

Impact of Economical Reforms and Imperialist Globalization on Handloom Weavers – A Case Study

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A pathetic story of a Handloom weaver who migrated to Chirala, under starving conditions caused due to Economic Reforms and influence of Globalization.

Munagala Venkata Subbaiah by occupation is a Handloom weaver. His wife is Adilakshmi. They are blessed with two boys and one girl child. There are 5 members in the family. The family was residing at Eethamukkala village, Kothapatnam Revenue Mandal, Prakasam Dist of A. P. before migration. This village is known for Handloom Industry close to Bay of Bengal and the shore is situated just 400 mts away.

Munagala Venkata Subbaiah inherited the caste occupation from his father Venkata Subbaiah as it is being handed over from one generation to another. Economic Reforms introduced by the central Government in 1991 posed unexpected serious threats to the profession to the just married Venkata Subbaiah who got married in the year 1989. Venkata Subbaiah who is innocent of worldly affairs, more particularly the Economic Reforms, could not understand the changes of Globalization. He was under strong opinion that the changes that are rapidly taking place are ones due to the competition from power loom and failure to supply required yarn. The drought and starving conditions are due to nature's curse against weaving industry. He was working 10 hours per day on the loom to feed his family but the income thus received was not sufficient for the entire family. To feed his child aged 3 years he was working 12 hours on the loom. Even then he was unable to meet the family demands. For 12 hours of work in a day on the loom, he was getting only Rs. 34/- per day.

The Master weavers or the cooperative societies were paying only Rs.280/- if the plain cloth of 25 yards is completed on the loom which takes about five days and pre loom processing consumes another couple of days. Therefore the total income per week is just Rs.280 only. This 25 yards is calculated as one warp and if a weaver completes 4 warps in a month, he would probably earn Rs.1020/-. Thus the average income per day is Rs.34/- only. The income thus earned is only sufficient for sustenance of family and to meet medical expenses of the family members till the implementation of the new Economic Reforms were introduced under structural Adjustment policy & GATT. The Bretton Wood Brothers (WTO and WB) are indirectly responsible for untold disturbance and irreparable loss to the Handloom sector. Due to such effect, Venkata Subbaiah was unable to get the required raw material as well as regular income. He was compelled to understand and realize the irreparable effects of Globalization and Economic Reforms that affected him and also his family. He tried to understand the relation between Handloom Industry and the New Economic Reforms. The amount he was receiving for single warp is reduced from Rs.280/- to 240/-. On the other hand, the prices of essential commodities were steeply hiked. He was not getting the equal wage to equal work, which provoked him to think about the developments that created unrest in his mind and family affairs.

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He began to search for the root causes for all the sufferings and pains. He realized that due to reform started from 1991 allowed import of Auto loom which threatened the power loom as well as Handloom Industry. The powerlooms started manufacturing 22 varieties of reserved Handloom items which were providing him work and also for other weavers. In fact these reserved items (22) today are largely produced by power looms. He realized that master weavers are also forced to reduce the mazdur (wages) of the Handloom weavers, while he was encountering the hike of essential commodities and reduction of wages, the number of family members has slowly increased. He felt further depression, as the second child was a girl because of the status given to a girl by the male dominated society. He began to share the pains and changes are taking place in the Industry with the family members. Wife of Venkata Subbaiah, despite bad health and unable to give breast-feeding to her second child decided to go for agricultural labour to help her husband. Venkata Subbaiah who was seriously influenced and dominated by false prestige and pseudo mentality felt it would be a shame on his part to allow his wife to work as agricultural labour. However, the financial condition of the family compelled V. Subbaiah to allow his wife to do agricultural labor work. He was able to come out of the traditional practice. He realized that he himself alone can't maintain the family. Having understood the realities in right perspective, he allowed himself to break the chains of traditions, customs and old practices. He realized the dignity of labor for the first time. Against the tradition and customs of the community, he sent his wife to earn Rs.25/- from agriculture work. Eventhough both of them were earning, it was not sufficient to feed the entire family. They could not give sufficient food to the children. Adilakshmi, wife of Subbaiah, used to forgo dinner to feed her children and hid the same from the knowledge of her husband, which eventually led to serious illness. Only then Subbaiah came to know the cause for her illness and felt very sad about it. Their eldest son Srirama Murthy though younger in age, could notice that his mother is not joining them for dinner. Later on he decided not to attend the school (Elementary) due to economic conditions of the family. Children used to force their mother to eat with them during lunch and dinner times. As mother she thought her portion of food might satisfy her children hunger and they can eat well. Thus she used to control her hunger, behaving as if she does not have any sorrows and pains.

