

# A STUDY ON PRESENT SCENARIO OF SILK HANDLOOM INDUSTRY IN KANCHIPURAM DISTRICT TAMILNADU

A. Arul Prakash

Research Scholar, Bharathidasan University And  
Assistant Professor, Faculty of Management  
Srm University, Kattankulathur-603 203

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Dr. A. Selvendran

Associate Professor and Research Supervisor  
P.G and Research Department Of Commerce  
Trichy Government Arts College, Trichy-620 022

## ABSTRACT

Kanchipuram silk initially started with the nine yard sarees that were woven to blend well with the culture of designing and patterning temple stories. Over a period of time, these sarees were converted to six yards with gold zari weaving. To make it available for every budget, these days there are Kanchipuram silk sarees woven in artificial gold zari, without losing upon the shining glory of this textile. **Innovation** the saree has evolved in terms of textures and shapes have taken over the scriptures and art of the silk sarees.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Kanchipuram silk sarees are famous by its gorgeous use of colours and fine golden thread work that produce gorgeous patterns and weaves. Created in the city of Kanchipuram in the south part of Tamilnadu. This particular type of saree is universally known as Kanchipuram silk sarees. This municipality in the southern India is also known by the name of Silk City, because people living there earn their employment by weaving silk sarees. If anybody is planning to attend a South Indian wedding-celebration, must to buy Kanchipuram silk saree directly or through the online from this collection. The wide-ranging of Kanchipuram silk sarees in this curated collection shows beauty and complexity. Kanchipuram silks are weightier than other types of silks therefore each Kanchipuram silk saree is considered as a piece of art.

It is understood that a South Indian bride's bridal wear goods is lacking without a Kanchipuram silk saree. These sarees are having the superb shining border, graceful textures and attractive colours with finely woven motifs and patterns in the form of South Indian temples, peacock, flowers, and tales from the Hindu epics like the Mahabharata, the Ramayana and the Bhagwat Gita heighten the beauty of these sarees.

Kanchipuram (also spelled as Conjeevaram, Kanjeevarum, Kanjiwaram, Kanjivaram) is traditionally woven silk from the village called Kanchipuram in Tamil Nadu, South India. For centuries now, these

sarees have conquered the world of South Indian sarees. Identical with the sarees of South India, these are the mark of culture for every south Indian wedding, ceremony or occasion. The shine and strength of the fabric have made these Sarees widespread attire among women across the globe. The rich quality combined with an amazing finish make them previous longer.

Equal with the sarees of South India, these are the spot of values for every south Indian wedding, ritual or occasion. The shine and durability of the fabric have made these Sarees popular clothing among women across the sphere. The rich quality combined with an astonishing finish make them last longer.

## 2. ORIGIN AND HISTORY

Geographically, Asia is the main producer of silk in the world and produces over 95 % of the total global output. Though there are over 40 countries on the world map of silk, bulk of it is produced in China and India, followed by Japan, Brazil and Korea. China is the leading supplier of silk to the world with an annual production of 1.5lakh MT.

Once upon a time there was a master weaver named Sage Markanda who used to weave for Gods. He even wove a tissue from the petals of the lotus flower. He knew the most favorite fabric of all Gods – he knew Lord Shiva liked cotton and Lord Vishnu liked silk. His expertise was passed on to his descendents which are now considered as *Kanchi Silk Weavers*. That's the story of origin of **Kanchipuram Silk Sarees**. Those *Kanchi Silk Weavers* are considered to be the ones behind the existence of this kind of Sarees. **Kanchipuram Silk Sarees** are no normal sarees. They are hand-woven in the town named Kanchipuram in India. The land of Kanchipuram is known as the temple city or the city of thousand temples.

According to the History, the city Kanchipuram came into popularity 400 years back when two weaving communities – the Saligars and the Devangas migrated to the city from a neighboring state. These two communities were already popular for their silk weaving skills and silk was really very popular in this town and gradually Kanchipuram became the mother of Kanchipuram SilkSarees. In south India, these sarees are considered very special. Being an integral part of South Indian weddings, KanchipuramSarees hold a luxurious status.

The sarees are considered special for their superior and rare color combinations. These sarees cost anywhere between Rs. 2500 – Rs. 1,00,000 depending upon the kind of work that goes into the saree.

