

ECONOMIC IMPORTANCE OF MAT WEAVING INDUSTRY IN PATTAMADAI OF TIRUNELVELI DISTRICT: AN OVERVIEW

Dr. S. Muthiah

*Research Supervisor, Associate Professor of Commerce,
Sri K.G.S Arts College, Srivaikundam-628619 Thoothukudi Dist.*

A. Venkateswaran

*Research Scholar, Assistant Professor of Commerce,
Ambai Arts college, Ambasamudram-627401 Tirunelveli Dist.*

Abstract

Mat weaving is an important traditional handicraft of Tamil Nadu which is famous for its korai dry-grass mats. The weaving also takes enormous time and patience on the part of the weaver. Men and women of the Muslim community weave these famous fine mats only in pattamadai of Tirunelveli District. The MSMEs have been characterized by their traditional strengths of relatively low investment requirements, effective resource utilization, greater operational flexibility, mobility and higher innovativeness. MSME, sector worldwide is being considered as the growth engine of any economy. The general aim of the present paper is to explore the social, economic and working conditions of the weavers of pattamadai in particular and the problems, prospects as well as its characteristics. The present work is based on empirical study. The study is based on primary data, collected through field survey by direct questionnaire to the respondents. Therefore, introduction of indigenous know how (traditional craft, style, design, etc.) in the field of mat weaving blended with modern techniques can be produce low cost of quality product with quantity production to sustain present day competition market. Hence, conclusion is made concerning relevant MSME issues. (Micro Small and Medium Enterprises).

Introduction

Mat weaving is an important traditional handicraft of Tamil Nadu which is famous for its korai dry-grass mats (marsh Reed (plant)). Korai belongs to the sedge family of plants, (*Cyperus corymbosus* Rottb.) is found in abundance along the banks of the rivers and in marshy areas in Tamil Nadu. Korai mats may be broadly divided into three categories. Coarse mats are rough in texture, relatively quick to weave and may be made using either a handloom or powerloom. Higher quality handloom mats are finer in texture. The highest quality has a texture akin to silk. To make such mats the korai is soaked in running water for up to a week until it begins to rot, the central pith is then scraped off and each stem split into fine strands, dried and dyed. The finer the mat desired, the longer the korai needs to soak and the thinner the weft strands will be. The number of warp threads also increases with finer mats. Apart from the regular weaves and patterns, Pattamadai paais are made to order for wedding ceremonies. The bride and the groom's names and the wedding date are woven in to the mat make the occasion memorable. This particular handicraft is original to Pattamadai, a small village in Tirunelveli district of Tamil Nadu,

and hence its name. It is also called Korai or Gorai pain as it is made of a special kind of grass called "Korai/Gorai". Many weavers have received national awards from the President of India for their unparalleled skill in mat weaving. Pattamadai Pattu Paai has been sent to Queen Victoria & Queen Elizabeth during the British Regime as the Royal Gift from India to highlight the quality and workmanship of world fame mats. The success of this mat weaving is the closely guarded trade secret among the Muslim Community of Pattamadai from ages. The traditional colours used are red, green and black and the weaves can reach up to the maximum 140 counts in the silk or pattu mat. . Mats having between 100 and 140 warp threads in every nine inches of their total width are only woven in Pattamadai town. They are locally known as 'super-fine mats', those with 50 warp threads in every nine inches of total mat width are termed 'fine mats' . Most fine mats take around a week to weave. It takes about four weeks to weave a super-fine mat. The old pattern consisted mainly of stripes at the two ends or streaks through the body (Resemble the Jamakkaalam). Designs inputs by modern designers has led to the making of contemporary mats which are greatly in demand both in the international and national markets. Today, apart from the sophisticated Pattamadai pai, Pattamadai weavers also craft korai grass shopping bags, place mats, runners, office folders etc.

