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“ENVIRONMENTAL RISK AND HEALTH OF WASHERMEN IN CHIKANKARI INDUSTRY”

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ABSTRACT

This research paper estimates the impact of washing clothes in river on environment and health of washermen working in Chikankari industry. The study is based on both primary and secondary data. The study of this research paper confirms that the washermen are suffering from various health problems and chemicals used for washing clothes which are also causing risk to environment. It is also analyzed that the washing products and chemicals (hydrochloric acid) used to wash the clothes also creating several health problems for the washemen. Therefore this paper suggests adoption of suitable strategies for improvement in the condition of chikankari washermen and also suggest measures to control environmental pollution.

Keywords: chikankari washermen, health, environment pollution

Introduction

The art of Chikankari embroidery of Lucknow is around 400 years old and is said to be brought in India by Noor Jahan (Jahangir's wife). This industry contributes significantly in the export sector of Uttar Pradesh. A piece of Chikankari cloth involves many hands in its production like cutting masters, tailors, printers, embroiders, washermen etc. This study is mainly concerned with the working environment and working conditions of chikankari washermen. The conditions under which these washermen are working is pathetic and also have a great bearing on their health, productivity, and efficiency. Their performance is affected due to working in extreme cold or extreme hot weather as it leads to hypothermia, heat stroke and sunburn. Working in rainy season also becomes difficult because of flooded river and many times they also come across various sting insects. The continuous exposure to water makes them sick due to bacteria, chemicals and pathogens found in it. Chikankari washermen also suffer from respiratory problems as they are also exposed to smoke of burn wood and use of traditional coal based irons. This study is also meant for the economic policy measures for controlling environment pollution. Washing of clothes requires application of various chemicals and hydrochloric acid which have a harmful effect on human and aquatic life. Since the washermen are totally depends on river water for their livelihood this study is very much contextual and worthwhile from the angle of decision making policy.

Review of literature

By standing on the major bridges of Lucknow one can have a clear vision of chikankari washermen washing clothes along banks of Gomti River. Washermen working in chikan industry are engaged in this profession since generations and called it their hereditary occupation. Some of the washermen think that only expert washermen can wash chikankari clothes but other are of the view that anyone can perform this job. Washing of chikankari clothes is a multistage process .Washing of clothes starts early in the morning and continue till evening i.e. almost 10 hours. In summers when workload is more they have to wash around 100 clothes per day. Clothes remain with the washermen for around four to five days. There is some relief in rainy season when the rivers are flooded with water and washing clothes in dirty and muddy water is difficult. Tanks can be used by them as an alternative to river water but they are costly

and limited in number. Blue printed synthetics are easy to wash with various washing products available in the market but washing pink printed clothes is a difficult task. Washermen soaked the cotton clothes in mixture called as “*Masala*” by them and additional soap and powders are used to remove the stains. The clothes are boiled in the clay pot called as *Matka*, over the fire in oven known as *Bhatti* (big logs of wood are used to provide the required heat which cannot be produced from cow dungs). Big plastic bins or plastic lined holes in the ground are used for soaking clothes. Large wooden boards on the riverside are used as washboards for scrubbing and beating of clothes. Hydrochloric acid is used to remove stains and rust marks on the clothes. Neel or blue is used to provide shining to white clothes. Ironing is done on the clothes by washerwomen and is the last step of washing. Traditional heavy coal irons and electric irons both are used by them for ironing of clothes. **Paine (1989), W.Wilkinson, M.Clare (1994), Gulati B (2004)**. She further investigated that continuously working in water for long hours and using of chemicals for washing has made their limbs pinkish and bleached, their feet and hands has develop cracks and their skin has become soft and swollen. **Neha (2014)**, While discussing the change in traditional practice of sustainability analyzed that previously bleaching on clothes was done with Goat dung , *Reetha* and *Rehu* (acidic salts extracted from the earth), which are replaced by bleaching powder, caustic soda, washing powder and baking soda. **S.S.A Jafri (2011)**, has attempted to study Chikancraft as a subsistence occupation and observed that washermen are stationary and either they collect the clothes themselves by the entrepreneurs or the clothes are brought to them by their agents and washing charges are decided between them according to number of pieces at fixed rate. He further gives his view that the entire family of washermen is engaged in washing, drying and ironing of chikankari clothes and ironing is generally done by the female members.