## 3. PREPARATION OF KANCHIPURAM SILK SAREES

These sarees are hand woven from pure mulberry silk thread. The native industries of Kanchipuram are only into manufacturing the sarees not the raw material. The main raw materials that go into KanchipuramSarees are – mulberry silk threads, metallic threads (Zari) and dyes. The KanchipuramSarees usually have three parts – body, border and pallu. Three shuttles i.e. three single threads of silk yarn and zari are used to weave a KanchipuramSaree. One more unique thing about these sarees is that the design of border and body are usually quite different but are in contrast. In case, the shade of the pallu is different from border and body, it is woven separately and then carefully attached to the saree.

A famous king of the Cholas dynasty ruled Kanchipuram between the years 985 and 1014, who took an inventiveness of silk trade. It was during the reign of Krishna-Deva Raya, when the famous weaving communities of Andhra Pradesh, the Devangas and Saligars, migrated to Kanchipuram. Thus, happened the historical migration of the whole silk industry in the 15th century, to this city. The two weaving peoples were entirely recognized for their skills at weaving silk. The weaving industry was provisionally halted during the French invasion in the 17th century. It strengthened and make over its style in the 18th century. Today, it ranks amongst the supreme popular silks in the world. Very few stand out in the competition against Kanchipuram silks. The British translated the Kanchipuram silks to Conjeevaram silks, also known as Kanjeevarum silks.

The town today has over 60,000 silk looms and 22 weaver cooperative societies (nine societies with a turnover of over Rs.10 crores; four with Rs.5-10 crores; and the rest less than Rs.5 crores). The town's annual turnover exceeds Rs.200 crores with exports worth nearly Rs.3 crores. According to S. Nagaraj, Joint Director, Anna Silk Weaving Cooperative Society and Special Officer of Tan Silk, the potential for exports has not risen sharply primarily because the product range is limited to saris and there is hardly any demand for them abroad. But he is confident that with product diversification, which the industry is contemplating, exports will rise.

The traditional Kancheepuram silk saris are hand-woven in two parts (the pitni technique). The pallu and the border are woven in one colour as one unit and attached to the body of the sari, which is woven separately and in another colour. The sari is woven with dyed silk yarn, which is interleaved with design made with zari - silk thread twisted with a thin silver wire and then gilded with pure gold. Technically, the silk thread used in Kancheepuram is made of three threads twisted together. Woven from pure mulberry silk, the Kancheepuram silk enjoys a reputation for texture, lustre, durability and finish. Thus, the Kancheepuram silk saris are usually stronger (and more expensive) than those woven elsewhere in the State. While 75 per cent of the zari comes from Gujarat where its production is a cottage industry, the rest comes from Tamil Nadu Zari, the government-owned factory, which is one of its kind in the country. The silk comes primarily from Karnataka.

### **Objectives of the study**

1. To study the silk handloom industry organisation and its structure of silk handloom weaving industry
2. To study the production practices of silk weaving industry and to identify the problems of production
3. To study the marketing problems of pure silk handloom weaving industry of Tamil Nadu
4. To study the financial problems of silk co-operative societies and private sector
5. To identify the various problems of the industry and offer suggestions for solving such problems.

### **Scope of the study**

This study has been made to analyze the problem of silk industry in Tamil Nadu. The study includes the analysis of various problems of the industry like finance and marketing. It also makes attempts to study the impact of the growth of the silk cooperative societies. The approach to the study has

been from the point of view of silk handloom weavers because the study of the weaver's financial and marketing related issues of the industry, for both complements each other. The study does not cover the silk weaving on electric powerlooms.

### **Limitations of the study**

Generally the literature available on the subject "present scenario of hand loom silk industry" is very limited. Most of the available data are either clubbed with the cotton handlooms or with the sericulture and silk exports. But it does not provide adequate information regarding the growth and development of the silk handloom industry. The researcher was able to get the required information from the cooperative sector for the purpose of his study. But no published data were available on the private sector viz., master Weavers and independent weavers. Even the directorate of Handlooms and Textiles of Tamil Nadu Government is not having adequate data on the private sector producers.

