bad conditions of looms, price hike of yarn high wages, inferior quality of raw material and filling up of inventory.
Channels of distribution

Among the important channels of distribution, APCO is the major channel followed by retailers, wholesale dealers, co-optex, consumer co-operatives and All India Market Federation.

Facilities provided by the societies

Among the important facilities provided by the co-operative societies to their members prompt supply of raw material is the main facility reported by handloom co-operatives (85.19 percent) followed by modernization of looms (77.78 percent), prompt payment of wages (77.78 percent), payment of fair wages (74.07 percent), pakka work sheds and old age pension (55.56 percent) each, provision of required finance (44.44 percent) and provision of bonus (14.81 percent). The same facilities can be observed in all the three divisions in Nellore district.

Facilities used by women weavers

Out of seven facilities old age pension scheme, thrift fund scheme, health insurance scheme are utilized more than 80 percent because of the awareness of the benefits of the schemes among the weavers.

Preference of looms by the weavers

In view of the advantage of looms, the weavers are asked about their preference of the looms in their weaving activity. In Nellore district the majority of the weaver respondents (74 percent) have chosen Dobby and Jacquards type of looms. These looms are convenient for weaving zari and cotton saris as they have good demand and profitability.

Capacity utilization

High profitability and low cost of production depends on the effective utilization of loom capacity by the weavers. The majority of 258 weavers (51 percent) have the installed capacity in the range of 2 to 4 meters per day. The
item-wise utilization reveals that majority of the weavers utilized the looms for weaving zari and cotton saris as they have good demand and profitability.

**Time spent on various items of weaving**

The weavers have to concentrate on various pre-weaving and weaving activities in order to get desired output. The survey results reveal that, weavers spend more time for weaving zari and cotton saris.

**Fair price to weavers**

Among 405 respondent weavers 60 percent are getting fair prices from the co-operative societies, and the remaining 40 percent depend on master weavers, private and other sources for fair price of their products.

**Problems of handloom co-operative societies**

Among the several problems faced by the handloom co-operative societies in Nellore district, the marketing problem occupies first place with 33.33 percent. The problem of production ranked as second with 21 percent. The problem of finance is ranked as third with 19.14 percent, low profitability is ranked as fourth problem with 14.81 percent and the problem of purchase ranked as fifth with 11.72 percent.

**Problems of finance**

Of all the problems faced by the weaver's co-operative societies, finance is the most severe for majority of societies. Without finance, no organization can carry on its business operations successfully. Even though several credit lending agencies, NCDC, NABARD and commercial banks have been extending their support, they are not adequate to meet the needs of the co-operatives.

**Problems of production**

Among the various problems of production faced by the handloom co-operatives in Nellore district the non-availability of required raw material is a
severe problem followed by competition from the power looms and mill made and high price of yarn.

**Problems of raw material**

Among the various problems of raw material faced by the handloom co-operatives in Nellore district, are the high price of yarn is the major problem followed by not getting of required quantity and irregular supply.

**Problems of sales**

Among all the problems of sales, high price of the product is number one problem, old models or designs is the second problem, low quality of the product is rated third, lack of marketing finance is fourth problem and lack of storage facility is the fifth problem.

**Problems of women weavers**

Almost all weavers expressed some common problems relating to production, finance, marketing, infrastructure, support from the Government and implementation of development programmes etc.

**Finance**

Most of the women weavers have found it difficult to get adequate working capital for their activities. In the present study, 242 weavers (59.75 percent) expressed lack of financial support from commercial and co-operative banks is a major problem, for 199 weavers (49.13 percent) non availability of required finance is the second problem, for 169 weavers (41.73 percent) limited owned funds is the third problem, for 147 weavers (36.30 percent) direct finance from Government is the problem and for 104 weavers (25.68 percent) high rates of interests on loans is the problem.
Problems of production

Among the different problems highlighted by the weavers, for 73.31 percent have seasonal problems, for 42.72 percent have low quality of raw material, for 29.88 percent lack of work sheds, for 27.9 percent out dated looms and for 25.68 percent lack of technical knowledge and lack of sufficient power are the problems hindering their production.

Raw material

The problem of frequent price hike of yarn causes alarming inconvenience to the weavers ranked as the first problem (34.08 percent), low quality of raw material is ranked as second problem (33.33 percent), non availability of required raw material in time rated third (29.42 percent).

Problems of sales

The problem of sales follows on the heels of raw material. The traditional items of production is the problem for 208 weavers (58.36 percent), the middlemen domination in the market and competition from power loom and mill made for 173 weavers (42.73 percent) each, for 164 weavers 942.49 percent) high cost of production is the problem and 147 weavers (36.30 percent) lack of latest designs is the problem.

General problems

The sample women weavers also have stressed the need for the development of infrastructural facilities like work sheds, modern looms which have been ignored by the societies as well as government. Lack of training facilities makes them depend on traditional methods of weaving which do not help them to meet the good demand in the market. The majority of handloom weavers depend on middlemen for finance and middlemen have no hesitation to exploit them to their own advantage by charging exorbitant rates and giving low price to the products of the weavers. In Nellore district weavers are facing the problems of natural calamities frequently. During some seasons weavers do
not have any work and no means livelihood. This situation makes day by day living of the weavers problematic and miserable.

