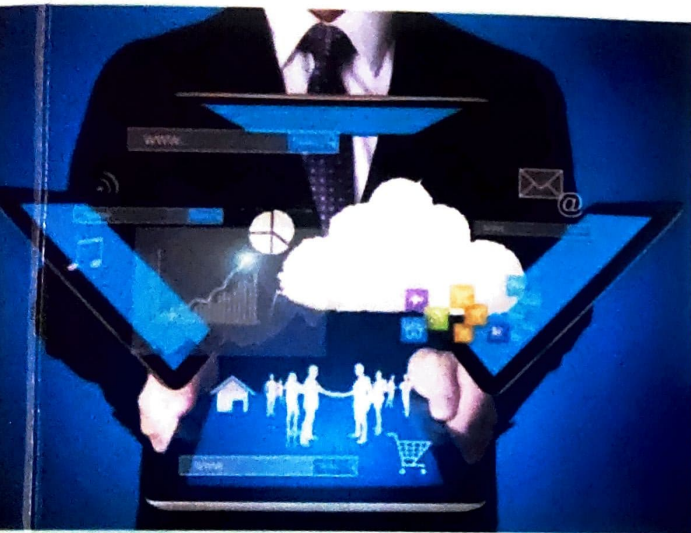


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A Study on marginalised women artisans and economic development

Dr. Gandham Sri Rama Krishna

Associate Professor, Sri Y.N. College, Narsapur (A.P), Email: drgsrk66@gmail.com

Dr. N.G.S. Prasad

Professor & HOD, Swamandra Institute of Engg and Tech, Seetharamapuram (A.P), Email: girinalla1958@gmail.com

Abstract

Lace industry was started in 18th century by Ireland people who came here for business purpose. They have given training for women community in stitching lace by nimble fingers and they had shown the way for women empowerment and used to the export the same lace to foreign countries. The cluster is 175-year-old. It all started by a Scottish lady by name McCrea who came here on missionaries of charity work in the year 1844 and taught the housewives the art of lace work by needles and since that time it spread in the district and women took up the activity as a source income. Previously 2 lakh rural women used to depend upon the lace clusters, due to downfall of the industry the count has come to below one lakh. China is one of the country's which is giving tough competition in lace making and exports. They had started preparing on machines as not by handmade (nimble fingers). The women in their part-time are pursuing this work and producing laces in different design according to the orders of exporters/importers and it is not a direct profession to earn their livelihood, they are not aware of the actual cost of the raw material used for the lace making and the value added after the lace is prepared and the rates at which the finished lace is sold in the market. In other words, their work is totally restricted to their labour only. Therefore, artisans are earn very less amount as a remuneration in this lace making process. Their living, working and economic conditions of women artisans are very miserable and marginalized. In this recent economic recession lace exports have come down

Keywords: Crochet lace, Lace clusters, Women artisans, Nimble fingers, Women empowerment, Marginalized women, Rural women folk.

Introduction

Narsapur in West Godavari District is famous for handmade crochet lace clusters. Majority of lace exporters are from Seetharamapuram village which is near Narsapur. Lace industry was started in 18th century by Ireland people who came here for business purpose. They have given training for women community in stitching lace by nimble fingers and they had shown the way for women empowerment and used to the export the same lace to foreign countries. The same work was spread to Palakol, Veeravasaram in West Godavari District and Rozole, Amalapuram, Nagaram in East Godavari District, and Bantumilli in Krishna District. The local people experience the profit the lace clusters and mushroom growth of lace exporters came to limelight.

Narsapur is a remote place in West Godavari District of Andhra Pradesh, India. It is famous for the crochet lace products. The cluster is having around 30 exporters who are exporting to various countries. The clusters are having around one lakh women artisans doing the lace work. The cluster is specialized in doing the lace works like dollies, furnishings, garments, tablemats, etc. The cluster is 175-year-old. It all started by a Scottish lady by name McCrea who came here on missionaries of charity work in the year 1844 and taught the housewives the art of lace work by needles and since that time it spread in the district and women took up the activity as a source income. Most of the women do the lacing in their respective houses. Traditionally the families are doing it since generations. In some places women gather at a common place in the village and do it together.

Once upon a time it was 350 crores per annum business but now it has fallen into nearly 30 crores. Majority of lace clusters are shutting down due to huge loss in business and lack of sufficient orders from import countries. Previously 2 lakh rural women used to depend upon the lace clusters, due to downfall of the industry the count has come to below one lakh. Out of total production 80 percent of production value is being exported. There is a less potential to expand its market both overseas and in domestic markets.