Health care, social and medical services are the basic services which are meant for people. These services include education, sanitation, food and nutrition, and availability of drinking water. This will help in ensuring equitable distribution among all sections of the society. They further analyzed that the people i.e. socially and economically backward groups are in need of these services the most and are the ones who are deprived of them. **Gulati Nayar (2004)**, on analyzing the impact of anthropogenic activities on the eco physiology of Gomti River. **Masih and Agha Parvez (2017)**, discussed that river Gomti also receives sewage discharge of the city like other rivers of the country. They further analyzed that contamination of water has not only

caused steady decline in fisheries but at the same time also affecting irrigation land and causing diseases to human beings. The pollutants in the river may cause toxic effects on aquatic animals and fishes, thus to avoid further degradation and depletion of river ecology, there is need of proper planning, designing and sound management. They suggested that positive and meaningful approach need to be followed. The findings of the study done in 2015 in University of California, Santa Barbara (USA) shows that microfibers generate through washing clothes reaches agricultural land, soil and in marine animals.

Objectives

The present research paper will assess the impact of environmental pollution on the health of washermen of chikan industry, and will also bring out the effect of washing clothes on environment. This paper will also suggest suitable measures based on the findings of the study for improvement in the condition of these washermen and suggest ways to protect river Gomti from pollution. Keeping in mind following objectives were identified:

1. To analyze the health of washermen working in chikan industry and impact of environment pollution on their health.
2. To study the physical environment of workers.
3. To study the impact of washing clothes on environment.
4. To study the impact of river pollution on the food chain.
5. To suggests measures for improvement in the condition of these washermen.
6. To suggest measures for controlling environmental pollution.

Methodology

The study is based on both primary and secondary data. Interview schedule was used to collect quantitative data from the sample respondents. In addition to this for collecting quantitative data, observation method is also used. Secondary data is collected from the researches done previously and from various government sites.

Description of Survey Area

The Gomti, Gumti or Gomati River is a tributary of Ganga. It originates from Gomat Taal from Pilibhit, India and meet Ganga near Kiathi, near Varanasi, India. After flowing 190 kms from its origin, the river Gomti enters into Lucknow, the capital of Uttar Pradesh, and becomes not only a river of the city but its lifeline.

Selection of Sampling Location

The preliminary survey was conducted for the selection of sampling points for the present study from Kurhiya Ghat, near Pakka Pul, Lucknow.

Survey

30 Washermen were selected as respondents for this study based on the random sampling method.

Tools of Data Collection

An interview schedule was prepared to collect the quantitative data from the sample respondents.

Socio Economic Analysis

This study analyses the social and economic aspects of the respondents. It also describes the demographic aspects like age and gender. Besides, it also analyses that whether their income is sufficient to sustain their livelihood.