**Hypotheses tested**

In view of the assessment of economic empowerment of women in co-operative handloom sector, four hypotheses were formulated and tested during the research study. The first hypothesis is that weaving activity in Nellore district is confined to limited castes like Devangula and Padmasali was proved in table 4.1. The second hypothesis is that there is a correlation between earlier occupation and the products produced by weavers was found valid in the analyses of the data of table 4.10. The third hypothesis of women participation in handloom co-operative sector is increased in recent years was proved in table 4.22. The fourth hypothesis is that the performance of handloom co-operative societies is poor in the district due to inefficient management of resources, was observed in table 5.2 valid in the research study.


FINDINGS

The findings hitherto made in the course of the present study of the empowerment of women in handloom sector in Nellore district with particular reference to the sample women weavers are listed for better comprehension.

- The frequent increase in the prices of raw material has caused untold misery to the women weavers. Of all sample respondent weavers, 34.08 percent of respondents with weighted score of 828 points reported that frequent price hike of yarn affect the weaving activities. The high cost of raw material increased the cost of production which in turn reduces the profitability and demand for their products.

- In recent years the prices of dyes and chemicals have also gone up by 40 to 60 percent. The cost of inputs also contributes its share in increasing the cost of production.

- Women weavers have been facing the problem of inadequate and timely finance for their weaving activity. Of the total sample weavers, 59.75 percent of them expressed their view that financial assistance by commercial and co-operative banks is inadequate which forces them to employ a limited time in the weaving activity and they were also resorting to informal lending sources.

- Out of total sample respondent weavers, 51.36 percent felt that due to production of traditional items and for 42.7 percent of respondents, middlemen domination is the problems for selling their products in the market.

- The level of education of women weavers is low in the study area. Of the total weavers, 74.82 percent have SSC and below SSC qualification. As a result, they have little knowledge about the development schemes
and policies implemented for betterment of living conditions of the weavers.

- Of the total sample respondent women weavers, 63 percent of the weavers reported that improvement in the existing technology is necessary and this improvement certainly leads to more production due to increase in the efficiency of the operation. It decreases the cost of production and labour and increases the quality and profitability of the product.

- The irregular supply of power hampers the continuity of weaving activity. Of the total sample respondent weavers, 70 percent of them complained against irregular and inadequate power supply cause hindrance to the weaving activity which results in decrease of production and increase the hours of working on looms.

- The weavers are facing health problems due to working continuously on looms and the chemicals used in the process of dyeing. Of the total sample respondent weavers, 75 percent are suffering from orthopaedical problems like joint pains and back pain.

- Women empowerment is low when compared to men in handloom sector in the study area. It is observed that low literacy rate (30.66 percent), male domination (26.29 percent) and low income (22.51 percent) are the major reasons for their low empowerment.

- The infrastructure base for handloom sector is very poor in Nellore district. Lack of proper infrastructure facilities like work sheds, modern looms, lighting and the like are major problems for weavers to maintain their weaving activities at the optimum level. Without proper infrastructure facilities, weavers would not get desired benefits from the weaving activity.
An occupational mobility is observed in handloom sector particularly among women weavers due to lack of encouragement, sufficient work and support from the government.

Weaving continuous to be a traditional and hereditary occupation. Weavers are using traditional methods of productions and design due to lack of exposure, awareness, knowledge in changing technology, methods and requirements of the consumers.

There is a need to form exclusive women weaver's co-operative societies as women members are not given priority to participate in the developmental activities of the society.

Most of the women weavers still used outdated looms and traditional method of weaving, because of which, it resulted in low productivity, low quality and high cost of production.

Involvement of master weavers and middlemen in the handloom sector has created a wide gulf between the weavers and consumers thereby creating conditions of exploitation for both of them.

The developmental schemes and incentives offered by the government have not reached the women weavers properly for whom they are intended.

Nellore district, which is on coastal belt, is affected frequently by natural calamities like cyclones and floods. Unfortunately the calamity relief schemes are not being provided in time and properly to be of help for the women weavers.

Although there is a stipulation of producing 50 percent hank yarn for handloom industry by the composite mills, they are not adhering to that stipulation.
The formalities to be followed by the women weavers to avail themselves of financial assistance from the government are cumbersome and discouraging that the weavers feel disgusted.

It is the fact that the delay in getting financial assistance from commercial and co-operative banks is due to women weavers' ignorance of the formalities to be fulfilled. Part of it is also due to non-cooperation of the bankers in extending financial support.

The weavers do not have required marketing channels except APCO which is not making purchases at regular intervals. There are no proper marketing complexes and exhibition sites at village level and semi urban level in the district and the state as well.

It is observed that weak organization among the women weavers', the middlemen frequently take a disproportionate reward from their products.