Pattamadai pai (mat) weaving is done by Labbai and Rauther Muslim weavers with korai grass grown on the banks of river Tamiraparani in Pattamadai, a small village in Tirunelveli district. The fully grown, korai grass is cut and soaked in the running water of river and split into fine strands. These strands are woven into fine mats, which is result of centuries of experience and expertise. So supple and lustrous is the mat that it seems to be made of silk threads. These mats have become traditional gifts for important functions. They are produced in different shapes, sizes and colours as regular floor mats, small prayer mats, dining mats, wall hangings. Their workmanship extends to bags, baskets, purses, fans, letter and penholders, jewellery boxes and other items from korai. The silken Pattamadai mats are all set to get geographical indication (GI) status for their uniqueness and extraordinary craftsmanship.

Statement of the Problem

The handloom sector plays an important role in the economic development of the rural poor in the state. It contributes significantly by generating more employment opportunities and providing bread to the rural poor. Though agriculture is the mainstay of the people of pattamadai, there are many families are mat weaving in this area. The tertiary sector also has been fast developing in pattamadai developing area.

Mahatma Gandhi, the father of the nation used to say, "India lives in her villages" highlighting the significance of the several types according to the nature of work they undertake. There are agriculture workers, construction workers, factory workers, diary workers, cart pullers, luggage carries, load men, dhobis, barbers, blacksmiths, casual

workers, porters water carriers, hotel workers, cooks, wood cutters graveyard workers, servants and village administrative workers. There can be long list of workers.

The study will try to find out the leading characteristics, problems and general economic conditions of the mat weavers in the study area. Mostly, the mat weavers are well organized and most of them do joint any association. They are producers. Many of them have mostly temporary jobs. They are not employed effectively and fully. The socio-economic conditions of the mat weavers are below poverty line also. In some cases, there is under employment. Work is not available on all days in a year another problem is seasonal unemployment. It is proposal in this work to examine the social and economic conditions of the mat weavers of pattamadai in Tirunelveli dist

Objectives

Keeping in view the above problems, this study is proposed to carry on with the following objectives.

- To evaluate the progress of weaving Industry in Tirunelveli District
- To analyse the socio-economic conditions of the sample Mat weavers.
- To assess the adoption of technology and production of Mat weaving.
- To observe the marketing facilities of Mats in the study area.
- To study the problems of Mat weavers in the study area.
- To assess the recent trends of the Mat weaver's welfare schemes in Tirunelveli District.
- To analyze the impact of weavers welfare schemes on the social and economic status of the Mat weavers in District.
- To examine the extent of the implementation of the welfare scheme.

Literature Review

There is no universal definition of Micro Small and Medium scale enterprise. Each country tend to derive its own definition based on the role Micro Small and Medium Enterprises are expected to play in that economy and the programmes of assistant designed to achieve that goal. The process of mat weaving is time consuming and painstaking.

The art and craft of weaving and blending intricate designs of Pattamadai mats are considered unique to this region. "Korai" grass grows in swampy lands and riverbeds. Online research mentions a specific set of Labbai/Lubbai and Rauther Muslim families are involved in weaving these mats or making the loom. According a research submitted at a seminar in New Delhi -by Ms Soumhya Venkatesan in 2003, this household cottage industry contributes to over 75% of the local income in Pattamadai.

Definition of Micro & Small Enterprises

In India where MSMEs are predominant, Micro Enterprises are those which have Investments in Plant & Machinery less than Rs. 25.0 lacs (USD 50,000). Small Enterprises

have Investment in Plant & machinery more than Rs. 25 lacs (USD50,000) but does not exceed Rs. 5.0 crores (USD 1million). Medium Industries in Manufacturing have more than Rs. 5.0 crores (USD 1 million) but less than Rs. 10.0 crores (USD 2 mil- lions).

According to Susan Ward [3], in the European Union, a similar system is used to define Small to Medium Enterprises. A business with a headcount of fewer than 250 is classified as medium sized; a business with a headcount of fewer than 50 is classified as small, and a business with a headcount of fewer than 10 is considered micro business. The European system also takes into account a business's turnover rate and its balance sheet.