While conducting the sample survey of master weavers, the research was provided with the general particulars regarding their business, such as, the number of weavers under their control, production details, marketing problems, sources of finance and the like. However, they have declined to give their financial statements to the researcher for the purpose of his study.

### **Geographical coverage**

The study covers the entire silk handloom weaving centres in Nine Taluks of Kanchipuram district, such as Kanchipuram taluk, Sriperumbudur taluk, Walajabad taluk, Madurantakam taluk, Uthiramerur taluk, cheyyur taluk, chengalpattur taluk, Thiruporur taluk and Tirukalukundram taluk.

### **Post scenario**

In the year 1949, the first co-operative society of weavers was formed, called the Kamatchi Amman Society. This society consisted of 79 weavers, who were provided financial support and several other benefits. Over the course of time, more and more co-operative societies were formed. Today, there are about 24 co-operative societies, most of which are managed by the government. Of Tamilnadu. Some of the apparent co-operative societies of weavers are the Kamatchi Amman Silk Society, Murugan Silk Society, Varadharaja Swamy Silk Society and others. The Kamatchi Amman Society now has about 2000 members and is one of the biggest. Entirely, there are about 50000 weavers who work through various co Private traders like Nalli Silks and Sri Kumaran Silks in Chennai acquire silk sarees from independent weavers in Kanchipuram and make them available to other cities of India and in foreign countries.

### **Evolution and People behind the Art**

This fabric is the characteristic part of several traditional and religious ceremonies. Kanchipuram silks have produced the main occupation for several in the city of Kanchipuram. The silk bears the descriptions of all the scriptures embossed on the walls of the temples of the Kanchipuram village. Over periods, Kanchipuram silk has been developing in terms of design and pattern but hasn't lost its charm. Initially sold across the world by only merchants, today the real weavers have awakened up to their own cooperative societies to sell their woven Kanchipuram silk.

## The Making and Style

The silk that is acquired from the sericulture of the mulberry worm is finely converted to produce the Kanjeevaram silk. These hand woven sarees hold their attraction in the double warp and double weft, and are known for the 1.2 inches of the warp frame that can hold up to about 60 holes through which would be woven the 240 warp threads.

Around 250-300 threads would be woven into the weft. This eventually allows the saree to remain strong and well made. Commonly, the zari used in a Kanjeevaram silk saree would be in gold and silver with silver running in first, coated with gold later. The sarees woven hereafter from this silk are mostly hand woven to design the best assortment. The famous weavers of the city of Kanchipuram have developed the art of converting this fabric into beautifully designed sarees in recent times. The designs are stimulated by the scriptures and art of the temples in Kanchipuram.

Kanchipuram silk originally started with the 9-yard sarees that were woven to blend well with the culture of designing and patterning temple stories. Over a period of time, these sarees were converted to 6 yards with gold zari weaving. To make it available for every budget, now a days there are Kanchipuram silk sarees woven in artificial gold zari, without losing upon the outstanding splendour of this textile. Private traders like Nalli Silks and Sri Kumaran Silks in Chennai acquire silk sarees from independent weavers in Kanchipuram and make them available to other cities of India and in foreign countries. Now, the Kanchipuram silk industry operates mainly in two ways- 1. Through co-operative societies and 2. Through private traders.

There are around 60000 silk looms in operation in Kanchipuram. The yearly turnover of the town exceeds Rs. 200 crores, with exports of approximately Rs. 3 crores.

According to experts, the exports have not risen to their full potential, as the demand for sarees outside India is negligible. Product diversification is being considered by the industry, which would definitely lead to a rise in exports. Certain units have started weaving churidar sets. Some units are considering the production of furnishing. Extensive research has been undertaken to make the production process technologically sound, faster and better. The use of computers in creating designs is on the rise. With increasing consumer preferences for low-priced, light-weight sarees, simple designs and light colours, many changes have been incorporated in the Kanchipuram saree. Weavers have started blending silk and cotton for producing the body of the saree. Sometimes, the body of the saree is made in cotton and the border in silk. Weaving borders using a combination of silk and polyester is also undertaken by some weavers. The gold and silver content in the zari is also being reduced. This brings down the cost of the saree to a great extent. These procedures have adversely affected the reputation of the Kanchipuram silk sarees and are affecting their sales in a negative manner. The Tamilnadu government, TIFAC (Technology Information Forecasting and Assessment Council) and Tamilnadu Zari have jointly established a testing unit for zari in Kanchipuram, which checks the content of gold and silver in zari. This facility can be used by both co-operatives and individuals by paying a nominal fee. Weavers Service Centre, which is a unit of the Ministry of textiles in Kanchipuram, provides training and consultancy services in design and modernisation. Factors such as piling up of stocks and decline in working capital have now led the co-operative societies to offer discounts on saree prices. The government also offers a rebate on these sarees. Moreover, these societies also receive cash credit from the Union Government. These co-operative

