

Women Workers in Handloom Industry
in Periyar District

BY

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Introduction

INTRODUCTION

All over the developing world it is being said that women should have a greater share in economic activity. The economic status of women plays a key role in determining her social status as well as her psychological relationship with others (Vivek Dandekar, 1985).

According to Marx, work is a self creating act whereby man humanises and comes to terms with nature. Anna Grek Leijon (1976) says that work is the foundation of the continued existence and development of any society. It is also fundamentally important to the individual members of society because it enables them to provide for their material needs; it enables them to participate in development of society; it involves them in a community where they can arrive at joint decisions aimed at the improvement of their circumstances and in favourable conditions. It is a source of vocational pride and self-respect. Any reform in the context of working life must aim towards ensuring that everyone must be entitled to work according to his or her ability; everyone must be entitled to work that is meaningful; everyone must be entitled to personal respect and to respect for his or her work; everyone must be entitled to life and security of work; everyone must be entitled to combine active parenthood with gainful employment. In short, work must form part of a social

continuum in which the fruits of labour are used to build a society characterised by a sense of community and human dignity.

Jawaharlal Nehru asserts that "freedom depends on economic conditions even more than political and if the woman is not economically free and self earning she will have to depend on her husband or someone else and dependents are never free". The National Commission on Labour also categorically stipulates that right of women to employment is in no way subordinate or secondary to that of men.

Basu (1979) points out that inspite of vast promises of equality in all spheres, our women still remain in the clouds of backwardness. They are a less privileged strata of the society for various reasons - disproportionate distribution among women and men in literacy rates ; education enrolment and training for employment; disparity in access to health and medical care between men and women particularly among the poorer sections and the lack of women's involvement in the general economic and political activities. Though women have played a considerable role in economic development and have formed an organic component of work force since time immemorial, their labour remains largely non-remunerative, unorganised and invisible. They work for as many hours as men do if not more. Yet their labour

is counted as 'shadow work' giving them neither the due credit nor equal pay for the work done, points out Sonarikar (1984).

It is true that women's status in economic activity and their status as workers will rise only if economic and social development takes place at a rapid rate, Lygman Hag (1984). Yet their access to employment in the existing socio-economic milieu has been steadily declining. The labour force participation rate reveals the position regarding the availability of jobs for women in the economy. This work participation rate of women had been falling steadily over a long period from about 34 percent in 1911 to about 14 percent in 1981. The C.S.O. (1983) also has made a note of this tendency and says that this decline in the share of women in labour force has been much more rapid than the decline in their share in population and that it had occurred in spite of the fact that female literacy has increased more rapidly than male literacy. Sonarikar (1984) estimates the number of women in organised sector's employment to be only 7.5 million out of the total female population. She has also estimated that nearly as many as 79 percent of the total women are unemployed. It simply means that job opportunities for women are scarce and hard to come.

Besides, women are largely employed in primary sector, 81.59 percent according to the 1981 census. Within the primary sector 46 percent of the working women are agricultural labour, a category where wages are very low, working hours long and job security and regularity not guaranteed. Again 33 percent women are working in agriculture where work all round the year is not available. Another 21 percent of women workers are engaged in house hold and other industries like weaving, fishing, cane work etc. where they are not probably paid in cash. Hence, it is necessary to review the position of women workers in the occupations where they are employed, so as to strengthen their position vis-a-vis men workers and ensure their work participation on equal terms and conditions as those of men.

Weavers are the most exploited group in handloom industry scattered as they are in all parts of the country primarily in villages. They are far away from all advancement, technical research. They do not have the necessary feed back of the market conditions. They do not possess high skills required for the production of value added items. They are unable to orientate their production to the ever changing tastes and preferences of the consumers.

They are underemployed and low paid. Many weavers are dissatisfied with low levels of earnings in handloom industry.

In handloom industry one finds a heavy concentration of women workers. Radha Devi (1984) states that handloom weaving is an important productive activity for women. This tendency is in conformity with what Gupta and Gupta (1987) found in their study on 'Role of Women in Economic Development'. They note that women in backward villages had more contribution in economic activities than others living in prosperous and affluent villages.

Hitherto, studies on handloom industry (Arputhrraj, 1980), (Venugopal Reddy and Shoban Baby 1985) have concentrated on the economics on handloom industry, the marketing and other infrastructural problems faced by handloom weavers, co-operative societies and so on. They have not specifically focussed on the working conditions of the weavers as such nor have they used sex as a category for presenting the condition of workers (Venugopal Reddy and Shoban Baby 1985). But their study is more in the nature of understanding the causes of decline of the industry and the factors that had led to the migration of the weavers to other places in search of alternative jobs.

Studies on the status of women workers in other areas/ industries had been reported (Banerjee, 1986). But one has

yet to come across such studies of women workers in Tamil Nadu. Hence the current study seeks to fill up the knowledge gap arising from the absence of information on women workers. The sample for the study numbering 150 workers is drawn from the Periyar District which in Tamil Nadu is a famous centre of handloom production particularly of items like bedsheets, towels, dhoties and dusters where the skill involved of the workers is rather low. Handloom industry of Periyar District in a sense is representative of the bulk of the handloom sector where a large number of weavers do not possess high skills required for the production of value added items but at the same time are thrownout of jobs in the absence of adequate demand for their product (Misra 1985). The position of women workers in such a setup is even more precarious than that of men weavers.

Hence the investigator decided to study the specific issue of women workers in relation to the handloom industry in Periyar District with the specific objectives of:

1. finding out the male female differentials in work participation rate;
2. finding the composition of the female labour force interms of age and nature of occupations;

3. assessing the relative contribution of women workers to their household income;
4. assessing the impact of the various economic, social and demographic factors on female labour force participation and earnings;
5. evaluating the impact of the nature of job contact on women employment and earnings;
6. finding out the extent of control women workers have over their family purse; and
7. finding out their attitudes towards certain women's issues.

It is expected that the study will contribute towards the understanding of the forces at work in determining female employments in the handloom sector and expose the extent of marginalisation suffered by women workers as a group and the policies that might be necessary to make women's work more productive and fruitful.

Review of Literature

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The literature relating to the current study on Women Workers in Handloom Industry is presented and reviewed under the following headings.

- A. Importance of Women's Development
- B. Women in Employment
- C. Women in Handloom Industry
- D. Related Studies

A. IMPORTANCE OF WOMEN'S DEVELOPMENT:

Through the centuries women have been fighting an unequal battle for the status of equality alongside men (Suslia Rohatgi 1982). The declaration of year 1975 as the International Women's Year and the decade 1976-85 as a Decade for Women gave an official and global recognition to the need for women's emancipation at all levels of policy making, administration and implementation. All over the world it is recognised that women should have a greater share in economic activity. Crash programmes have been drawn up to deal with the problem of raising women's labour force participation rates.

In India, the Sixth Five Year Plan committed itself to providing women access to education, employment and

health. It acknowledges that for sometime in future, women will continue to be one of the most vulnerable members of the family. Hence, economic emancipation of the family with specific attention to women became one of the major operational aspects of the family centred poverty alleviation strategy in the Sixth Plan. It promised them larger employment in the public distribution system, rural godowns, operation flood II diary development, social forestry and in armed forces. It also promised that only selective modernisation would be undertaken in traditional occupations like spinning and weaving, match making, coir, cashw, rural marketing, agriculture, animal husbandry and that modernization programmes, if implemented, would include simultaneous development of skills for alternative employment for them. The plan document also mentioned the need for identifying those areas where womens employment is either low or on the decline to initiate corrective measures.

The Seventh Five Year Plan aims at raising the economic and social status of women through their integrated development in order to bring them into the main stream of national development. Its basic approach is to inculcate confidence among women and bring about an awareness of

their own potential for development as also of their access to education, health and other beneficiary programmes, it seeks to expand the facilities for income generating activities and to enable them to participate actively in socio-economic development.

The anxiety of the planners regarding women's development had been articulated in the approach to the Sixth and Seventh Five Year Plans. However, it had not been fully reflected operationally as the Plans finally emerged. Krishnaswamy and Shashi Rajagopal (1985) observe that at both Central and State levels, schemes and programmes for women continue to be in the nature of marginal additions to a basic plan rather than an integral part of the planning process. The immensely relevant task of providing specially for utilisation of the productive capabilities of women through appropriate job-categorisation, choice of technology and organisational patterns has remained largely undone. A similar view had been expressed by Devaki Jain (1981) who says that women's development is much more than a chapter on women in the plan and an expanded budget on women's welfare.

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Integrating the women into the warp and weft of the development process is of course, a difficult and complex process. At least a beginning has been made in this direction from the Sixth Five Year Plan onwards.

B. Women in Employment:

Basu (1979) observes that in spite of vast promises of equality in all spheres our women still remain in the clouds of backwardness. They are a less privileged strata of the society for various reasons - disproportionate distribution among men and women in literacy rate, education enrolment and training for employment; disparity in access to health and medical care between men and women particularly among the poorer section and the lack of women's involvement in the general economic and political activities.

According to Gupta and Gupta (1987) women play a considerably equal role in economic development. Since time immemorial they have formed an organic component of the work force. They along with other members of the household are engaged in sowing, transplanting, weeding and watering plants and also helping in family enterprises

such as bidi making, rope making, weaving etc. They do all these, in addition, to their domestic chores as a housewife. The contribution of women to economic activities in backward village is, in fact, more than the contribution of women in prosperous and affluent villages.