China is one of the country's which is giving tough competition in lace making and exports. They had started preparing on machines as not by handmade (nimble fingers). The Government in China is giving lot of subsidy for purchasing lace thread, supply and exports. Even though country like America, England, Australia, the people like handmade crochet lace rather than China made. The growth rate crochet lace work remains same from 1991 to 2019, because of heavy competition from China.

Lace clusters currently behind the iron curtains of a few private exporters and most of the women artisans are un-organized and desperate. The crochet lace clusters had given potential for women employment and foreign exchange earnings. The lace cluster at Narsapur has tremendous business potential. It is being considered as one of the mega clusters in the country where about one lakh artisans, all women, live and depends for their livelihoods. The women in their part-time are pursuing this work and producing laces in different design according to the orders of exporters/importers and it is not a direct profession to earn their livelihood, they are not aware of the actual cost of the raw material used for the lace making and the value added after the lace is prepared and the rates at which the finished lace is sold in the market. In other words,

their work is totally restricted to their labour only. Therefore, artisans earn very less amount as a remuneration in this lace making process.

The women artisans consider lace work as part time work hence professionalism is lacking. As the job is done mostly at the clusters and their residential places of artisan, the quality is not up to the international standards. Very little cooperation among major cluster stakeholders i.e. exporters which leads to underutilization of common facilities set up at lace clusters. As the cluster is dominated by semi-educated and un-educated, they don't have much of the exposure to the international markets, emerging trends and quality standards. The bleaching practices adopted by the job work units in the cluster are primitive (manual, done by hand and using chemicals) that lead to quality product. This in turn also discourages them to take up coloured jobs. The cluster artisans are trained in the traditional age-old design patterns and need to be up graded according to the latest trends in the fashion world.

Now a days, the women artisans are more knowledge, educated and have higher level of aspirations. But the lace artisans situation is different. Their living, working and economic conditions of women artisans are very miserable and marginalized. In this recent economic recession lace exports have come down. Owing to a sharp decline in export orders from abroad, over one lakhs lace artisans in West Godavari and East Godavari Districts face an uncertain future. Even though the women artisans daily wages are also reduced for Rs. 300/- a day to Rs. 200/- even certain area clusters earn Rs. 160/- only. The cluster artisans are heavily dependent on job work from exporters who have direct orders hence they are paid lower conversion charges (almost 30 percent lower). The artisans do not have the capability and capacity of direct marketing.

It is observed that the employment conditions of women artisans are not as expected due to middlemen and exporters. As the workforce is predominantly female, the major reason for taking up the lace making work is to supplement family income. The nature of work of female includes hand work, joints, bordering and lining. In case of male workers the work includes checking, repairing, finishing, washing, ironing, packing and forwarding. It can be stated that the lace making is dominated by women workforce with a marginal number of male workers.

Sweating with its triple evil of long hours of work, more dust mite allergy conditions and low wages is common in lace clusters. Apart from low wages, the women artisans report many problems at work. Their work day begins at sunrise and continues till sunset. In the absence of community facilities, they have to carry infant children to lace clusters where they are not provided with any shelters and the children remain constantly exposed to the forces of nature. In addition, the women are not permitted to nurse their children.

The income of the women artisans is less than their expenditure and hence they are indebted. The physical working environment for the lace workers is congenial but they are not given the statutory leaves and holidays. The Minimum Wages Act, 1948 is applicable to the lace workers but the wages paid to the workers are not as prescribed under the Act. There is lot of differences between male and female workers wages. The social security legislations like Employees Provident Fund Act, 1952 and Employees State Insurance Act, 1948 are applicable to lace workers which is not implemented so far. The Factories Act, 1948 is applicable to the lace making clusters to provide health, safety, welfare, paid holidays, leave with wages. But in practice no exporters are implementing the Acts for the benefit of the lace artisans.

After LPG Policy the lace clusters are struggling for its existence. In 2007, the Government of Andhra Pradesh granted 75 crores in the budget through DRDA and mega Alankrithi Lace Park was established and for training in villages many clusters were started. Alankrithi Lace Park was established as a co-operative set up with Public Private Participation (PPP) by roping in entrepreneurs interested to participate in this activity. While doing this, they are drawing strength from the values that form the core of cooperative philosophy: those human beings, working together with mutual trust and respect, can improve their own lives, their villages and their nation. All the artificial destination of religion, language, caste and gender dissolve when we recognize a fundamental fact: we are all basically the same - human beings, born to cooperate and coexist. It is expected that through this association of enterprises and the cooperatives, the development that had been by and large bypassed-would see hope in life through increased incomes and an enriched cultural life.