Canada defines a small business as one that has fewer than 100 employees. Micro business is defined as a business with fewer than five employees.

Profile of the Study Area

Pattamadai is a panchayat town in Tirunelveli district (surrounded by Kozhumadai/Melacheval in the East, Paymadai/Cheranmahadevi in the West, Pulavan Kudiyeruppu/Kanganankulam in the South and karisulnthamangalam in the North east) in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu. As of 2011 India census,[1] Pattamadai had a population of 14,965. Males constitute 49% of the population and females 51%. Pattamadai has an average literacy rate of 72%, higher than the national average of 59.5%: male literacy is 80%, and female literacy is 66%. In Pattamadai, 11% of the population is under age 6.

Profile of Mat Weaving Industry

Mat weaving is highly developed rural handi-crafts in Tirunelveli district and their mats are famous through India and in foreign countries for their exquisite quality and texture. The famous Pattamadai Fine Mat Weavers Co-operative Society had unique honor of producing a mate of very exquisite quality and design which was presented by the Government of Madras to her majesty the Queen Elizebeth of England. Through her royal highness the duke of Edinburgh, when he visited Madras in January 1959.

There were three mat weavers' societies in Tirunelveli district at the end of 1957-58. Two more societies were started in 1958-59 for the further growth and development of the mat making. The mat industry has gone through a cycle of transition from being most coveted to the most ignored and then back in demand. Efforts by a few organizations to promote this handicraft led to an influx of commercial interests. This cycle doesn't benefit any craft/art form, and the same applies to the Pattamadai mats industry as well.

Commercial weaving led to increased use of pure cotton and nylon threads instead of silk thread. Over the years, excessive exploitation and stress for over production resulted to waning in use of traditional methods. As I have always maintained, over production and apparent, in flow of money in the short term doesn't translate to "growth".

Increased domestic and international Demand and supply imbalance eventually led to increased use of synthetic dyes, shorter product life cycles, and lesser focus on long term benefits for the weaver and the industry as a whole. I remember members of my

family discussing a drastic fall in quality of mats produced. With plastic mats making a foray into the market, silk mat industry lost its foot hold and its patrons among Indian buyers.

Present Study

Mat weaving is carried out in Pattamadai and Viravanallur in Tirunelveli District. A number of Muslims are engaged in this work manufacturing fine mats on a cottage basis from korai grass. They have been permitted to cut free of cost the korai grass grown locally in tanks and river beds. An appreciable amount of their requirement of korai grass (*Phragmites Karka Trin*) is obtained by them from Karur and Tiruchirappalli, through local stokists and retail dealers in Tirunelveli Town and Pettai. Mat weavers in Tirunelveli District are at stake and the weavers are panic stricken with miseries since they are facing acute production and marketing problems. A majority of them are struggling hard to survive in Tirunelveli District in Tamil Nadu has much economic importance as high concentrated mats are produced and the Mats are being exported to various countries. But the condition of the weavers is pathetic. The weavers in Tirunelveli District are facing multiple problems in the production and marketing of their Mats Competition of mill or power loom products, unfavorable climatic conditions, as well as their poverty and under employment also have added fuel to the fire of the miseries.

Research Methodology

The present study is based on both primary as well as secondary data sources and methods used for data collection. The Study is an Empirical Research based mainly on field study. Primary data was collected through a survey conducted in different localities consisting of 30 respondents chosen randomly. Secondary data was collected from the publications of various governmental agencies, private Mat weaving units, books, journals, newspapers, periodicals, reports, internet and unpublished records of District Industrial Centers of District and other NGO's.

Construction of Interview Schedule

The Interview schedule constructed by the researcher himself. The variables to be included are identified by the researcher in the pilot study. The variables identified are converted into appropriate questions and they are included in the interview schedule. It is contacted with few mat weavers. In the light of recommendation from them interview schedule was modified.

