

**SUICIDAL FEVER WIPING
DUBBAKK WEAVERS COMMUNITY
- A CASE STUDY**

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ABSTRACT

Dubbakk- a small town in Medak district of Andhra Pradesh saw over 120 handloom weaver deaths caused either by starvation or by suicide. Dubbakk today has turned as a graving yard n with on-stop deaths.

Dubbakk, a turning burial ground indicative of all that is wrong with the handloom sector. Till recent times, homes and work stations in Dubbakk resounded with the regular bustle of the looms and the weavers churned out yards and yards of clothes that found ready market everywhere.

There was so much demand that the weavers had to work in shifts. There were over 10000 looms in Dubbakk, neighbouring Lacchapet, Ramakkapet, Habsipur, Chittapur, Dharmajipet, Mote, Challapur, Dumpanapalli and several other villages. Traders from as far as Odisha used to descend in flocks to Dubbakk to place orders

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and give advances. Siddipet, the nearest town, too was a handloom hub with the countless looms continuously rocking in nearby villages like Chandalapur, Chinna Kodur, Rajagopalpet, Ande, Dhoolmitta, Kasalabad, Ibrahimnagar and Palamatla.

However, today hardly a couple of hundreds of looms operate in this town. Market availability, shifting choices of fickle customers, asymmetrical policies and priorities of the powers that be have reduced Dubbakk to a poor shadow of its former self. With the Janata Sarees and Janata Dhoti scheme dying a natural death, fund flows dried up for the weavers. The government obviously has little interest in the survival of the handloom sector.

This paper studied and analyzed the situation, with the help of media aired a special programme highlighting the situation. The subsequent action taken by the RTI and government in reassuring and safe guarding the remaining weavers families at Dubbakk are the outcome of the study.

“Death is a simple solution for most of the handloom weavers.

An end to all their woes, a full-stop to all their days of starvation and poverty. Nitrite comes much cheaper than a kilo of rice”.

“You may have heard of cyanide capsules that the LTTE guerrillas carry. This is our cyanide capsule,” K. Lakshminarayana told the visiting SJP team showing the white powder in a plastic pouch”.

“Just wash down a spoonful of this powder.....Death comes quickly and silently. Just 10 grams is what it takes to make a family go to eternal sleep,” Lakshminarayana said nonchalantly. That powder is what the handloom weavers call nitrite, a must-use chemical for dyeing the yarn.

INTRODUCTION:

Suicide is the intentional destruction of one's own life. Most people who commit suicide do it with the hope for set free, for the reason that in reality they don't want die. This self-destructing act is rather a cry for help and a desperate attempt to change hopeless situations. Only less of all suicides happen deliberate without chance for help.

Dubbakk- a small town in Medak district of Andhra Pradesh saw over 120 handloom weaver deaths caused either by starvation or by suicide. Dubbakk today has turned as a grave yard and with non-stop deaths. This small town in Medak district of Andhra Pradesh saw over 120. Only seven cases were registered in the concerned Police Station. Handloom weaver deaths caused either by starvation or by suicide. In Dubbakk today suicidal fever is turning the entire handloom sector into grave yard. Dubbakk, is indicative of all that is wrong with the handloom sector.

Till recent, every home in Dubbakk reverberated with the musical sound of the looms and the weavers churned out yards and yards of clothes marketed everywhere. There was so much demand that the weavers had to work in shifts.

Dubbakk Loom History in the past:

There were more than 10000 looms in Dubbakk and neighbouring villages Lacchapet, Ramakkapet, Habsipur, Chittapur, Dharmajipet, Mote, Challapur, Dumpanapalli and several other villages. Traders from as far as Orissa used to come down to Dubbakk to place orders. Siddipet, the nearest town, too was a handloom hub with the countless looms continuously rocking in nearby villages like Chandalapur, Chinna Kodur, Rajagopalpet, Ande, Dhoolmitta, Kasalabad, Ibrahimnagar and Palamatla.

Dubbakk Loom situation at present:

Today, due to unpredictable market fluctuation and vagaries, more and more customers going for fashionable garments and preferring costlier designer sarees for Janata Sarees and Janata Dhoti and asymmetrical policies and priorities of the powers has turned rich Dubbakk in to destitute state today. Above all no capital investment or fund flow has dried up the life of the weavers.