societies are now beginning to advertise their product in an attempt to promote sales and reduce stock accumulation.

The Central Geographical Indication Registry approved the application for Geographical Indication Registration of the Kanchipuram silk saree by the Tamilnadu government. As per these norms, any saree sold as a Kanchipuramsaree should follow certain set standards regarding weight and zari and the saree should have been produced in the region. Legal action can be taken against anyone selling a duplicate sarees as a Kanchipuramsaree. The Tamilnadu Government is planning to allot a special logo to Kanchipuram silk sarees to certify their authenticity to protect the interests of the weavers. This industry has recently been passing through a crisis on account of the availability of fake Kanchi silk sarees.

The government has undertaken a campaign to abolish child labour from the Kanchipuram silk industry. Under this campaign, committees have been formed to scrutinize saree-producing units. Some loom owners have been charged with making use of child labour. To discourage the use of child labour, the government has developed equipment that performs the job of a helper. The Kanchipuram silk industry has managed to survive many highs and lows and has made its presence felt internationally. However, the biggest challenges faced by it today are undertaking modifications to suit changing customer preferences, use of modern technology and product diversification.

### **Innovations**

The saree has evolved in terms of textures and shapes have taken over the scriptures and art of the silk sarees. Each texture and desi have a name allotted to it with which it is best known. Thandavalam (Railway track) is one such patterned saree where parallel lines describe the saree.

### **Wearing the Attire**

Presence the lustrous silk, Kanchipuram has got the fascination of Wedding, Ceremony or any other festival. Since, silk is a thick weave; it is more suitable for cold climatic conditions, mostly suitable for the autumn and winter season.

### **Maintenance**

Dry cleaning is the favourite method. One should keep them outside plastic bags in a nicely folded state. One can use some pre-washing techniques as well.

### **Present scenario**

Nowadays, people have been showing lots of creativity when it comes to the **KanchipuramSarees**. Motifs like chariots, peacocks, lions, coins, parrots, mangoes etc can be seen on such sarees. Though the KanchipuramSaree industry in Kanchipuram is facing a big crunch due to increase in raw material and production cost, ladies have loved **Kanchipuram Silk Sarees** more and more. In fact, one **KanchipuramSaree** is considered a must in an Indian Woman's wardrobe.

As per the present statistical data reveals that there are around 60000 silk looms in operation in Kanchipuram. The yearly turnover of the town exceeds Rs. 200 crores, with exports of approximately Rs. 3 crores.

According to experts, the exports have not risen to their full prospective, as the demand for sarees outside India is negligible. Product diversification is being considered by the industry, which would positively lead to a rise in exports. Certain units have started weaving churidar sets in modern days to attract their teen age group of customers.. Some units are considering the production of furnishing. Most of German people interested to buy these silk sarees to decorate their inside house walls and also using as the wall panels during their occasion, festival season.

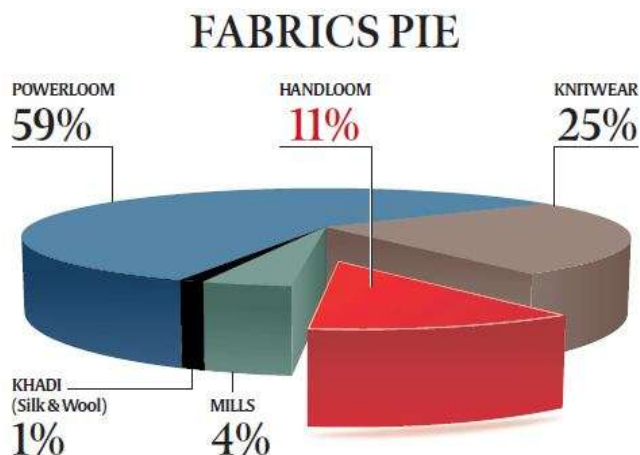
Extensive research has been undertaken to make the production process technologically sound, faster and better. The use of computers in creating designs is on the rise in these days. With increasing consumer favorites for low-priced, light-weight sarees, simple designs and light colours, many changes have been incorporated in the Kanchipuramsaree. Weavers have ongoing amalgamation silk and cotton for producing the body of the saree. Occasionally, the body of the saree is made in cotton and the border in silk. Weaving borders using a combination of silk and polyester is also undertaken by some weavers.