Sampling Design

In the Tirunelveli District has famous for korai Mats (Rough & Fine) and craft korai grass shopping bags, place mats, runners, office folders etc. which are also exported to some foreign countries. The study is confined to 30 mat weavers' households in different

category in the Tirunelveli district. They were selected at random by applying convenience sampling.

Limitations of the Study

- This study covers only TIRUNELVELI city. This is the major limitation of the study.
- The needs, wants and other motives of respondents vary at different occasions.
- Numbers of the respondents are relatively small.

Analysis of data

Table 1 Demographic information

Age in (years)	No of Respondents		Percentage of Respondents	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Younger (Below 25)	0	2	0	6
Middle age (Between 26-50)	2	18	7	60
Old age (Above 50)	2	06	7	20
Total	04	26	14	86

Source: Primary source

Data depicted in the table 1 reveals that the demographic information of the weavers belonged to middle age group of 26-50 years, because the productivity is relatively more at this age due to their physical capabilities. Younger generation in the weavers' community preferred to take employment in handloom weaving industry after their higher education. Therefore their involvement is very minimal in weaving. On the other hand involvement of older people was less conspicuous because of their physical health, strength and visual problems.

Table 2 Educational Status

Educational Status	No of Respondents	Percentage of respondents
Illiterate (unable to read and write)	1	3
Primary (I- V standard)	14	47
Middle school (V-VIII standard)	10	33
Secondary (IX to X standard)	3	10
Higher Secondary (XI to XIIStandard)	2	7
Total	30	100

Source: Primary source

Data shown in the table 2 exhibits that weavers' communities have realized the importance of education and the children nowadays are aware about the role of education and therefore they develop their career by higher education. Nearly one Tenth of the weavers were educated up to secondary level and nearly one fifth up to middle school because all weavers could not afford to go in for higher education, due to family constraints, ignorance and encouragement from the family members. Such children had to discontinue their studies owing to financial problem.

Table 3 Family Type

Family Type	No of Respondents	Percentage of respondents
Nuclear	6	20
Joint	24	80
Total	30	100

Source: Primary source

It is inferred from table 3 highlights that the Family size and system are important features that contributed to the family income. It is found that the joint family still prevails in the weavers' community.

Table 4 Size of the family

Family Size	No of Respondents	Percentage of respondents
Small (up to 3)	2	7
Medium (4-6)	22	73
Large (more than 6)	6	20
Total	30	100

Source: Primary source

Data presented in table 4 lime lights that joint family still prevails in the mat weaver's community 73 percent family size 4 to 6 members.

Table 5 Economic Status

Sl.No	Monthly Income (Rs)	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
1	Upto- 2000	5	17
2	2000-3000	13	43
3	3000-4000	7	23
4	4000-5000	3	10
5	5000 above	2	7
	Total	30	100

Source: Primary source

Data depicted in Table 5 revels that the income-wise classification of the weavers. Out of 30 respondents upto 2000 to rupees it could be identified that 17 percentage of the weavers, majority 2000-3000 to is 43 percentages of weavers, average of the salary in 3000-4000 to rupees in 23 percentages of weavers in average salary and above 5000 rupees to 7 percentages of the weaves.

Annual income (Rs.)	No of Respondents	Percentage of respondents
Low income (Below 50,000)	22	73
Middle income (50,000-1,00,000)	06	20
High income (Above 1,00,000)	2	7
Total	30	100

Source: Primary source

It is learned from data given table 5 shows that handmade Mats are always having tremendous competition with power loom Mats. Many times there is a setback for handmade Mat products because of the relative price flow of the variety of power loom inexpensive mat products in the market, lack of demand and fashion issues that in turn affect the socio-economic condition of the weavers. Approximately 75 percent of the weavers fall in low income group.

Table 6 Distribution of expenditure Pattern

Sl.No	Expenditures	Percentage of Respondents
1	Food	40
2	Education	25
3	Medical Expenses	15
4	Festival and Religious Expenses	10
5	Others Expenses	10
	Total	100

Source: Primary data

Data shown in Table reveals that the households expenditure of the weavers. Out of 30 respondents majority 40 percentage of them engaged in food, 25 percentage of them engaged in education, 15 percentage of them engaged in medical expenses, 10 percentage of them engaged in festival and religious expenses and other expenses.