Dhamija (1976) opines that in most parts of the developing world and especially in rural areas, women's time is so fully occupied that they are barely able to cope with their existing duties and responsibilities.

The labour force participation rate of women reveal the position regarding the availability of jobs for women. As per the 1971 census 13.18 percent of the female population was working. The position has not changed materially during the last decade and as per the 1981 census the percentage of working women has increased slightly to 14.5 percent. Table I gives details regarding the comparative differences in male female participation rate as given by the 1981 Census.

TABLE I.
PERCENTAGE OF MALE AND FEMALE POPULATION ACCORDING
TO WORK STATUS ALL INDIA 1981

S.No.	Category	Percentage of total population			percentage of female population	percentage of male population
		Female	Male	Total		
1	Working	20.9	79.1	100	14.5	51.23
2	Marginally Working	75.27	24.73	100	6.4	1.97
3	Non-working	61.3	38.7	100	79.1	46.8
		48.36	51.54	100	100	100

To the 14.5 percent working women, if we add the 6.4 percent marginally working women, working part time seasonally or on job basis on very low wages, yet we get nearly 80 percent of the women as totally unemployed. It may be true that all women are not willing or available for work as the men are and as such some difference in their participation rate is understandable. Sonarikar (1984) says that it is hard to believe that as many as 79.1 percent of the total women are voluntarily unemployed. It simply lays bare the truth that job opportunities for women are scarce and hard to come by. This view is also supported by Basu (1979) who says that though a majority of women may not actively seek employment, they will be available for work if proper mobilisation of female labour can be organised.

The employment status of the working women can be assessed to some extent from their occupational distribution, Table II describes the occupational distribution of female and male workers as per 1981 Census.

TABLE II

OCCUPATIONAL DISTRIBUTION OF FEMALE AND MALE WORKERS ALL INDIA 1981

S.No.	Occupation	Number of		Percentage of Working	
		Females	Males	Females	Males
1	Agriculture	15.2	76.2	33	43.18
2	Agricultural labour	20.9	34.4	46	19.18
3	Household industry	2.4	6.4	5	3.7
4	Others	7.5	57.1	16	32.7
	Total	46.0	174.1	100	100

It is evident from the table that 46 percent of the working women are agricultural labourers, a category where wages are very low, working hours are long and job security and regularity are not guaranteed. Again 33 percent women are working in agriculture which is a seasonal occupation and where work all round the year is not available. Most of these women are working on their own farms without any remuneration. The women workers who work in household and other industries number 5 percent of the total working women. Here again employment is erratic, wages are very low and the workers have the least amount of job security. Thus except for 16 percent (7.5 millions of working women out of 46 millions) 84 percent of the rest work in the highly unorganised sector. The labour market has always discriminated more against these women than those engaged in the organised sector.

Worse still women have lost traditional occupations as a result of changes which have transferred production activities from homes and villages to factories and machines. New technology introduced in agriculture and allied activities have ousted unskilled female workers from their traditional jobs. Women have thus been isolated from gainful occupations. Infact, the decline in women's labour force participation rate is more than proportionate to the decline

of their share in population between 1901 and 1971, according to a study conducted by the Central Statistical Organisation (1983). Further women are becoming less important than men in enterprises of all kinds catering to material production. It is very strange that such phenomenon has occurred at a time when the female literacy has increased more rapidly than male literacy. Banerjee (1985) considers this decline in women's employment as a part of the general process of loss of industrial employment that affected the entire population.

C. Women in Handloom Industry:

The handloom industry is the most important traditional rural and semi-urban industry in the country. It is spread over in many parts of the country. The industry has taken a commercial shape in the States of Tamil Nadu, Andhrapradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Kerala, West Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. It plays a pivotal role in solving the unemployment problem. It gives employment to 10 million people which is ten times the number employed in the mill sector. This age old artistic and skillful industry is contributing to the extent of 30 percent of the total textile production of the country (Venugopal Reddy and Shoban Babu^u 1985). Though it was envisaged that handloom sector would disappear from the textile map of India in a period of 20 years from 1954, nothing of that sort had happened. In fact it had

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grown from about 25 lakhs looms in 1942 to 40 lakh looms currently.

Considering the vast employment potential of the industry and on grounds of social justice, the State had always accorded a preferential treatment to the handloom sector, through a policy of reservation, progressive co-operativisation, creating infrastructure for marketing, and popularising handloom fabrics, arranging for the supply of yarn at reasonable prices and on a regular basis and arranging credits through the nationalised banks at differential rate of interest (Mahawal 1980, Misra 1985, Kurshid Alam Khan 1986, Machant 1985). For purposes of stabilising the demand in the handloom sector, the new textile policy had announced the transfer of the entire production of controlled cloth to the handloom sector by the end of the Seventh Plan. This shift is expected to provide continuous employment to a large number of weavers who do not possess high skills required for the production of value added items but at the same time are thrown out of job in the absence of adequate demand to their product.

Weavers are the workers ultimately responsible for the turnout of the products. They are broadly classified into three categories viz the weaver who is a member of a co-

operative society and independent weaver who is working on his own account (Yogaiah 1979). The condition of weavers who are working for co-operatives is relatively better than other workers. However, the position of weavers who are working for other agencies and on their own account is totally controlled by the master weavers. The master weavers supply the yarn and other inputs with their specifications and take back the final output. The weaver's earning capacity depends on his efficiency, price levels of inputs and output and profits.

$$W = f (E, P, R)$$

Where W stands for the wage rate

E - Efficiency

P - Price level of inputs and outputs

R - Profits

Profit: determines the wage rate. Under co-operative conditions the wage rate is equal to the value of the marginal physical product of the weaver. Otherwise his wages are less than the value of the marginal physical product.

$$(P \times MPL) - W = R$$

Where value of R is significantly different from zero for

workers working for agencies other than co-operatives working on their own account. Thus weavers of the second and third category are the most exploited groups in the handloom industry. They are under employed and low paid. They are migrating into the cities in search of employment abandoning their age old traditional work. At its State level Conference, the Madras Chingleput Handloom Cloth Producers Association had urged the Government to provide Rs.1000 each as interim relief for weavers in the drought affected areas (The Hindu 1988).

Women are an important component of the work force in the handloom sector. In the north eastern region of the country where weaving is practised as a domestic craft, women form a large proportion of handloom weavers (Batra 1977). In other areas also women do a number of activities in the handloom sector from weaving upto dyeing. In most of the cases weaving itself is a family activity with a role for each one of the members in the family.

Asok Mitra et al (1980) in their study on the 'Status of Women - shifts in Occupational Participation 1961-71, had found that some spinners, weavers, knitters, dyers and related workers group absorbed more than 10 percent of the total

women workers in 1971. In Tamil Nadu the percentage was 18.1 percent in 1971 as against 19.5 percent in 1961. The participation sex ratio of this group had declined to 31.6 percent in 1971 as against 68.7 percent in 1961.

In view of the unorganised nature of the handloom sector and in view of the special disabilities with which women suffer from in the labour market, it becomes imperative to study the position of women workers in the handloom industry, which constitutes a leading example of the unorganised or informal sector. Banerjee (1985) says that though the concept of unorganised sector cannot be defined precisely yet the division between the formal and informal sector in any country is marked by a distinct change in the wages and working conditions of the two sectors. Workers in the organised sector can bargain effectively with their employers, the bargaining strength of the workers being derived largely from the political militancy of their trade unions. Other workers are not capable of building up such bargaining strength and therefore continue to work under deplorable working conditions, and live at the margin of survival. The work experiences of women differ from men even within the informal sector. Hence it is necessary to probe into the factors conditioning the participation rates of women with a view to suggesting suitable policy measures to enhance their economic position as also their bargaining strength.

5. Related Studies:

1. Luqmanul Hag (1984) had studied the factors that had caused a decline in women's employment in the organised industrial sector. This study had outlined the factors that tend to restrict women's employment as follows:

1. Introduction of modern and automatic machinery in jute, silk and cotton textile industries, that has reduced the strength of female workers. For example in the textile industry in Bombay where there are only 7500 women workers now as against 25000 workers ^wtoo decades ago.

2. The notion about the sexual division of labour often controls the distribution of women workers within the economy and restricts opportunities for their employment within the industry.

3. The employment of women has been adversely affected because of extra social changes such as payment of maternity benefit, maintenance of creches, etc, which make the cost of employing women workers higher.

4. The application of the principle of equal pay for equal work for men and women workers has made the employment of men workers more economical and women workers therefore are being replaced by male workers.

5. The restricted mobility of women workers has gone against their interest.

Hag's study clearly shows that the struggle for equality between men and women must form part of the struggle for social and economic equality as a whole.

2. Rabindra Kumar Choudry (1987) had investigated the supply of work effort by women in India and also examined the degree to which women had shared in the benefit of economic progress. His study comprises the period of one decade between 1973 and 1983, covering the 27th, 32nd and 38th rounds of the National sample survey. To capture the supply of work effort by women, he had used the figures of malefemale unemployment ratio since the willingness to work of any category ^{of} male or female shows itself in its unemployment statistics. His study had shown that the unemployed female rural labour force had increased at an annual average rate of 12.3 percent; the unemployed male rural labour force by 6.2 percent, unemployed female urban labour force by 3.2 percent and unemployed male urban force by 3.5 percent, over the period 1973 to 1983. Obviously, the supply of women labour in the rural areas had been increasing at twice as high a ratio as that of the male workers in rural areas.