Recently the prices of the yarn, the chief raw material, have shot up. In 2009, the prices were around ' 1800 and ' 1900 in December 2009, has gone up to ' 2600 in just four months. A weaver can make around 12 to 13 sarees from one box of yarn at the rate of one saree in two-three days. In return they earn '120 for one saree. Thus a weaver gets approximately ' 1500-1600 for an investment of '2600. In other words, every weaver incurs loss of '1100 on every box of yarn. The imbalance is further deteriorating the conditions of weavers and resulting indebtedness, despair again aggravating the situation into starvation deaths and suicidal deaths. To support the family to survive every member of the family are forced to involve in weaving.

Today, the family is unable to earn even ' 30/- per day. No wonder! Most weavers in surrounding areas now find National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS) more lucrative as they are assured of ' 125 for just four-hours of work. Poverty, lack of work and the acute starvation have forced most weavers and women in particular have taken up beedi rolling as life saver not minding the harmful effect of the same. Many have migrated to power loom companies in neighbouring mandals like Sircilla in Karimnagar, Bhivandi and Sholapur in Maharashtra and other power loom companies. Others have ended up as hotel workers, masons and casual labourers in cities like Hyderabad, Mumbai and Nizamabad.

The worsening condition of Dubbakk weaver's community failed to seek government attention. Though well aware of the revailing

situation government failed to study the situation and provide self-protective measures both in terms of monetary and emotional support to curb the situation. This further indicated that the government has little or no interest in the survival of weaver's community. Stabbing their self esteem government officials have endorsed them 'BEGGAR' in white ration card in the occupation and caste column. This has further worsened their conditions.

Miserably, with no government support forthcoming, the weavers are forced to approach the Siddipet-based Seths, who practically control the handloom market in Dubbakk. These Seths hardly provide work for half the month.

Case Study I

Arjja Krishna 55 years. He is known as trainer and teacher. He has taught many junior weavers the art of dyeing colours. He was the real engineer as his co-weavers call him fondly. For last forty years he had mastered the tie n dye technique and designing technique on sarees in Dubbakk. He has trained as many as 60 young weavers in tie n dye technique. Many weavers and many depended on him for work. Due to no work in recent time, mounting indebtedness and unable to support the family that is starving of hunger for days together preferred death as a solace. He committed suicide the very next day of after the first field visit to Dubbakk on April 23, 2010. This incidence of Dubbakk was then telecasted in the Sakshi Telugu Channel on April 24, 2010 with the intension to seek government's attention. Again his family members collected money and borrowed some on loan to cremate his body.

Case Study II

Rangavva – a widow who has lost her only son and husband. The situation is due to heavy debts incurred towards procurement of

raw materials, towards marriage expenses and to run family with minimum requirements. Unable to bear the situation her husband hanged himself. The family responsibility now rested on the only son who with all his efforts failed to earn ₹ 500 per month. The wretched situation forced the son to consume potassium nitrate the chemical used for dyeing colours. As moist and other anti terrorism groups carrying cyanide capsules, potassium nitrate is Dubbakk weavers cyanide capsules.

Case Study-III

Bathela Bhulakshimi—a widow a widow who has lost her only son, daughter-in-law and husband is now taking care of her only granddaughter. Her husband knew only weaving and no other occupation. For some days her only son worked in a beedi rolling company. Unhappy with the wages, he returned to the family occupation. Unable to return back the debt made towards his sisters wedding compelled her son Balkrishna to commit suicide. Following this her daughter-in-law burnt herself alive by pouring kerosene and setting herself ablaze. This mourning condition forced her husband Parashuram to end his life by hanging himself to a tree. Her only solace is her 3 years old daughter.

Findings:

- Ø The study further explains that though there is a co-operative society with 800 members, has failed to protect the miserable situation. The society even intended to start garment designing for women has not progressed.
- Ø Again, none of the handloom schemes like integrated handloom rural development scheme, handloom development centers and quality dyeing unit scheme and the welfare

schemes like health package schemes, insurance scheme, and soon.