While the family was undergoing severe poverty and struggle for survival, another child was born. The new born child, Srinivasulu, fell sick soon, add more pain and burden. With the passage of agricultural season, there was no work for the wife, depleting their earnings further. Serious illness of the third child left the couple with untold pains. Meanwhile, there is increasing conversion of fertile paddy lands to fish and prawn ponds in the village, probably as a response to changes brought in by globalization and economical reforms. All these developments made them to realize that two important rural sectors, handloom Industry and agriculture, are badly affected by Globalization.

Venkata Subbaiah finally decided to change the style of work according to times, having understood all the changes in the Handloom Industry. He shared everything with his wife before a final decision was taken. They decided to migrate to Chirala, a place known for production of export Handloom varieties and cloth that is largely used by middle class people. He tried to convince the family by informing them that there is hope to get better and good employment and wages for that work. He informed them that they can earn and eat whatever is sufficient for the family. Adilaksmi as a committed and obedient wife gave her consent for the proposal. It was a merry time for the entire family and he celebrated the occasion with joy. He shifted to Chirala in 2000 and took a house on rent at Srinivasa Nagar. With his expertise, he established a loom that can manufacture a variety which cannot be

made even on a power loom. He knew that traditional varieties bring in less wages and loss of employment. The competition between powerlooms and Handlooms also allowed him to produce a variety of cloth by adding extra weft to weave better designs. He thought that he alone in the world had that knowledge, technology and expertise. But by then upgradation of technology was introduced by the power loom service center and as a result 22 items reserved for handlooms are also being produced on power looms.

This change in the government policy, he understood, was solely due to the strict conditions imposed on Indian Government by World Trade Organization and World Bank. In pursuance of the changes catering to the imperialist Globalization, Government of India appointed Satyam Committee. He also knew the reasons why the committee was opposed by the Rastra Chenetha Karmika Samakya (RCKS). Not only he believed that the Economic Reforms and Globalization is responsible for loss of occupation and employment in his beloved profession, but was also convinced that the government is making rules in order to the close Handlooms industry so that it would double the profits of the power loom owners and the investors. He realized that the rules and amendments brought about by the Government is only to help the powerloom owners. Thus the powerloom owners and government colluded with each other to serve their selfish interests. In a way he thought that the Government is pro-capitalist and anti-poor. Though 22 Handloom reserved items are manufactured by powerlooms violating the Act of Parliament, government did not take any action against the power loom owners and save the Handloom Industry. He further learnt that the negligence and failure of the government in controlling the powerlooms is the sole reason for his poverty, hunger, illness among the family members and sufferings in the community of Handloom Weavers.

The deteriorating family situation, economic conditions and poverty forced him to employ his eldest son in a hardware shop as a daily labour - whose age is not more than 12 years by then. He used to go to the shop at 9 a.m. and return by 9.30 p.m. to earn just Rs.400/- p.m. The income of the child was invested in small chits with a view to clear amounts borrowed earlier. On the other hand, debts of the family increased along with hardships. This family paid Rs.200/- for house rent, electricity Rs.150/-, Rs. 50/- to clear master weavers advances - all together Rs.400/- is paid out of a total income of Rs.1,500/-. Remaining balance of Rs.1,100/- is not sufficient for five members of the family to maintain themselves. His family has been facing poverty, hunger and prolonged illness due to lack of protein food experiencing serious health problems.