The author, therefore, concludes that the rural economy had failed in absorbing the excess supply of women labour and attributes this to the technological displacement of women labour in the rural areas.

3. Gupta and Gupta (1987) made an attempt to study the 'Role of Women in Economic Development'. The objective of the study was to assess the socio-economic conditions of women in rural areas where about 75 percent women are still living and to ascertain the contribution of rural woman to economic development through their participation directly or indirectly in income generating jobs in two different settings. The study was based on micro level analysis and two villages, one from Kanpur Dehat and the other from Kanpur city were selected. For analysing the data, Gini's concentration co-efficient had been used to quantify the difference among the various castes, land, assets and earnings of households. In Maikanpur the Gini's concentration co-efficient for land assets and earnings were computed as 0.44, 0.42 and 0.15 respectively, for Varsatpur Village it was 0.49, 0.68 and 0.38 respectively. In household activities in general woman contributed 73 percent while men contributed only 27 percent in Maikanpur and in Varsatpur. Men's contribution was 30 percent and women's contribution accounted to 70 percent in agricultural sector. The major contribution of women was

about 65 percent and 59 percent in both the villages respectively. When all the activities were taken together and calculated, men's contribution was more by about five percent in Varsatpur which was influenced by the modern techniques, while in Makanpur which was socio-economically poor, less prosperous and backward, women's contribution was found to be more by about 52 percent. It showed that women in the prosperous village had more leisure time.

The study revealed that the women's contribution was generally found more in two fields-household activities and in agricultural labour.

4. Jagdish Prasad (1987) had analysed the regional variations in the work participation of women in the state of Bihar, based on the 1981 census data. He recognises the limitation involved in the use of female labour force participation rates *per se* in evaluating the women's role in economic development. Yet it can provide some indicative results. The specific hypothesis tested in his study is that the expansion of female labour force participation is directly related with social and economic progress of the country. He uses the concept of participation sex ratio ($1000 \times \frac{\text{female workers}}{\text{Male Workers}}$) to study the differentials in employment in different industrial categories.

The study showed that the participation sex ratio was very poor, 187 for rural Bihar and 79 for urban Bihar. It also showed that females were in employment, in low earning occupations demanding strenuous, drudge work in low skill and low technology sectors of low productivity. The study in conclusion suggested that all efforts should be made to stabilise the present proportions of employment and create further new employment opportunities for women.

5. Chakarbarti and Chakrabarti (1987) had conducted a study on male and female participation in economic activities in the Burdwan and Bankura Districts of West Bengal. Their hypothesis is that in spite of considerable economic growth, the male-female participation rates had not changed significantly basically because the rate of population growth had more or less neutralised the rate of overall economic growth in these areas.

Their study uses the secondary data available from the Census Reports from 1961-81, Economic Review of the Government of West Bengal, Statistical Abstract of the Government of West Bengal, Tea Statistics, Tea India, and the Report of the Chief Inspector of Factories of West Bengal. The authors have found that the participation rate in these regions have been consistently lower than those in India. Further participation rates both male and female for West Bengal have been lower than these for India in the period 1911 to 1981. The authors have also found that economic

growth has failed to keep pace with high rate of population growth, there by explaining the low female participation rate in the region.

6. Swaminathan (1986) studied the relationship between agricultural development and demographic behaviour of rural women in Periyar District. The study used both secondary and primary data. The secondary data available from district level officers and published sources were used to measure the level of agricultural development in the area. The primary data pertaining to the demographic behaviour of rural households was collected through structured questionnaire. Out of 16 districts in Tamil Nadu, Periyar District was selected since it included both intensively irrigated blocks and dry blocks. The prime focus of this study was to identify the important factors that influence the fertility behaviour of the rural women. These factors were grouped under three heads: socio-economic factors, economic factors and demographic factors. The study used a simultaneous equation model for estimating the relationship between the factors mentioned above and the fertility behaviour. The conclusions of the study were:

- (1) Agricultural development increased the farm income.
- (2) Women with higher level of education and higher income did not take part in rural labour force.
- (3) Presence of young children prevented the women from taking part in the rural labour force.
- (4) Women with higher income and education married at a late age.
- (5) Scheduled Caste women married earlier than the Backward Caste women.
- (6) Higher asset value, higher age at marriage and higher level of education of the husband reduced the fertility in both the blocks.
- (7) The strong positive association between infant mortality and fertility showed that fertility could be reduced by reducing the infant mortality.
- (8) Mothers in developed blocks were found sensitive to the increasing expenditure on the maintenance of their children and this reduced the fertility level.
- (9) The lower fertility in the developed blocks showed that agricultural development reduced the fertility.

7. Ramachandra Sastri and Sivaprakasam (1987) in a study on female work status and fertility investigated the inter-relationship between these two areas of behaviour. The specific objectives of their study were (1) to find out whether or not the employment of women outside the home has any bearing on fertility and contraception, and (2) to identify the mechanisms by which the relationship between the variables is produced. They argue that as against *data and secondary data, the use of case study approach which they* the use of cross sectional_^ had adopted, was superior on the ground that it gave a total picture of the family dynamics and helped in delineating the causal direction, with more confidence. Their study covered working women in all settings, urban working women in metropolitan cities and rural women working as agricultural labourers_^ and plantation workers, who were selected using the quota sampling procedure.

It was generally assumed that working women had lower fertility than the non-working women. Further the depressing effect of work on fertility is supposed to be higher in urban setting because it was assumed that the role incompatibility in the urban area was higher than in a rural area. The study reveals that in middle and high income groups the working and non-working women were almost similar with respect to the mean number of pregnancies that they have had. However,

considerable variation occurred in the low income group over the reproductive span. On the whole it was the low income group in which the working women have higher fertility than middle and upper income groups. The study shows that female work outside home on paid wages does not in anyway influence fertility and contraception, when all other relevant variables in this relationship are controlled. Further, the relationship between female work and fertility seems to vary by the social class position of the families. The study has further shown that female education is relatively more important than employment in determining the fertility and contraceptive behaviour.

8. Nirmala Banerjee (1985) had conducted a study on women workers in the unorganised sector in Calcutta. The study was based on the sample of 400 workers belonging to the category of cooks, maid servants, house keepers some of whom were also engaged in the preparation of paper bags, plastic things, embroidery, vegetable selling, school attendants, toy makers, papad makers, among others. The reference period of the study was 1977. She found that the extreme poverty of the people in the group compelled them to send out on an average 2.4 earners per family. The mean hourly wage rates in nearly all the occupations clustered around 35 to 40 paise. The differences in wage

rates between workers in the same occupation could not be explained in terms of differences of age, experience or qualification of workers. Self-employment was not very common among these women except in the case of traditional occupations such as laundring or in others like paper making, cowdung, cakes, or paper bags which needed little capital. The work discipline was enforced either through rejecting piece work or through fines for inferior quality work. The study also revealed that even when women earn 50 percent or more of the family income, atleast one-third were not allowed to manage the family funds. Even after five years of working, 40 percent of these women knew little about trade union movement. They were largely unaware of job opportunities, or wages prevailing elsewhere. In short, here study underlined the need for in depth investigations into the working of the labour market as it relates to women.

9. Yogaiyah (1979) had conducted a macro level study in the handloom industry in India with the specific objective of comparing the economic status of the different groups of Weaver workers in the industry. For the purpose of his study, he had classified the weavers into three categories namely:

1. The weaver who is a member of a co-operative society and works for it;
2. Out worker, who works for agencies other than co-operative society, and
3. Independent worker, who is working on his own account.

His study revealed that 29 percent of weavers were working for co-operative societies; 26.6 percent came in the category of master weavers and business master weavers. Weavers on own account numbered 32.1 percent. In other words, about one third of the worker weavers were independent workers, more vulnerable than the other two groups. It is have a very crucial role in the eindustry, in spite of the co-operativisation efforts.

The author cautions that the workers under business master weavers and those working on own account run the risk of being paid less than they should be. He hypothesises that the wage rate of weaver or his earning capacity depends on his efficiency, the price level of inputs and outputs and profits i.e.,

$$W = f (E P R)$$

Where E = efficiency

P = Price level of inputs and outputs

R = Profits

W = Wage rate.

Given E and P, Profit determines the wage rate. Under co-operative conditions, wage tends to be equal to the value of the marginal physical product of weaver ie.

$$W = (P \times MP_L)$$

Where MP_L is marginal physical product of labour. In other situations, wages are less than the value of the marginal physical product.

$$(P \times MPL) - W = R,$$

where R is the difference between the value of the marginal physical product of weavers and wage cost to the employer or master weaver. According to the author, the main reason for the high value of R is that most of the weavers own no property and lack bargaining power. His suggestion for reducing the value of R lies in improving the financial position of the weaver worker and providing the marketing infra structure so that he can operate independently, buying yarn and selling his output. This alone will help in retaining the workers in the handloom sector and arresting their migration into the cities.

