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Clothing is a basic human need as much as food and shelter. In fact, the history of textiles would be the history of mankind since the Neolithic period. The Indian Textile Industry is the largest industry that has been receiving acclaim from all over the world. Today, the products of the Indian Textile Industry are playing a pivotal role through their contribution to industrial output, employment generation, and the export earnings of the country. The handloom industry is a part of textile trade. Handloom weaving is the India’s biggest cottage and labour intensive sector, which has been playing a very important role in the country’s economy by forming part of India’s rich heritage and exemplifying the rich artistry of the weavers. As an economic activity, the handloom sector occupies a place second only to agriculture in terms of employment.

From time immemorial, Andhra Pradesh has been a name for production of handloom cloth and the industry has been occupying as important place in its economy. The present study – based principally on socio-economic conditions of handloom weavers and various issues relating to organization of handloom industry in India in general and Andhra Pradesh in particular – is a modest attempt to present an integrated and comprehensive analysis of this most important household industry of the state.

The study presents a historical account of the industry with a view to identifying the factors leading to its decline. It also attempts to focus on aspects of the socio-economic conditions of handloom weaver households, viz. age,
gender, social grouping, religion, level of education, type and size of weavers’
family, dependents, migratory character, health conditions of the weavers,
occupational diseases, exposure to mass media and communication, services/
amenities enjoyed by the weavers, social participation, annual income, types of
looms employed, mode of acquisition of looms, type of dwelling unit, category
of assets owned by the weavers, expenditure pattern, indebtedness and purpose
of taking loans. In addition, the organizational issues of the industry have also
been dealt with.

The study also gives broad indications of the likely consequence of
different policies implemented by the successive Governments. However, just
one study, like the present one, cannot be adequate to cover all the gaps in our
knowledge about the industry. There is always scope for a more specific and
indepth examination. Hence, the study ends with suggestions for further lines
of research to examine other dimensions of the industry.

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