Table 7 Distribution of Savings

Sl.No	Mode of Savings (Monthly)	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
1	Bank	13	43
2	Post office	10	33
3	LIC	04	13
4	Others	03	10
	Total	30	100

Source: Primary data

It is inferred from Table that the mode of savings. It says that out of 30 weavers in 43 percentage of the weavers are save in bank, 28 percentage of the weavers are save in post office, 13 percentage of the weavers are save in LIC, and the remaining 10 percentage of the weavers are save in others.

Table 8 Distribution of borrowing by sources

Sl.No	Expenditures	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
1	Bank	12	40
2	Non-Government Banks	8	27
3	Co-Operatives	7	23
4	Others	3	10
	Total	30	100

Source: Primary data

Data presented in Table reveals that the source of borrowings. It says that out of 30 weavers in 40 percentage of the weavers are borrowed from bank, 27 percentage of the weavers are borrowed from non- government bank, 23 percentage of the weavers are borrowed from co-operatives, and the remaining 10 percentage of the weavers are borrowed from others.

Table 9 Working Status

Category	No of Respondents	Percentage of respondents
Independent weaver	2	7
Master weaver	5	17
Working under middlemen	14	47
Co-operative Weaver	9	30
Total	30	100

Source: Primary source

Table 9 highlights that Weavers either are working for under middlemen or co operative weavers in family based Mat weaving units, very few being independent weavers, and master weavers. Therefore the annual income of the family is very low. It has been found that about 47% of the weaver members engaged in weaving activities under middlemen.

Table 10 Working hours

Working Hours /Day	No of Respondents	Percentage of respondents
Up to 8 Hours	18	60
8-10 Hours	8	27
11-15 Hours	4	13
Total	30	100

Source: Primary source

It has been revealed that 60 % of the weavers are engaged in weaving for up to 8 hours a day, while 27% of them work for period of up to 8-10 hours, 13 % of them work for the period of 11-15hours per day.

Table 11 Social-Personal Status

Preferences	No of Respondents	Percentage of respondents
Inherited	24	80
Job opportunity	3	10
Interest	0	0
Educated Unemployment	3	10
Training	0	0
Total	30	100

Source: Primary source

It could be seen from the table 11 weaving requires whole family co-operation. The family members, irrespective of their age, stretch their helping hand to improve the family

living. The weaver's children do work hard along with their parents and they do not receive any particular weaving training. The majority of the weavers 80% in pattamadai, who inherited weaving from their forefathers, insisted to continue the family profession. This mind-set and nature of weavers all over India is found to be the same in various areas and it focuses on the respect, regard and honour for the profession, whether profitable or not. Their wish to continue traditional weaving is mainly related to preserving and protecting the inherited tradition alive.

Table 12 Procurement of Raw materials by the weavers

Source of procurement	No of Respondents	Percentage of respondents
Master weavers	3	10
Local Raw Material dealers	12	40
Direct purchased	1	3
Direct harvesting from Tamiraparani river bank	6	20
Co-operative society	8	27
Total	30	100

Source: primary source

Table 12 Shows that raw material plays a vital role in the production of any product. It is found that 40% of the Mat weavers purchased raw material from Local Raw material dealers.

Table 13 Mode of Payment

Mode of Payment	No of Respondents	Percentage of respondents
Cash	24	80
Credit	0	0
Cash & Credit	6	20
Total	30	100

Source: primary source

Table 13 exhibits that the main mode of payment was found to be on cash of 80 %. Purchasing raw material from local raw material dealers or co-operative society is convenient for the weavers in terms of time, energy, and money saving and reduces the risk of stock accumulation. On the other hand 20% of the weavers purchased raw materials on both cash and credit bases.