10. Arputharaj (1980) had undertaken a study on handloom weavers in Tamil Nadu. His study is based on secondary data drawn from 1971 census of Tamil Nadu, and the half yearly Economic Review of the Handloom Industry in Selected Focal Centres in Tamil Nadu brought out by the Director of Statistics, Government of Tamil Nadu (September 1979).

He had studied the different aspects of economics of handloom industry in Tamil Nadu, namely, trends in production, price and profits, raw materials position, status of workers and problems faced by them.

He says that handloom weavers do not constitute a homogeneous group. They can be classified according to (a) their economic status i.e., independent weavers, those working under master weavers etc; and (b) the type and variety of cloth they manufacture i.e., cotton, silk, art silk etc. The nature and duration of employment as well as the earning capacity varied between these sub groups. His study showed that the average monthly earnings of the independent weavers in some centres viz., Arni, Karur, and Chinnalapatti had shown a declining tendency whereas the average monthly earnings of weavers working under master weavers under co operative societies had shown a decline at least in one centre, Chinnalapatti. The author found that the difference in the earnings of different categories was not statistically significant. Neither was the difference in the earnings of the same category of weavers over the years significant.

An examination of the earnings of the weavers according to the variety woven showed that the weavers producing silk varieties earned more than those producing cotton, art silk or mixed fabrics. A silk saree weaver in Kanchipuram got

about Rs.375 per month whereas a cotton lungi weaver of the same centre got only Rs.275. The earnings of cotton fabric weavers in other centres were much lower ranging from Rs.140 to Rs.250/- month.

The author had analysed, among other aspects, the problems faced by the handloom weavers. The main problems faced by them were problem of accommodation; lack of organisation; lack of finance; erratic availability of raw materials; low wages, unemployment, low productivity and high indebtedness. The Government had gone into these issues and taken legislative measures to protect the interests of handloom workers.

Though the author had acknowledged the existence of a large number of women workers in the various jobs of winding, warping, sizing and beaming as assistants, their size or status had not been separately studied by him.

11. A study was conducted by Venugopal Reddy and Shobhan Babu (1985) to analyse the problems of silk handloom weavers of Rayadurg in Andhra Pradesh. In Rayadurg the industry was found to be dominated by the master weaver (a master weaver is one who owns more than five looms) Nearly 70 percent of the looms were being owned and managed by master-weavers and another 10-15 percent of the existing

looms were under the management of a particular system known as 'Munguda system'. The remaining looms were owned by independent weavers. The problems of the master weavers related to the procurement of inputs, mobilisation of labour and marketing of final products. The master-weavers expenditure for buying inputs. The weaver-worker in silk handloom industry is the person who works for the end product. The silk handloom weaver-workers community as a whole is facing many problems such as housing, illiteracy, bad habits, inherited indebtedness and exploitation by the local master weavers. About 65-70 percent of the weaver-workers did not have good accommodation. They were constrained to take advances from the master weavers because of which they were exploited by them. The weaver workers were compelled to sell their produce to the master weavers though the price paid by them was less than the existing market price per saree by Rs.30 to Rs.40. The independent weavers who owned less than five looms faced a number of impediments in meeting their working capital requirement. Owing to their inability to fulfil the security conditions of the banks, nearly 50 percent of the present weavers were approaching private sources and were paying exorbitant rates.

A number of recommendations follow from their analysis. More than 70 percent of weaver-workers, aspired to become independent weavers. The Government could help them by providing a house with the facility atleast to establish one or two looms inside. They could also be provided with bank loans at a nominal rate of interest without asking for any security. A separate evening school could be started exclusively for weavers children so that they can help their parents. Nearly 15 percent of the total weaver workers were suffering from ill health and a few with diseases like tuberculosis. The employers must bear atleast a part of the medical bill. The weavers and their families may be prevented from indulging in playing cards and matka by enforcing law and order effectively as most of their earnings are misspent on such evil acts. Lastly Government could refresh these skilfull weavers with latest weaving techniques by way of organising an annual exhibition of handloom products.

12. Anjan Kumar Datta and Hein Streefkerf (1985) conducted a study on 'Weavers, Traders and the State, Handloom weaving in Bangladesh' based on the Handloom Census. The main purpose of their study was to provide detailed information on handloom weavers in Bangladesh and to focus on their role in the historical and present day context to be able to conclude

whether or not the industry can be fostered as an alternative source of rural employment and income.

In 1978 the handloom industry provided employment for almost 8,48,000 people in Bangladesh of which 58 percent were family members. The remaining 42 percent was employed as wage earners. These workers are spread over 1,98,000 units. According to the Handloom census only a small part of these units are handloom factories, the great majority of them were independent weavers. Though the handloom sector was next to agriculture in terms of employment it was in a deplorable state. There was a decline in the number of looms under operation.

Even with the worsening condition, the weavers stuck to their craft because for generations they had been weavers by 'caste'. They had no other skills and no other resources.

Methodology

III. METHODOLOGY

The methodology adopted for the study Women Workers in Handloom industry is presented under the following headings:

- A. Selection of the Sample.
- B. Method of Data Collection.
- C. Tools of Analysis
- D. Definition of Terms and Concepts.
- E. Limitations of the Study.

A. Selection of the Sample:

The Erode Town in Periyar District of Tamil Nadu was chosen as the area of study. The handloom industry in Erode has a long history and the area is noted for its production of bedsheets, towels, pillow covers, grey cloth, and dusting cloth. Handloom weaving is a traditional household industry giving employment to a large number of families in that area. Women alongside men are employed in the various activities in the handloom sector. They participate in spinning, weaving, dyeing, and processing. In order to obtain the list of workers which can be used as the sampling frame, the investigator approached the foremost handloom co-operative societies of Erode namely, Anna Weavers Co-operative Society, Dravida Weavers Co-operative Society and Veerapan Chatram Weavers Society. From the list of 500

workers provided by these societies, the investigator selected a random sample of 150 workers, using the random number table, constituting 30 percent of the sampling frame.

The reference period of the study was February 1988. The data collection was done by the investigator in the month of March.

B. Method of Data Collection:

The study was concerned with the labour force participation of women workers in handloom industry. It called for details regarding their family background, type of employment, number of days they are employed per month, the wages they received, the extent of their control over family purse, their attitudes towards women's work, and other issues. Since they were, by and large, illiterate, the investigator had to use the personal interview method for data collection. The schedule that was used for collecting the data was earlier pretested on a group of 20 workers. Based on the experience of pre-testing, the questions were revised in the final schedule (vide Appendix I).

C. Tools and Analysis:

The study used ratio and average analysis for drawing general inferences and the statistical tools of simple regression and the student's 't' test to evaluate the specific hypotheses.

1. Simple linear regression analysis:

To test the hypothesis that womens earnings made a significant contribution to household income, simple linear regression analysis was used. The equation specified was of the form.

$$Y = b_0 + b_1 X + U$$

where

Y - the household income per month measured in rupees.

X - female earnings per month measured in rupees

b_0 - the constant ^{er} term

b_1 - the parameter estimate

U - the error term with zero mean and constant variance.

This equation was estimated using the O.L.S. method. The co-efficient of determination r^2 , the F statistic and the sign and level of significance of the regression co-efficients were considered to evaluate the goodness of fit of the estimated equation.

The elasticity of household income with respect to female earnings was also calculated using the co-efficient b_1 of female earnings (Koutsoyiannis, 1977) The estimation of the equation is shown in Appendix II.

2. Student 't' test:

The student 't' test was used to test the significance of difference between the wages of workers under paid employment and workers operating in the putout system.

The analysis consisted of following steps:

$$\text{S.E. } (\bar{X}_1 - \bar{X}_2) = \sqrt{\frac{\sigma_1^2}{n_1} + \frac{\sigma_2^2}{n_2}}$$

$$t = \frac{\bar{X}_1 - \bar{X}_2}{\text{SE}}$$

where

\bar{X}_1 and \bar{X}_2 are the means of the respective series.

σ_1 and σ_2 are the standard deviations of the two series.

n_1 and n_2 are the number of observations in each.

The computed 't' value was tested for its significance at 5 percent level. The application of the 't' test is given in Appendix III.

Two way classifications were used to isolate the influence of the economic, social and demographic factors conditioning women's work participation and earnings.

The economic factors include household income, household assets and the husbands standing in the employment market. The social factors used in the study were education caste and the demographic factors where age differentials and family size.

D. Definition of terms and concepts used in the study:

1. Household income:

The term household income was defined as the total current annual income of all the members of household from all sources. It was measured in rupees per month at current prices.

2. Female labour force participation:

For the purpose of the current study following Swaminathan (1986), the concept of female labour force participation was defined as the number of days the wife or homemaker was engaged in gainful economic activity either at home under the putout system or outside the home as a wage earner in the handloom sector.

3. Female earnings:

This concept was employed to denote the earnings of the women workers measured in rupees per month.

4. Dependency ratio:

This was defined as the ratio of children under 5 and 14 to the total population expressed in percentage terms.

5. Informal sector:

The informal sector of economic activity was deemed to include all those areas of employment where the workers job security, number of days of employment and the related facilities of social security, accident benefits etc are at risk. The worker is consequently exposed to more hazards in employment compared to someone working in the organised or formal sector where the wages, working conditions and fringe benefits are protected. The bargaining capacity of worker in the informal sector is too low compared to that of the worker in the formal sector.