Women artisans were well motivated and trained by Central Government and constructed International Lace Trade Centre (ILTC) in Narsapur under the control of Export Promotion Council for Handicrafts (EPCH) in 2016. ONGC showed its corporate social responsibility by providing training for women artisans and supply the required material and machines. The ILTC is doing a good service for providing computer knowledge on market, exporting rules and regulations, packages, e-market etc. by conducting training to lace artisans by subject experts. It is high time the ILTC should expand the crochet lace technology to different colleges and schools in and around Narsapur so that crochet lace clusters will flourish again.

After the starting of Alankrithi Lace Park at Narsapur by Andhra Pradesh Government, International Lace Trade Centre (ILTC), at Narsapur by the Government of India, the artisans are well trained and they are paid stipend according to government rules and regulations. The self-help groups are mostly benefited by the Alankrithi Lace Park. In this way, the government is extending helping hand to the poor women irrespective of their caste, creed and religion. Thereby it is directly empowering the women.

The Government of India is giving best packages for the benefit and development of women and making them to play a pivotal role in the country's economic development. In the lace clusters the workers are women, they are economically poor. It is the Government through the Alankrithi Lace Park the economic status of women has been raised considerably and some

of them started their own lace works. The AlankrithiLace Park is acting as a trainer and mediator for empowerment of lace artisans.

The lace clusters involves three categories of people. They are workers, the middlemen(agent) and exporters. The lace making is carried-out in putting-out system and workshop manufacturing. Under the putting-out system women in the household prepare the lace items for the agent who in turn hands over the lace items to the exporters. This putting-out lace making is the monopoly of household women. In this system there is no relationship between the exporter and women artisans and the entire relationship is carried-out between the agent and the women artisans. The another system of lace making is workshop manufacturing i.e., lace clusters. Where the exporter arranges the preparation of lace items with the men and women workers. There is a general division of work between men and women in this system the lace making including Chethipani (hand work), Athukupani (joint or attachment work), Kajakuttu (bordering and lining) is done by women artisans whereas checking, repairs, finishing, washing, ironing, packing and forwarding are performing by male workers. The means of production the women need are very simple. It consists of hooked needing, their hands and lace and thread. The raw material requires for the production of lace is only cotton thread imported from merchants. This is also called "Diamond Thread". There are 3 different types of lace work process: one is handwork, second is attached work and third is lining.

The rural women artisans are often socially and culturally isolated. They commonly lack the productive assets other than their working power which would enable them to struggle for independence and self-reliance. They remain attached in various ways to those who have control over land and capital. They have learnt to live with apathy, injustice and have no opportunity for schooling. They work without being recognised as workers, and throughout their lives they are expected to obey male authority. Women's condition as family members and co-workers has not changed even after 12th five year plans. Women artisans are taken for granted and they play a important role in contribution to economy. Few studies are available on women artisans. Some of them were undertaken by social scientists and a few of them were undertaken under the government auspices. The focus and the dimensions of the studies tend to vary depending upon the objective and the level at which the study was conducted. But studies portraying the problems of women artisans at the grass root level are few and far between. There is an imperative need to take up more studies at this level to understand the problems of women artisans more vividly. Such an understanding is necessary to evolve appropriate measures to deal with their problems and to bring about overall development of women artisans in general. The Second National Commission on Labour (2002) is also of the same opinion and endorse the views of Human Development Report (1990) that "the low value attached to women's work requires a fundamental remedy and felt that there is a need to redesign national censuses.

Crochet lace entered into the lives of the local poor women as a means of livelihood and to mitigate their financial problems to some extent and to increase their hidden skill and talent. Lace making came as a need initially and became a hobby soon. But later on it became a craft and now it is a profession. The lace women artisans of Narsapur is a sensitive portrait of women in India and the conditions under which they work at clusters and some works from home to produce luxury goods for the global market. For women artisans, the consequences of this pattern of capitalist growth are accelerating pauperization and a rapid deterioration in their position in Indian markets generally. Lace making became a part and parcel of the cultural life of the rural women folk. To rich and middle classes it may be a hobby but to the poor rural women it is the chief means of livelihood. It is well known fact that women artisans play a major role in making of lace items.

Conclusion

There is still male dominance persist in the society and most of the women earnings are spent on the family and they are treated like machines without giving due weightage for their empowerment. The government is to bring out the women at their invisible marginalized and dependent position to an independent confident member of the society, playing a conscious role in the development of the community and their by the State and the Country as a whole.

In the words of former President Late Sri A.P.J.AbdulKalam "Empowering women is a prerequisite for creating a good nation when women are empowered and a society with stability is assured. Empowerment of women is essential as their thoughts and value-systems lead to the development of a good family, good society and ultimately a good nation."

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