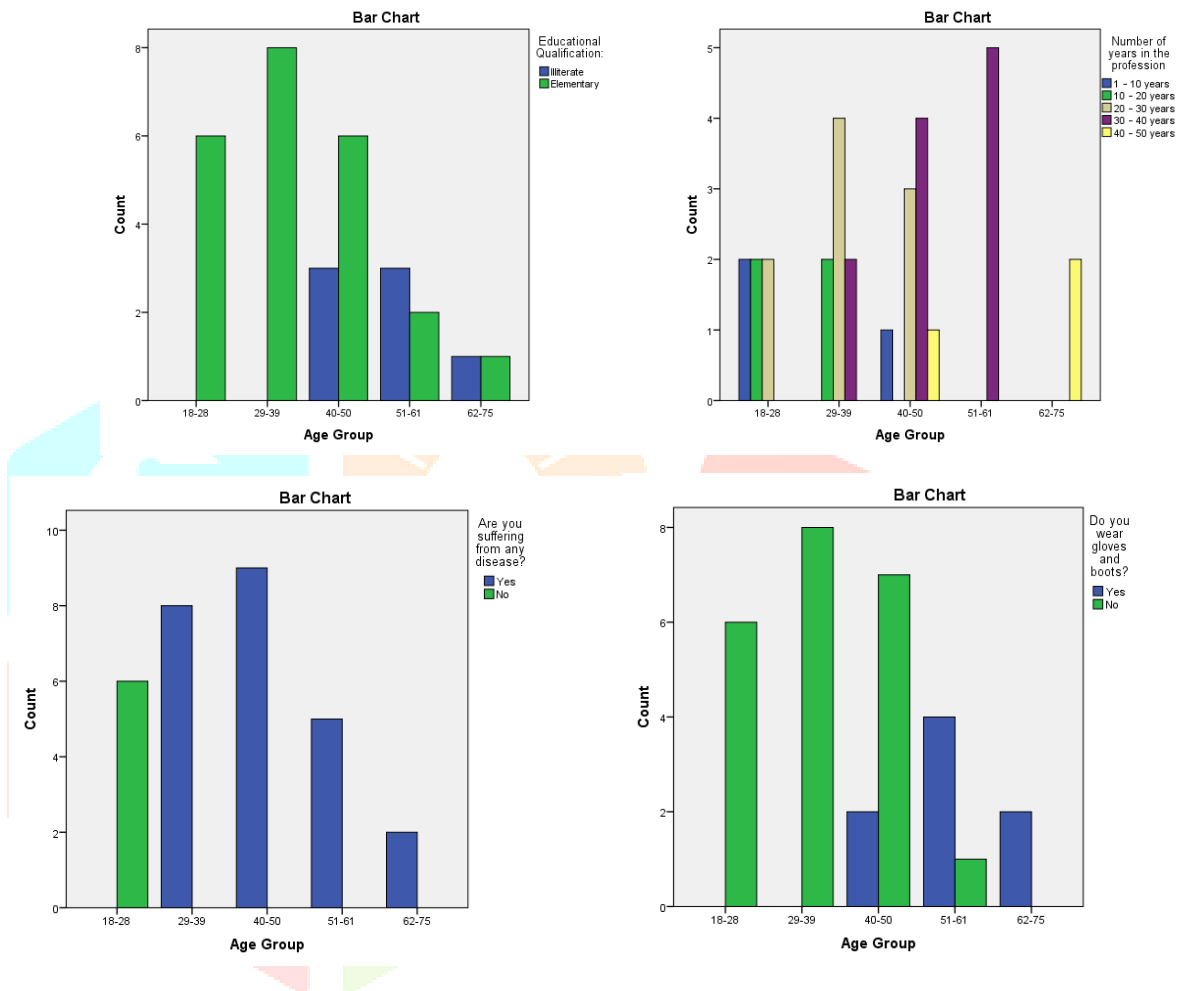
Socio Analysis

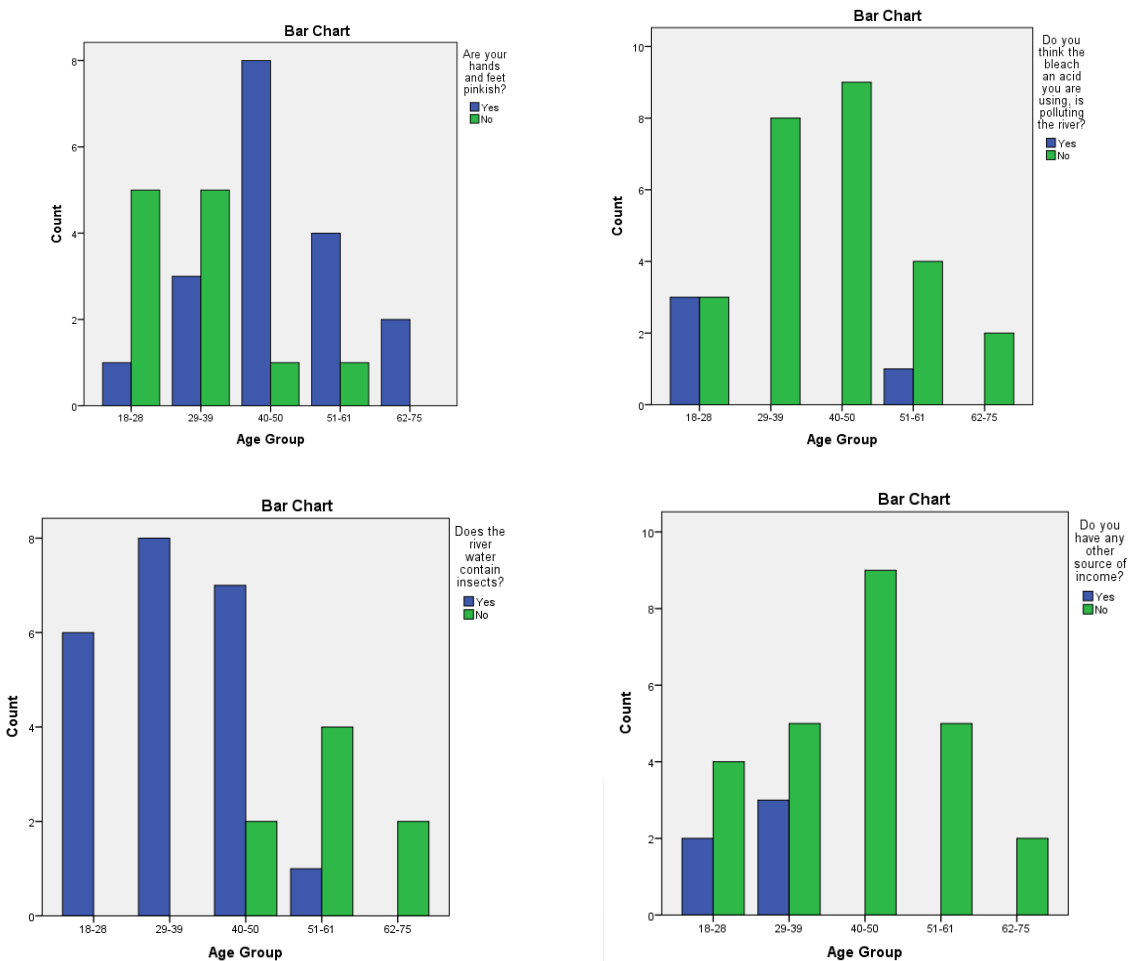
Social analysis describes the respondent's attitude towards environment, pollution and the various health problems which they are facing due to environmental degradation caused by river water pollution.