6. Skilled worker:

The concept of skilled worker includes all those who are employed in the activities of spinning, weaving and dying where the skills for doing the activities are relatively complex and handed down through generations or those that required a good deal of experience and training. The workers engaged in other activities were classified as unskilled workers.

E. Limitations of the Study:

This micro-level study was intended to assess the status of women workers in the handloom industry, which falls under the informal sector. However, its scope is limited in that its findings are based on the experience of the women workers in one specific area namely the Erode Town in one district, Periyar District. Hence the findings of the study need to be substantiated by similar studies done in other areas also where the handloom industry happens to be concentrated.

The study is based on the cross-section data relating to a very limited period of time namely a month. Since the handloom industry is subject to fluctuations in employment, with its peaks and troughs, it may be desirable to extend the study covering a longer time preferably a year or two. Due to the constraint of time and resources it was not presently attempted.

Further the findings of this micro level study might also be cross-checked with those of aggregative time series analysis. Here again the paucity of published information relating to the women workers in the handloom industry frustrated the attempts of the investigator to undertake

such an exercise. Hence the plea of the investigator that the conclusions of the study be treated with caution.

Current study relates to the workers who are working under the co-operative societies. Its findings need to be substantiated by studies of workers who are outside the co-operative fold.

Results and Discussion

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the study on 'Women workers in Handloom Industry in Periyar District' are presented and discussed under the following headings:

- A. Background information
- B. Nature of work participation
- C. Determinants of mean female participation and earnings.
- D. Working conditions of women workers and
- E. Their attitude towards women's issues.

A. Background information:

The sample households were analysed for the details of their family size, earner dependent ratios and per family, percapita and per earner income levels. The details are given in Table III.

The average family size of the sample worked out to four, with 77 percent of families having upto four members each in their families. The number of earners per family worked out to 2.44 in the sample which was in conformity with what Banerjee (1985) found about the women workers in the unorganised sector of Calcutta. This itself was an index of the extreme poverty conditions under which these workers subsist. The overall dependency ratio was 24 percent implying that 76 percent of sample population was economically active or gainfully employed.

The average family income per month that was accruing to the sample was Rs.652/-. The percapita income of the group was Rs.177 per month, which showed that this group was on the whole a little comfortable above the poverty line. On an average a worker in the group earned Rs.267/month.

One striking relationship that came out of this analysis was that the larger the dependency ratio the smaller was the per capita income, bringing out the fact that children are liability for this group rather than an asset.

The investigator had also collected details about the household consumption expenditure per month. The per capita household consumption expenditure worked out

to Rs.123 per month, as against the per capita income of Rs.177. In spite of the very low levels of income the sample households had managed to have a margin of savings amounting to about Rs.54 per head. This cannot be literally viewed as surplus, but only a margin arising from the prevalence of convention amongst people regarding saving.

When the mortality rates of this group over the five year period 1983 to 1987 were examined as an index of its quality of living, it was found that the mortality rate in the sample which was 15 per 1000 in 1983 had come down to 4 per 1000 in 1987, indicating a significant gain in the quality of living of the group.

An analysis of the birth rates in the sample in 1983 and 1987 showed that the birth rate which was 14 per 1000 in 1983 had come down to zero in 1987. The sample population that exhibited a tendency towards constantcy in 1983 had really become a declining population in 1987 with a birth rate of zero and a death rate of 4 per 1000. The child population below five years in the sample was again very negligible (5 percent) and the proportion of children below 14 years was 24 percent.

TABLE III

DISTRIBUTION OF SAMPLE HOUSE HOLDS BY FAMILY SIZE, EARNER,

DEPENDENT RATIOS AND INCOME LEVELS

(in Rupees per month)

Sl. No.	Family size	Frequency of families	Population	No. of earners	No. of dependents	Depend-ncy ratio	Total family income	Average family income	Average income per earner	Percapita income
1	1	3	3	3	0	0	450	150	150	150
2	2	26	52	49	3	6	12130	467	248	233
3	3	37	111	82	29	16	23390	632	285	211
4	4	50	200	128	72	36	13190	744	291	186
5	5	20	100	55	45	45	14205	710	258	142
6	6	12	72	35	37	49	7815	651	223	109
7	7	1	7	7	0	0	1800	1800	257	257
8	8	1	8	7	1	12	875	875	125	109
Aggregate/ Total	4	150	553	366	187	24	97,855	652	267	177

B. Nature of work participation:

An analysis of the distribution of workers between the formal and informal sector was done to find out the extent to which women workers tend to be concentrated in the informal sector with the disadvantages associated with it. Table IV gives details of the distribution of workers in formal and informal sectors.

TABLE IV

DISTRIBUTION OF WORKERS BETWEEN FORMAL
AND INFORMAL SECTORS.

Sl. No.	Sector	Frequency of workers		All
		Male	Female	
1)	Formal	67 (41)	7 (3)	74 (20)
2)	Informal	97 (59)	195 (97)	292 (80)
3)	Both	164 (100)	202 (100)	366 (100)

Foot Note: The figures in the parantheses are percentages of the respective column totals.

Out of the total work force of 366 in the sample, 20 percent were employed in the formal sector with 80 percent working in the informal sector. Four out of every five workers eeked out their livelihood by some activity or other in the informal sector. The dependence of female workers on the informal sector was much more (97 percent) than that of the male workers (59 percent). Only three percent of female workers had reported employment in the formal sector.

The number of female workers in the sample was far larger than the number of male workers, indicating the extreme dependence of these families on female employment. Hence, the investigator examined the work participation rates of male and female population. Table V gives the details regarding the male-female differentials in work participation rates, computed both as a proportion of population above five years and as a proportion of population above 14 years.

TABLE V

MALE FEMALE DIFFERENTIALS IN WORK
PARTICIPATION RATES.

Sl. No.	Category	Population		Work force	Work Participa- tion rate as a proportion of	
		5+	14+		5+	14+
1)	Male	245	197	164	67	83
2)	Female	283	224	202	71	90
3)	All	528	421	366	69	87

The National Sample Surveys and other statistics compiled by the Government compute the work participation rate as a proportion of the population over five years. The sample work participation rate using the same basis for calculation worked out to 67 percent for males and 71 percent for females, as against the All India work participation rates of 14 percent for females and 52 percent for males. (Government of India, 1985). The female labour force participation in the same ^{pl} was nearly five times as high as the All India participation rate emphasising once again the extreme marginalisation of this group. The male participation rate was not as high as that of the female participation rate.

The 32nd round of the National Sample Survey relating to employment and unemployment has estimated the labour force participation rate for rural women above five years of age as 52.30 percent, acknowledging the income augmenting activities done by the women in their households or outside (Sen, 1985). The female participation rate in the sample was higher than this rate, again reinforcing the marginalised conditions under which the group was subsisting.

When work participation rates were estimated as a proportion of population above 14 years, it was found that the overall work participation rate was 90 percent for females and 83 percent for males.

The distribution of women workers by their age and occupational grouping is shown in Table VI.

TABLE VI

DISTRIBUTION OF WOMEN WORKERS BY AGE
AND OCCUPATIONAL GROUP

Sl. No.	Age Group	Skilled Occupation			Unskilled Occupation		Total
		Spinning	Weaving	Dyeing	Knitting	Others	
1)	14-25	3	17	1	2	2	25
2)	26-35	10	39	6	2	2	59
3)	36-45	5	24	2	-	1	32
4)	46-55	7	12	-	-	-	19
5)	56-65	3	4	-	5	-	12
6)	66+	1	-	-	2	-	3
Total		29	96	9	11	5	150

The table shows that weaving was the predominant activity in which women were employed (64 percent). It was followed by spinning (20 percent). Only nine women workers were found engaged in dyeing. The age distribution of the women labour force in handloom industry was skewed to the left indicating that more than 50 percent of the workers were concentrated in the first two groups, ie., they were within 35 years of age.

Table VII examines the percentage contribution made by women workers towards their family incomes.

TABLE VII

CONTRIBUTION OF WOMEN TO HOUSEHOLD INCOME

(in Rupees per month)

Sl. No.	Household Income Range	Frequency	Mean household income	Mean female earnings	Percentage of contribution of household income
1)	Upto 200	5	156	130	83.3
2)	200 - 400	24	277	175	63.2
3)	400 - 600	43	504	207	41.7
4)	600 - 800	39	724	235	32.5
5)	800 -1000	17	912	257	28.2
6)	1000 and above	22	1295	275	21.2
	Aggregate	150	652	222	34.0

Note: The figures of incomes and earnings have been rounded off to the nearest rupee.

For the sample as a whole, the mean contribution of women (Rs.222) to mean household income (Rs.652) was 34 percent. The range of their contribution varied from 83.3 percent in the lowest income group of less than Rs.200 to 21.2 percent in the highest income group of over Rs.1000. As the mean household income increased the percentage contribution made by women towards household income steadily declined. This tendency highlighted the fact that female employment was indispensable to the families in the lower income groups.