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Factors such as piling up of stocks and decline in working capital have now led the co-operative societies to offer discounts on saree prices. The government also offers a rebate on these sarees.

Furthermore, these societies also receive cash credit from the Union Government. These co-operative societies are now opening to advertise their product in an attempt to promote sales and reduce stock accumulation.

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The Kanchipuram silk industry has accomplished to survive many highs and lows and has made its presence touched internationally. Nevertheless, the biggest challenges challenged by it today are undertaking amendments to suit changing customer preferences, use of modern technology and product diversification.

The Handloom (Reservation and Articles for Production) Act, 1985, defined handloom as “any loom other than power loom”, and included 22 items such as pure silk and cotton saris, lungis, dress material, and towels. The list was whittled down to 11 items in the mid 90s. In 2012, a new definition was proposed: “Handloom means any loom other than power loom; and includes any hybrid loom on which at least one process of weaving require manual intervention or human energy for production.

### **Achievements of the Department of Sericulture**

Tamil Nadu continues to occupy numerous positions in the Country and has improved upon its performance over previous years in the following aspects: a) Average Cocoon Productivity per 100 silkworm layings is 73.900 Kgs. This has improved further during 2014-2015 from 71.50 kg in previous year. 49 b) 75.34 % of total productions is Bivoltine silk. The percentage of bivoltine silk has also improved further from 63.45% in 2013-2014. c) 52 % of layings to farmers are distributed chawkie worms as against 32% in previous year. d) Cluster Promotion Programme is being implemented in 28 different villages. Average Cocoon productivity per 100 silkworm layings is 75.54 Kgs as against 73.40 kgs in previous year e) Production of bivoltine (1207 metric tonnes) silk in the country during 2014-2015.

### **Problems of silk Industry in Tamilnadu**

There are various problems which are being faced by this industry. Some of them are

1. Inadequate supply of raw material.
2. Fluctuating price of raw silk.
3. Exploitation of weavers by middleman.
4. Lack of regular employment of weavers.
5. Lack of marketing and exporting facilities.
6. Generally the weavers are weaving the traditional floral design fabrics and find them- selves unable to changes their techniques and designs according the changing fashion time to time.



7. Majority of weavers belong to low income group hence suffers from ill health, poor housing, less schooling facilities for their children and medical facilities.

Keeping in view above problems the adequate and ready supply of silk yarn at reasonable prices is necessary for the healthy growth of the industry. Approximately 40% weavers of this industry do not have their looms, hence they have to work on daily wages and when the supply of raw material is inadequate they remain idle. The average monthly income of these weavers is also very low and these weavers live in slum areas and generally they suffer from various diseases. Therefore, it may be said, that the industry can subsist on profitable grounds only when it imbibes the spirit of constant change of perception, taste, design and size of the finished products and adjust itself to the world market situation.

### **Strategic approach for next three years 2017-18 to 2019-20**

1. Major intervention would be towards achieving self-sufficiency in import substitute bivoltine silk and bringing shift from cross breeds to improved cross breeds, to make Indian silk industry self-sufficient globally competitive by 2020.

2. Support to address critical gaps in infrastructure at stakeholder level viz., rearing houses, seed multiplication infrastructure with focus on large scale farming.

3. Attempts to improve the quality of silk yarn to international standards and reduce wastage, Automatic Reeling/ Automatic Duping Reeling units with focus on indigenously made automatic reeling machines will be undertaken.

4. In order to diversify the utility of silk, production of silk for diversified and non-textile purpose will be attempted with focus on development of silk industry.