- Ø Though the weavers are ready to work on the looms, the Dhanis are unable to
- Ø Provide enough work to them. (Dhanis are the ones who provide work to the weavers. Under each Dhanis around 15-20 weavers work).
- Ø The loom technology has become highly non remunerative. Loom upgradation has not taken place.
- Ø Changing customer needs are not taken into account. There has been no value-addition to the products. Most of the production is not in par with changing textile choices of the customers.
- Ø Lack of credit facility and access to the market. The raw material availability too has been a problem.
- Ø High prices of the yarn have turned the handloom economy topsy-turvy. There has been no corresponding rise both in the product price as well as the weavers' wages. This has made a significant number of weaver's getting addicted to consumption of liquor.
- Ø There is no protection from occupational diseases like asthma, arthritis and other related skin ailments.
- Ø 80 percent of the weaver's suicidal deaths in Dubbakk village are due to consumption of potassium nitrate- essential chemical used for dyeing colours.

20 percents have killed themselves by hanging.

- Ø Power loom crisis in Sircilla of Karimnagar appeared as main headline in the national news and gained the politicians attention during election and became a powerful poll issue, and the government was forced to implement a special economic assistance package for the weavers. Ex-gratias were announced for the family of the deceased weavers. Whereas, Dubbakk failed so.

Media's Intervention and Its Effects:

- v With the help of media, the Dubbakk weavers' starvation suicidal deaths were telecasted over prime Telugu channels like Sakshi, TV9 and others. The Dubbakk issue has sensitized politicians and government too.
- v Weavers launched Mahapadayatra - Almost the entire village moved with them. Aged, educated, students and women - every one took part in 'Mahapadayatra' taken up by the weavers of this tiny mandal headquarters, which was once famous for weaving the best cloth in India. The padhayatra. The 25-km padayatra commenced on Saturday morning at 10 a.m. near the Panchayat office located in the centre of the village. The programme was taken up by State unit of Swadeshi Jagaran Manch (SJM).
- v Both print and visual media did support to put forth the plight of the weavers of Dubbakk to the Andhra Pradesh Human Rights Commission. The Commission passed an order on 9/8/2010 directing, the Collector of Medak district to attend to the problems of the weavers mentioned and file his report before it by 31.8.2010.
- v 1368 applications of the weavers' families in Dubbakk Mandal were received by the Tahsildar Dubbakk mandal. Enquiry was

conducted in to the eligibility for issue of AAY cards. Door to door verification has been done and reported that during the enquiry (171) representations were received for issue of AAY cards to the families of Weavers. Thus a total number of (1539) applications were got enquired and the enquiries revealed that out of (1539) applications (1162) families are found eligible for issue of AAY Cards and the remaining (377) families are found ineligible for various reasons.

- v A list of eligible handloom weavers containing (1162) families for issue of AAY Cards proposals were submitted to the Commissioner Civil Supplies AP Hyderabad. Civil Supplies AP Hyderabad issued orders to issue AAY cards, to all the sufferers and also other welfare measures including the payment of ex-gratia to the families of 120 persons.
- v Again, steps are taken for admission of children of the deceased families of the Handloom Weavers in the Residential Schools.
- v A weaver and his daughter have been working in their own way for weavers. They have put in a lot of hard work through "save Weavers forum" to help the sufferer. For last 4-5 years they have focused on the issue. His daughter Pooja Jyoti, a 11th grade student at Livingston High School, New Jersey, is a young leader and founder of Save the Weavers Organization, actively promoting a global signature campaign through www.SaveWeavers.org, to appeal to the Government of India to address the problems faced by weavers. She has met and submitted the petition to the HRD Minister and Prime Minister of India.

SUGGESTION AND CONCLUSION:

Though AAY is temporary relief, the more sustainable focus is to be laid in the in terms of special incentive schemes and active partnership involvement from both the Government and the non-governmental agencies. Access to credit and assured sales in the form of buy-back agreements needs to be established. Improved access to trade avenues: Currently, the Dubbak weavers are selling their goods at Toopran, Lacchapet, Ramayampet, Dubbak and Cheryal. Loom quality improvement of Dubbakk weavers. Again, skill upgradation training programmes and implementation of newer and effective loom technologies and this has to pave way towards technology exchange programmes.

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