The simple linear regression equation fitted to the variables of household income (Y) and female earnings (X) yielded the following result:

$$\begin{array}{llll}
 Y & = & 289.52 & + & 1.5543 & X & & r^2 & = & .2906 \\
 S(b_1) & & (3.2396) & & (.4583089) & & & F & = & 11.486; \\
 & & & & & & & t_{0.025} & & \\
 & & & & & & & & & = 1.699 \\
 t & & 89.369 & & 3.384 & & & t_{0.025} & & \\
 e & = & .53 & & & & & & & = 2.045
 \end{array}$$

The co-efficient of determination (r^2) of the equation was 0.2906 implying that the variations in the female earnings explained only 29 percent of the

total variation in the household income. In other words, 29 percent of the variations in household income were due to the variations in female earnings. The predictive power of the equation was very low as expected. Nevertheless the F statistic of equation was statistically significant at five percent level indicating the overall significance of this regression equation for explanatory purposes. The 't' values of parameter estimates were also significant at five percent level. The co-efficient of female earnings was carrying the expected positive sign indicating the significant contribution women's earnings made to the household income in the group of weavers. The elasticity co-efficient was estimated as .53. It showed that a one rupee increase in female earnings would bring about 53 paise increase in household income. This analysis demonstrated that women's employment and earnings contributed significantly to household economic welfare through higher household income.

C. Determinants of Women's Participation rates and earnings:

1. Economic factors:

The economic factors which are likely to influence the participation of women in paid employment were identified as the household income levels, their assets base and the security of employment of the head of the household. The larger the household income, the less one would expect women to take to gainful employment. Likewise the larger the asset base of household, the less likely it is that women would step out for employment. The degree of security attached to man's employment may also determine whether the women wants to take to employment at all. In a sense the women labour is a reserve which is tapped only when the family is faced with adverse circumstances. Her services are used for keeping the hearth burning when all other alternatives have failed for some reason or other. Hence, the relationship between the economic factors as identified above and the women's participation in labour market was studied.

a) Household Income:

For purposes of discovering the relationship between household income and female employment and earnings, households were classified into four groups; Those with the

monthly income of less than Rs.400, 400-800, 800-1000 and 1000+. The families in the first group are living below the poverty line, for which the Seventh Five Year Plan had specified the cutoff point as Rs.4800 per annum. All other families were above this threshold level of poverty. Hence, one would expect the female participation in work force to be higher in the families below this threshold level and lower in the families above this level, so also their mean earnings. Table VIII gives the details relating to household income and women's labour market behaviour.

TABLE VIII

MEAN FEMALE PARTICIPATION AND EARNINGS BY HOUSEHOLDS
INCOME.

Sl. No.	Monthly Income (Rs.)	Frequency	Mean female participation	Mean female Earnings.
1)	< 400	32	24	160
2)	400 - 800	82	24	213
3)	800 - 1000	15	29	270
4)	1000 +	21	29	314
	Aggregate	150	25	222

NOTE: The figures of mean female participation and earnings have been rounded off to the nearest units.

The table shows that the mean female participation in employment tends to increase rather than decrease with increased household income, likewise their earnings. This finding dispels the common idea that women tend to take up jobs in large numbers only in the poorer households, rather than in the well off households. Whatever the income levels of households, women appear to have taken to jobs in large measure. In fact their employment and earnings appear to have contributed to the prosperity of the households themselves.

b, Household assets:

Since the sample for the study was drawn from one of the very depressed groups in the society, namely the families engaged in handloom industry, the investigator did not expect them to own assets in a big way. The two major income earning assets, land and livestock, were considered to be the assets of prime importance for this group. The other items of physical or financial assets would be inconsequential to this group, poor as it is. The attempt at grading the households by the value of land and livestock assets was given up in view of the difficulties in assessing their monetary equivalents. Hence the households were classified into two dichotomous groups namely those with these assets and those without them. As already hypothesised, female employment expected to be inversely related to the asset base of the household.

This relationship between the asset base of households and women's participation in labour market is given in Table IX.

TABLE IX

MEAN FEMALE PARTICIPATION AND EARNINGS BY ASSET POSITION

Sl. No.	Asset Position	Frequency	Mean female Participation	Mean female earnings.
1)	Households with assets	22	26	195
2)	Households without assets	128	25	227

The analysis showed that there was only a marginal difference in women's participation in employment between the two groups, with asset endowment and without asset endowment. However, the mean female earnings in the households without assets was considerably higher at Rs.227 as against the mean female earnings of Rs.195 in the households with assets. The differential in female earnings between the two groups showed that the contribution made by women in asset less households was very critical in maintaining their standards of living.

C. Degree of Security of husbands employment:

The degree of security of husband's employment did not appear to influence women's participation in the labour force and their earnings. No consistent pattern was observed between the variables under consideration, showing that whenever women were working they were employed fully for about 25 days in a month and were earning between Rs.217 and Rs.243 per month, vide Table X.

TABLE X

MEAN FEMALE PARTICIPATION AND EARNINGS BY NATURE OF
HUSBAND'S EMPLOYMENT.

Sl. No.	Husbands' employment by sector	Frequency	Mean female participation	Mean female earnings
1)	Organised	44	25	226
2)	Unorganised	81	25	217
3)	Male unemployed	7	26	243
4)	Female headed households	18	25	224

2. Social factors:

The social factors that are likely to influence female labour force participation/earnings were identified as their educational level and their caste background.

a. Education:

The relationship between the woman worker's education and her labour market behaviour is illustrated in Table XI.

TABLE XI

MEAN FEMALE PARTICIPATION AND EARNINGS BY LEVEL OF EDUCATION

Sl. No.	Education	Frequency	Female Participation	Female earnings
1)	Illiterate	86	25	213
2)	Primary	57	25	227
3)	Secondary and above	7	29	289

It was found that earnings were directly related to education in all the levels. The level of education had obviously influenced earnings by improving the productivity of the workers. Hence the direct relationship.

b. Caste:

The Inter-relationship between the caste background of workers and their participation and earning levels is given in Table XII.

TABLE XII

MEAN FEMALE PARTICIPATION AND EARNINGS BY CASTE

(in Rs. for month)

Sl. No.	Caste	Frequency	Female Participation	Female earnings
1)	Mudaliar	86	25	216
2)	Others	64	25	229

Handloom industry in the informal sector is essentially dominated by the particular caste group of Mudaliars. However, the breakup of the households by caste showed that others had also entered the industry in large numbers (43 percent). However, the long association of Mudaliar group with the industry had not resulted in higher earnings for their women workers. Caste by itself did not give an edge to the Mudaliar group over the others.

3. Demographic factors:

Under the demographic factors, the investigator considered the two crucial factors of age differentials of women workers and their family size to examine their impact on female participation and female earnings.

a. Age:

Table XIII gives the relationship between age of the women workers and their work participation and earnings.

TABLE XIII

MEAN FEMALE PARTICIPATION AND EARNINGS BY AGE DIFFERENTIALS

Sl. No.	Age	Frequency	Female Participation	Female earnings
1)	25	27	25	197
2)	25 - 35	60	25	223
3)	35 - 45	29	25	253
4)	45 - 55	19	25	238
5)	55 +	15	26	184

Irrespective of the age differences all the women workers were employed fully throughout the month i.e., for 25 days. The behaviour of their mean earnings showed that their earnings reached the peak level in their third decade of life namely 35 to 45 years. Thereafter it tended to decline.

b. Family size:

An analysis of relationship between family size and women's work participation and earnings is given in Table XIV.

TABLE XIV

MEAN FEMALE PARTICIPATION AND EARNINGS BY FAMILY SIZE

S.No.	Family Size	No.	Female Participation	Female earnings.
1)	< 4	116	25	222
2)	5 - 6	32	25	224
3)	7 - 8	2	24	248

The table shows that 77 percent of the households had less than four as the family size. The family size by itself (atleast in the first two groups) did not in any way result in any variations in work participation and earnings of women.

D. Working conditions of women workers:

The research on women's employment in the informal sector had shown that women workers in this sector are doubly deprived in the sense that are clustered ⁱⁿ low skill level jobs and discriminated in wages and also they are the victims of the putput job system where they do not have any bargaining power at all. The sample women worker's working conditions were studied for these aspects.

Table XV gives details of the nature of jobs done by the women workers against their participation levels and earning.

TABLE XVMEAN FEMALE PARTICIPATION AND EARNINGS BY NATURE
OF JOB.

Sl. No.	Nature of Job	Fre- quency	Female Participation	Female earnings
1)	Skilled	134	25	230
2)	Unskilled	16	25	158

It was found that 89 percent of workers were doing jobs involving some skill. They were either engaged in weaving, dyeing or spinning with only 11 percent reported in unskilled jobs. Female participation itself did not show any variations between these two groups, whereas their mean earnings did show a marked difference with the skilled workers getting Rs.231 on an average per month as against Rs.158 earned by the unskilled workers.

The differentials in the wages received by women workers together with their work participation and earnings are reviewed in Table XVI.

TABLE XVI

MEAN FEMALE PARTICIPATION AND EARNINGS BY
DIFFERENTIALS IN WAGE RATES.