5. In-order to promote Indian Silk in international market brand boosting activities will be taken up on large scale covering generic promotion of Indian Silk, brand building.

6. In order to achieve the target of producing **38500 MT** of quality raw silk to meet the domestic demand by the end of the year 2019-2020 and to make the import of bivoltine raw silk to zero, the Central Sector Scheme "Integrated Scheme for Development of Silk Industry"

### **Summary of findings**

(i) In Tamil Nadu, pure silk weaving is undertaken only on handlooms. There are about 90,000 pure silk looms in Tamil Nadu. The Central, as well as the State Government, have been in the past giving more importance to the development of sericulture without giving due importance to the silk handloom industry.

(ii) The various Government policies and programmes instituted over the years to aid the handloom industry had been intended for the cotton handloom industry. Only at a later stage the silk handloom industry has been eventually incorporated into these programmes.

(iii)The silk handloom industry has been facing problems relating to raw materials, finance, marketing and competition from the art silk industry. All these factors resulted in the large scale unemployment and underemployment among the silk weavers.

(iv)The Government thought of complete cooperative sector as the only solution to solve all the problems of the silk weavers. From 1977 onwards, there has been a phenomenal spurt in the growth of the silk Co-operatives in Tamil Nadu. However, still 12 % of the silk looms in Tamil Nadu are outside the Co-operative fold. Thus, the silk weaving industry in Tamil Nadu is both under the Cooperative sector and private sector.

(vi)The performances of the silk cooperative sectors are not up to the expectations of the silk weavers. If any of the societies find it very difficult to provide continuous employment to the weavers for want of working capital.

### **Suggestions**

The return on investment of silk societies reveals that a minimum reasonable return of about 20% is earned. Though the silk co-operatives are not eagerly after making profit, they have to stay on in the field of productions and sales and hence this return on investment assures their continuance in this field of activity. Further, it is evident that as much as 85% of the total cost of production is accounted by materials and wages. Hence a suitable method of materials management and labour management will definitely result in a considerable reduction in the cost of production.

Bankers may liberally extend financial assistance to all genuine weavers to improve silk handloom industry in the district. Silk handloom industry is cottage based one, and the entire work is to be carried on in the home of a weaver. As such, house is a basic requirement and a potential asset of a weaver. It is, therefore, felt that the State Government under the House-cum-work shed scheme may provide a puccha house to each weaving household that lives in a thatched hut. A puccha house is pre-requisite for a silk handloom household. It is because of the fact that silk handloom uses such inputs which are costly compared to cotton hand looms. Hence, silk handlooms necessarily are to be protected from the rain and the fire. The houses allotted under the scheme, would have provision for sufficient lighting and ventilation facilities which are so essential for a weaver who works on a loom for more than 8 hours a day. This facility would certainly enhance productivity of the industry as a whole in the district. Keeping in view the importance of Silk handloom industry in the economy of kanchipuram district silk weavers.

The silk handloom cooperative societies should be strengthened to help the weaver community to adopt new design and technology and diversify their products to capture much wider market. Necessary support should be provided to weaver communities for technological innovation of their production process. Nearly 86% of the member weavers reported that effective market support can improve the performance of the silk handloom sector. Nearly 52% of the member weavers held that assistance of technological innovation and better design can enhance the performance of the silk handloom sector in Tamil Nadu.

### **CONCLUSION**

Silk handloom is an eco-friendly industry, sustained chiefly by drawing an agro-product mulberry cocoons - as an input has an immense potential to significantly develop the economy of the district. The

study is concluded with following suggestions for the further development of silk handloom industry in the district. The bogus co-operative societies are to be weeded out and genuine ones are to be identified and supplied the inputs required to provide work for 300 days in a year to the weavers working under the cooperative fold. The government has undertaken a movement to abolish child labour from the Kanchipuram silk industry. Under this movement, committees have been formed to scrutinize saree-producing units. Some loom owners have been charged with making use of child labour in their loom area. To discourage the use of child labour, the government has developed gear that performs the job of a helper.

Most of the silk reeling units have become sick and closed and are not engaged in processing of raw silk for the past four years. Efforts may be made by the Government to revive the sick units which are under the State control. This goes a long way in the Development of Sericulture and Silk handloom industry in the district.

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