Table 14 Major Health Ailments

Name of Ailments	No of Respondents	Percentage of respondents
Eye Sight Weakness	2	7
Back Ache	14	47
Knee Pain	10	33
Joint Pain	4	13
Total	30	100

Source: primary source

Table 14 reveals that Mat weaving requires long and patient hours of work in various harmful positions on traditional looms and instruments of Mat weaving. In addition, most of the looms on which weavers work are situated next to windows of the room in a very small space. Work is done in the natural light and unhygienic rooms or places, considering the strain which eyes, joints or the whole body go through during Mat weaving. Overtime people engaged in Mat weaving start facing health ailments due to the hard working conditions. The major health ailments which people face are muscular-skeletal in nature and they suffer mainly from knee pain, joint pain, back ache and weakening eyesight. It shows the major ailments which people are prone to in Mat weaving. The major ailments were back ache 47% and knee pain 33% of the respondents were suffered.

Conclusion

Ultimately, women entrepreneurship must be recognized for what it is. Nationally, it has great importance for the country's future economic Prosperity. Individually, business ownership provides women with Independence as they crave with economic and social satisfaction.

There is no escape from the adoption of improved technology wherein several engineering processes are involved and the difficulties confronting these industries could be overcome to some extent with the use of modern equipment and instruments. In view of this, the aims of transfer of technology to the Village Industries should be:

- To reduce the drudgery of the workers and the artisans in the operations of tools and implements.
- To enable the artisans to increase their earning power.
- To enable them to produce quality goods in comparison with the products of other sectors.
- To enable them to use raw materials available locally so that they may not be required to migrate in search of raw materials outside their familiar region.
- While effecting suitable modifications in the processes, equipment and the units, the existing elements of skill or personal interests should not be sacrificed to such an extent as to make them slaves of the machine.
- The transfer of technology should ultimately help to increase employment potential in the primary activity and help in efficient utilization of local raw materials.

As per recommendations made by the High Power Committee, following areas may be taken up for R & D work:

- Improvement in the existing tools and implements used in KVI sector within the broad parameter of the objectives set forth above.
- Improvement in process know-how, technology know-how to improve the productivity and quality of end product.

- Publicity of improved implements etc.: Adequate publicity must be made for developed technology of the implements.
- Developed technology could be adopted by the concerned agency in qualitatively improving the implementation of the programme.
- Establishment of experimental process houses: The processing input made.
- Prototype Development Centre could be established for product development in a decentralized manner so that the regional capacity for manufacturing of developed tools and implements could be created.
- Establishment of Technology Demonstration Centre like Technology Park, Vigyan Kendra, etc.: Establishment of such centers of technology park/vigyan kendras can be undertaken to demonstrate practical benefit of technology and implements for a wider application and use of the same.
- Quality control/linkages with other laboratories: In order to provide the standard and quality of the end product in KVI sector, linkages should be established with all laboratories of Government and even private sector so that suitable collaborations thus established can improve the quality of the end product in KVI sector.
- Training of quality marketing system in KVI sector: Khadi and VI product have their own characteristics since they are processed and manufactured manually and the raw materials used are from the rural site. Being environmental friendly and eco-friendly, the products are more near to nature and in a scenario when the world over people are becoming more conscious about environment friendly product, there is need for having quality marking system for KVI product of its own something like BIS, Agmark, etc.
- Field Trial/Extension: Many technologies have been developed at various levels by various agencies and R&D efforts are continuously being made in all spheres of life. Attempt should be made to identify such technologies, products and implements which have relevance and utility in KVI sector and accordingly irrespective of the fact at which source these implements/know-how are developed, attempts could be made for adopting these technologies in KVI sector by suitably experimenting them at the initial stage in the form of field trials in KVI sector and they may be gradually taken up in KVI sector for their further uses.
- Study/Evaluation: No R&D work is complete unless proper evaluation of any work is complete. Even for collecting data, information, etc. such studies become part of the R&D work.
- In order to have better input of information and data compilation for various R&D works. If such studies are required to be undertaken, they may also become part of the R&D work.