Sl. No.	Daily Wage (Rs)	Fre- quency	Family Participation	Female earnings (Rs per month)
1)	< 10	96	25	170
2)	10 - 15	50	25	308
3)	15 - 20	3	25	408
4)	20+	1	20	450

The analysis of wage differentials revealed that except for four women workers whose wage rate was in excess of Rs.15 per day and who earned about, Rs.400 per month, the others were all clustered in the lowest wage group getting Rs.10 a day (64 percent) or in the next higher group getting Rs.10-15 per day (33.3 percent). The modal wage rate however was within Rs.10 for those women workers (Rs.7 per day) giving them a monthly income of about Rs.170 for 25 days of work per month. Needless to say, this group remains a marginalised group even within the informal sector. Unless their wage rate is increased to atleast the notified minimum wage rate of Rs.10 per day, their employment will continue to remain a drain on their physical effort.

The nature of labour contract under which they work constitutes yet another source of discrimination. In the sample 20 percent of the women workers reported that they were working under the put out system while the remaining 80 percent reported that they were in paid employment. That the workers under the putout system suffer from lower earnings and larger work burden is clear from Table XVII.

TABLE XVII

MEAN FEMALE PARTICIPATION AND EARNINGS
BY NATURE OF JOB CONTRACT.

Sl. No.	Nature of contract	Fre- quency	Female Participation	Female earnings
1)	Putout system	30	25	183
2)	Regular paid employment	120	20	232

The workers in the putout system worked longer (25 days as against 20 days per month) and received lower earnings (Rs.183 as against Rs.232 per month) than those in regular wage employment.

As against women workers who were working in low paid jobs, men workers who were by and large employed in weaving, dyeing, packing and transporting jobs, earned between Rs.10 and Rs.30 per day. Hence, their average earnings per month was considerably higher than that of women workers.

The mean wage rates of the women workers were analysed in terms of their job contract. The details are given in Table XVIII.

TABLE XVIII

MEAN WAGE RATES BY JOB CONTRACT

Sl. No.	Nature of job contract	Fre- quency	Wage rate Per Day in Rs.	
			Mean	Standard deviation
1)	Paid employmer	120	9.22	3.06
2)	Putout system	30	7.50	2.60

The overall mean wage rate was Rs.8.87 with a standard deviation of 3.29, i.e., it was Rs.8.87 \pm 3.29. It was in the range of Rs.5.58 to Rs.13.16 per day.

The workers under the putout system had relatively low wage rates and earnings. Their wage rate was Rs.7.50 per day as against Rs.9.22 for workers under paid employment. The standard deviations of these wage rates were 2.60 and 3.0 respectively. It showed that the wage rate of the workers under the putout system was Rs.7.50 \pm 2.60, i.e., it varied between Rs.4.90 and Rs.10.10. The wage rate of workers under regular employment was Rs.9.22 \pm , 3.00. i.e., it varied between Rs.6.22 and Rs.12.22.

The 't' test that was used to evaluate the difference in the mean wage rates of the two category of workers showed that the difference was statistically significant at five percent level, indicating that the two mean wage rates differed significantly from each other. (Vide Appendix III) The workers under putout system were thus more deprived than those under wage employment.

E. Attitudes towards Women's issues:

A few queries on the awareness of women workers

with regard to their civic duties and their attitude towards women's employment, together with the degree of control they enjoy over the family earnings and their own earnings were asked. Interestingly enough 97 women (65 percent) reported that they had exercised their right to vote in the last general elections and 106 women (71 percent) said that they were in the habit of attending social meetings. This indicated that the political and social awareness of the group was of a fairly high order.

With regard to the question on whether women should earn at all, only one answer mentioned that they should earn as a normal routine, that is it considered women's employment as a means to her emancipation. Thirteen others (9 percent) mentioned that women should step up employment only in the absence of husband in the family or of any other source of income, implying that a women's place is primarily her home. The majority of these women (132 - 88 percent) of women considered women's employment and earnings to be largely of a supplementary nature. This perception of women about themselves explains why they are discriminated in the labour market and confined to low skilled jobs, with no security, at low levels of wages with low productivity.

Excepting for one respondent all others mentioned that they were not exempted from household activities because of their employment outside. Their participation in the various household activities varied slightly, depending on whether or not they had help from other members of household. With regard to the question on whether they got other members of the household ^{to help them in household} activities, 67 of them (45 percent) said that they did not get any help whatsoever from others and they were constrained to pull on with the double day work load day after day. This had naturally resulted in greater morbidity, in as much as 47 women workers (37 percent) reported of frequent illness and health problems with which they suffered. Seventeen percent mentioned that they could not devote enough time to the care of their children.

To the questions that related to the extent of their control over the management of family finances, their own earnings and the contribution they made to the family pool, the women workers in the sample replied that 105 of them (70 percent) were handling their family finances and that 134 of them (89 percent) were handling their own earnings. This obviously gave the women a certain degree of financial independence. To the question on how much of their earnings

was passed on to the family pool 95 answered that their entire earnings went into the family pool while the remaining 55 mentioned that their contribution ranged from 66 to 93 percent. When this behaviour on the part of the head of the household was studied, it was found that 35 out of 132 heads of households (27 percent) were turning over their entire earnings into the family pool. The contribution of 11 percent of the heads of households was within 50 percent. This phenomenon explains to some extent why women had been pushed into the labour force to maintain their families atleast at the subsistence level in the absence of responsible parenthood behaviour by their husbands.

Out of 150 women workers who were interviewed for the study, only 16 women reported of the existence of a female work tradition in their families in the sense that either their mothers or their mothers-in-law had been working earlier. When they were questioned on whether they would expect their daughters also to continue in the work tradition, 33 of them mentioned that they expected their daughters to be in the work force till their marriage. Only eight of them expected their daughters to continue working after the marriage. These responses made it clear that taking up paid employment outside was not in the nature of these women. They had been pushed into the work force by necessity and they would expect to come out of it at the earliest moment.

Summary and Conclusion

V. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Employment holds the key for women's emancipation. As a result of the focus on women since 1975, the International Women's year, it is recognised that women should have a greater share in economic activity. The economic status of women plays a key role in determining her social status as well as her psychological relationship with others. The studies on women in economic development had by and large focussed their attention on the changing, rather declining work participation rates of women drawing upon the aggregative data. The dynamics of women work relationship as it operates in concrete situations in the work place at the micro level had not been studied in detail. The industry studies have more often bypassed the issue of women workers.

Hence, the investigator decided to undertake a micro level study of women workers in the handloom industry to understand their work environment and labour market behaviour in terms of their wage rates, earnings and extent of employment. The study was undertaken in Erode in Periyar District during February 1988, It was based on a random sample of 150 women workers. The specific objectives of the study were:

1. finding out the male female differentials in work participation rate;
2. finding the composition of female labour force in terms of age and nature of occupations;
3. assessing the relative contribution of women workers to their household income.
4. assessing the impact of the various economic, social and demographic factors on female labour force participation and earnings;
5. evaluating the impact of the nature of job contract on women's employment and earnings;
6. finding out the extent of control women workers have over their family purse;
7. finding out their attitudes towards certain women's issues.

The main findings of the study are:

Background of the Women Workers:

The average family size of workers was four.

The number of earners per family was 2.44.

The dependency ratio was 24 percent.

The mean earnings per worker was Rs.267 per month.

The mean household income was Rs.260 per month.

The mean per capita income was Rs.177 per month.

The mean per capita consumption expenditure was Rs.123 per month.

The mortality rate in the sample was four per thousand in 1987 as against 15 per 1000 in 1983.

The birth rate was zero in 1987 as against 14 per 1000 in 1983.

With a birthrate of zero and a death rate of 4 per 1000.

The sample population exhibited the tendency of a declining population.

b. Nature of Work participation:

In the sample households four out of every workers were employed in the informal sector. There were more female workers (97 percent) in the informal sector than male workers (59 percent)

The number of female workers in the sample (202) was far larger than the number of male workers (164). Only three percent of female workers were employed in the formal sector. The female labour force participation in the sample (71 percent) was nearly five times as high as the All India rate of 14 percent.

Activity wise, women workers were employed in weaving (64 percent) spinning (20 percent) and dyeing (6 percent).

More than 50 percent of the workers were within 35 years of age. The mean wage rate of these workers was Rs.8.87 per day with standard deviation of 2.29.

The regression analysis showed that these women contributed significantly to household income. The elasticity co-efficient of household income with respect to women's income was .53.

C. Determinants of female work participation and female earnings:

The mean female participation increased with increase in household income, dispelling the popular assumption that women withdraw themselves from labour force at higher income levels.

Assets or no assets, the female work participation did not show any variation. However, in assetless households the female earnings were much higher than in others.

The degree of security of husband's employment did not influence the participation rates.

The level of earnings was directly related to education. It appeared to have influenced the earnings through improving productivity.

The Caste factor had only a marginal influence on work participation.

The earnings of the workers reached their peak level in the third decade of the workers life namely 35 to 45 years.

The skilled workers reported a higher level of earnings (Rs.231) than the unskilled workers (Rs.158). The workers under the putout system received lower earnings (Rs.183) than those in regular paid employment.

Their mean wage rates were Rs.7.50± 260 per day as against Rs.9.22± Rs.3 of other group. The difference between 400 rates was statistically significant confirming that the workers under the putout systems were more exploited than the workers under regular paid employment.