Environmental Assessment

The study analyses the short term and long term effects of washermen activities and the river and bank areas. It also identifies the ways to minimize or eliminate these effects.

Data Analysis and Conclusion





The washermen in chikankari industry has been totally dependent on the banks of river Gomti for their livelihood. But the increase in river pollution is adversely affecting their health and livelihood. They do not have other alternatives available with them except water tanks, which are costly and not easily available. The washer men spends almost 10 hours daily on the river bank because of which they are suffering from various skin related diseases, because of different chemicals found in the river and the banks are surrounded with sewage and plastic waste. The chikankari washermen had to work in all the seasons with little decrease in work load during rainy season. They have to work in extreme hot and cold weather and there is no availability of sheds, drinking water or bonfire there. Chikankari washermen when work in hot weather suffer from sunburn and heat stress and in extreme cold weather suffer from hypothermia. They are also exposed to various types of insects. Since the chikankari clothes are need to be cleaned in clay pots which are placed over the fire the washermen are also exposed to firewood. The wives of washermen have the responsibility of ironing the chikankari clothes but they used traditional coal based irons and suffer from chest pain and other respiratory problems. Environment is also effecting because now various chemical based detergents,

washing products and hydrochloric acid are used for removing printing stains and washing clothes, earlier goat dung, *reetha*, *rehu* and acidic salt extracted from earth is used for the same purpose. A study done in California also reveals that synthetic fibers shed microfibers in water which are consumed by aquatic animals and is not only dangerous for them but for the whole food chain who consumed those aquatic animals. As earlier chikankari was done on pure cotton cloth but with change in fashion it has also started on synthetic fibres which shed microfibers.

Suggestions

- Proper shed facility should be provided at various river banks which is the workplace of washermen.
- First aid facility should be there for treating cuts and burns while working.
- Best quality boots and gloves should be provided to the washermen at reasonable rates.
- Such clothing should be worn by the washermen which is protective.
- There should be facilities for warmth, shelter and fresh drinking water.
- Sewage treatment system and water disposal system should be installed at all the workplace of washermen.
- Efforts should be made to build separate '*dhobi ghaats*' for washing chikankari clothes so as to save the environment as well as providing clean work environment to these workers.
- Necessary steps should be taken to provide education so that they find other sources of employment.
- Organic and chemical free detergents should be used for washing clothes.

Limitation of the Study

This study has its limitation in terms of selection of research area. Only one *dhobi ghaat* known as 'Kurhiya Ghaat' was analysed. The sample was also restricted to just thirty.

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