Co-operation, though considered as the best form of organization for a decentralized industry like handloom is not successful in spite of the continuous efforts over the last six decades. The co-operatives could attract only 30 percent of the total weavers in the study area.
SUGGESTIONS

It would be appropriate to offer some suggestions for consideration in the light of the observations made hitherto in the present study of the empowerment of women in co-operative handloom sector in Nellore district. It is hoped that these suggestions would be helpful in overcome the problems surmounting by the women weavers and also to improve the economic empowerment of them. The development of women weavers and handloom co-operatives is like two sides of the same coin and need to develop them. The handloom sector has great potential for employment generation and bread earning activity. Therefore, the government and other allied agencies should come forward to create confidence in the minds of women weavers to develop in a co-operative way for the improvement of economic empowerment of women in handloom sector.

- The Government should initiate effective measures to bring down raw material prices and to ensure steady supply. Production of yarn should be increased. Raw material should be supplied properly by the weavers' co-operative societies.

- The Government should provide inputs like dyes, chemicals and colours with subsidy rates by establishing special counters which enable them to maintain continuous production and employment.

- Government should extent financial assistance at concession rates through co-operative and commercial banks to meet the requirements of women weavers.

- It is a need to create weavers fund to extend financial assistance to cater financial needs of the weavers.
The procedure for getting loans should be minimized and simplified as most of the weavers have minimum educational qualifications.

The rules are to be relaxed and all concessions like waiving of loans, lending at pavalavaddi are to be strictly implemented to the women weavers.

Special training should be given to the weavers to enable them to adopt latest technology, innovative designs in weaving to get good market for their products and to compete with mill made products.

To promote the marketability of handloom products, special marketing complexes should be set up at village, town and district level by the central and state governments. Budget provision should be increased for market development assistance.

As the level of education of women weavers is low, it is dire need to impart required education on modern lines to them. It is important not only to improve the technical skills of the weavers but also broaden their outlook. It will surely facilitate the weavers to realize their opportunities to improve their economic status in the society.

Modern technological centers for imparting training in computerized designs, operation of looms and to maintain quality of international standard should be established to compete in the global market.

Measures should be taken to regularize the supply of power as is done in the case of small and medium scale industries.

Proper facilities like ventilation, lighting, protected drinking water should be created at the working places so that they will have better health condition in a good environment. They should have restricted working hours and balanced diet which will enable them to maintain physical health and mental peace. The government should be keen on
implementation of health insurance schemes to cover the health problems of the weavers.

- Promoting literacy among women weavers and eradicating illiteracy help to educate them. Education will enable the women to understand their position in the society. As a result, they will aware of the opportunities for their economic empowerment and social status in the society.

- The government should provide the package of modernization of looms with all financial and technical support. Necessary incentives and policies are to be designed for importing modern looms.

- Organization of exclusive co-operative societies for women members would help to a larger extent to protect the interests of women weavers besides regular employment and fair wages.

- Women weavers who still depend upon traditional methods of weaving and use outdated looms have to be encouraged to adopt modern technology to upgrade their traditional looms.

- In order to save the women weavers from the clutches of middlemen and master weavers, the government should provide sufficient financial assistance to them at concessional rates of interest through commercial and co-operative banks.

- A change has to be brought about in the weaver's outlook. They must be oriented through exposure towards betterment of their skills, knowledge and technology in order to ensure quality of the products and improved efficiencies.

- The existing mechanism of implementation of programmes must be revamped and streamlined so as to make the benefits to reach the women weavers.
As natural calamities are regular and recurrent threats to the women weavers, the existing calamity relief schemes should be extended and the amount of relief to the weavers should be increased whenever they are affected by the calamities.

The co-operative societies should be developed as nerve centers of handloom industry. Each society should be provided with adequate working capital to run the activities for the welfare of the weavers.

The government and other allied agencies which are working for development of women weavers should increase their financial and technical support to meet the needs of the weavers to continue their weaving activity.

To get financial and other support, one has to move as if driven from pillar to post from one institution to another wasting time and energy. It would be of great help to the women weavers if the government introduces the single window system of sanctioning financial assistance.

The government should encourage the weaving community to involve their children in weaving activity after they got required educational qualification. This would reduce the disappointment among the youth and they would become self-reliant and self-confident. The government has to formulate a precise package of schemes of assistance in order to attract as many people as possible to the weaving activity.

While designing a programme or policy for women weavers, they must be given opportunity to participate in the process and express their needs, certainly will help in the formulation of proper programmes, policies and schemes. This involvement makes the women weavers think of the larger interest and welfare of the weaving community in general.
The above suggestions, if implemented properly will certainly improve the economic empowerment of women weavers and the performance of handloom co-operatives in general in Andhra Pradesh and Nellore district in particular. If all these suggestions are implemented whole heartedly, with firm determination, certainly it could go a long way to strengthen and to reshape the handloom sector in Andhra Pradesh. It paves the way for enhancement of women empowerment further, which is dire need of the day as government reiterates its policy from time to time to bring the women into the main stream of the economy.