By and large the findings of the study confirmed the fact that these women workers come from the most marginalised section of the population which depended heavily on female contribution through outside work. The female work participation rates in the group is alarming as high as 71 percent, even higher than the male participation rate of the group namely 67 percent. They made a significant contribution to their household income (34 percent).

They were fully employed for 25/26 days in a month and they were clustered in unskilled jobs. Their mean wage rates were far lower than the national minimum wage rate of Rs.10. The workers in the putout system were even more exploited, their wage rate being Rs.7.50. Sixty three percent of the women turned over their entire earnings to

the family pool as against only 27 percent of heads of households who were reported to have contributed their entire incomes to the family. Seventy percent of these women workers mentioned that they were handling the family purse. **E**ighty nine percent reported that they handled their own earnings. This behaviour substantiated the fact that when the woman earns, the family benefits more than while the man earns the similar amount. In spite of the crucial importance of their employment to the family welfare, these women were of the view that women should take up employment only in the absence of husband or in case of *dire need rather than as a normal routine. They did not have any* perception about women's emancipation in spite of their work tradition. This was perhaps because they did not get any substantive assistance in domestic work and hence were doubly burdened.

As an outcome of the study it is suggested that the work experiences of other categories of women workers could also be documented so as to understand ~~for~~ their perceptions to employment in order to strike a social policy for their development.

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Appendices

APPENDIX I

SRI AVINASHILINGAM HOMESCIENCE (AUTONOMOUS) COLLEGE

FOR WOMEN

DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMICS

DISSERTATION WORK FOR M.A. DEGREE

AN INTERVIEW SCHEDULE TO ELICIT INFORMATION ON WOMEN IN HANDLOOM
INDUSTRY IN PERIYAR DISTRICTDate :
Place :

I General information

1. Name of interviewee :
2. Address :
3. Type of family :
Joint
Nuclear
4. Caste :
5. Religion :

II Family background

- a. Particulars of the family

No.	Name	Age	Education		Occupation	Income	Contribution to family pool
			Studying in	Studied upto			

6. Household consumption expenditure per month (in Rs.):

C. Birth and death of respondents children in the last five years

S.No.	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	Remarks (causes of death)
1.	Births					
2.	Deaths below one year					
3.	Deaths between 1-4 years					
4.	Deaths between 5-9 years					
5.	Deaths between 10-14 years					
6.	Deaths between 15-34 years					
7.	Others					

III Employment details :

1. What are the reasons for your employment?
2. How long have you been working in the present job?
3. How many days in a month are you employed?
4. What is the nature of your work

Weaving :	Dyeing :
Packing :	Printing :
Others :	
5. How many houses do you work in a day?
6. Do you normally set a day off in a week?

5. Do you handle the money you earn?

Yes

No

6. How much of your earning is passed on to family pool?
(in Percentage)

Fully

Partially

7. How much of your earning is retained by you? (in Rs.)

Fully

Partially

8. How do you spend it?

9. Did your mother or mother-in-law have to work for
money at any time?

Yes

No

If yes, what work?

10. What do you expect your daughter will do

a. Work before marriage

Yes

No

b. Work after marriage

Yes

No

If yes, what kind of work?

11. Do you own any property?

Yes

No

If yes,

<u>Property</u>	Value (inRs)
1. House	:
2. Livestock	:
3. Vehicle	:
4. Land	:
5. Others	:

12. Do you involve in household activities

Yes

No

If yes,

Cooking	:	Cleaning	:
Sweeping	:	Childcare	:
Gardening	:	Shopping	:
Health care	:	Hobbies	:

13. Do you get other members of the family to help you in household work?

Yes

No

Activity	Person helping	Type of help
Cooking		
washing		
Cleaning		
Sweeping		
Others.		

14. What are the problems faced by you in going out for work? Does it hamper your household activities?

APPENDIX II

ESTIMATION OF SIMPLE REGRESSION SHOWING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FEMALE EARNINGS AND HOUSEHOLD INCOME

S.No	X	$(X-\bar{X})^2$	Y	$(Y-\bar{Y})^2$	$(X-\bar{X})(Y-\bar{Y})$	X^2
1	300	7992.36	500	13806.25	-10504.5	90000
2	300	7992.36	775	24806.25	14080.5	90000
3	300	7992.36	700	6806.25	7375.5	90000
4	160	2560.36	450	28056.25	8475.5	25600
5	120	8208.36	850	54056.25	-21064.5	14400
6	200	112.36	530	7656.25	927.5	40000
7	150	3672.36	415	41006.25	12271.5	22500
8	175	1267.36	500	13806.25	4183.0	30625
9	250	1552.36	540	6006.25	-3053.5	63500
10	175	1267.36	900	79806.25	-10057.0	30625
11	150	3672.36	350	71556.25	16210.5	22500
12	210	0.36	700	6806.25	-49.5	44100
13	150	3672.36	700	6806.25	-4995.5	22500
14	300	7992.36	600	306.25	-1564.5	90000
15	200	112.36	750	17556.25	-1404.5	40000
16	300	7992.36	600	306.25	-1564.5	90000
17	300	7992.36	600	306.25	-1564.5	90000
18	300	7992.36	850	54056.25	20785.5	90000
19	175	1267.36	700	6806.25	-2937.0	30625
20	150	3672.36	450	78056.25	10150.5	22500

21	150	3672.36	700	6806.25	-4999.5	22500
22	125	7327.36	325	85556.25	25038.5	15625
23	300	7992.36	700	6806.25	7375.5	90000
24	300	7992.36	1200	339306.25	52075.5	90000
25	100	12232.36	400	47306.25	24055.5	10000
26	180	936.36	490	16256.25	3901.5	32400
27	100	12232.36	400	47306.25	24055.5	10000
28	100	12232.36	150	218556.25	51705.5	10000
29	300	7992.36	1000	146306.25	34195.5	90000
30	300	7992.36	700	6806.25	7375.5	90000

$$\hat{b}_1 = \frac{\sum (x - \bar{x})(y - \bar{y})}{\sum (x - \bar{x})^2}$$

$$= \frac{260475}{167586.8} = 1.55$$

$$\hat{b}_0 = \bar{y} - (\hat{b}_1 \bar{x})$$

$$= 617.5 - (1.55 \times 210.6)$$

$$= 326.43$$

$$r^2 = \frac{\hat{b}_1 \sum (x - \bar{x})(y - \bar{y})}{\sum (y - \bar{y})^2}$$

$$= \frac{1.55 \times 260475}{1389387.3} = .2906$$

$$\hat{\sigma}_u^2 = \frac{(1 - r^2) \sum y^2}{n}$$

$$= \frac{.7094 \times 1389387.3}{28}$$

$$= 35201.119$$

$$\hat{s}_{b_1} = \sqrt{\frac{\hat{\sigma}_u^2}{\sum (x - \bar{x})^2}}$$

$$= \sqrt{\frac{35201.119}{167586.8}}$$

$$= .4583089$$

$$\hat{s}_{b_0} = \sqrt{\frac{\hat{\sigma}_u^2 \sum x^2}{n \sum (x - \bar{x})^2}}$$

$$= \sqrt{\frac{35201 \times 1499000}{30 \times 167586.8}}$$

$$= 3.2396$$

$$\begin{aligned} \hat{t}_{b_1} &= \frac{\hat{b}_1}{\hat{S}_{b_1}} \\ &= \frac{1.55}{.458} \\ &= 3.384 \end{aligned}$$

$$\begin{aligned} \hat{t}_{b_0} &= \frac{\hat{b}_0}{\hat{S}_{b_0}} \\ &= \frac{289.52}{3.2396} \\ &= 89.369 \end{aligned}$$

$$\begin{aligned} F &= \frac{\frac{r^2}{k-1}}{\frac{1-r^2}{N-K}} \\ &= \frac{.2906/2-1}{1-.2906/30-2} \\ &= 11.486 \end{aligned}$$

(Elasticity)

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Elasticity} &= \hat{b}_1 \left(\frac{\bar{X}}{\bar{Y}} \right) \\ &= 1.55 \frac{210.6}{617.5} \\ &= .5286 \end{aligned}$$

APPENDIX III

APPLICATION OF THE STUDENT 't' TEST TO TEST THE DIFFERENCE
BETWEEN MEAN WAGE RATES.

- X_1 - Wage rate in putout system
 X_2 - Wage rate in regular paid employment.
 n_1 - Number of workers in the putout system.
 n_2 - number of workers in regular paid employment.

$$\bar{X}_1 - 7.50$$

$$\bar{X}_2 - 9.22$$

$$\sigma_1 - 2.61$$

$$\sigma_2 - 3.00$$

$$n_1 - 30$$

$$n_2 - 120$$

$$\begin{aligned}
 SE(\bar{X}_1 - \bar{X}_2) &= \sqrt{\frac{\sigma_1^2}{n_1} + \frac{\sigma_2^2}{n_2}} \\
 &= \sqrt{\frac{6.81253}{30} + \frac{9.06}{120}} \\
 &= \sqrt{.227 + .0755} \\
 &= \sqrt{.3025} \\
 &= .55
 \end{aligned}$$

$$\begin{aligned}t &= \frac{\bar{X}_1 - \bar{X}_2}{SE} \\&= \frac{7.50 - 9.22}{.55} \\&= -3.127 \\t &= -3.127.\end{aligned}$$