



PROBLEMS FACED BY GOLDSMITHS – A STUDY WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO COIMBATORE DISTRICT

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ABSTRACT

Gold jewellery has been an inevitable part of the lives of human being right from the Bronze Age. Talented goldsmiths made gold ornaments with utmost devotion, dedication and precision. Jewellery adorning the deities since time immemorial is the creations of goldsmiths having high degree of artistic skill and aesthetic sense. Traditional goldsmiths who once received royal patronage are hit badly during the last two decades due to mechanization and withdrawal of Gold Control Act. In the early years of mechanization, several goldsmiths in Coimbatore committed suicides due to un repayable debts. Today, incidents of suicides have reduced, but many have left the profession and are forced to choose an alternative employment due to low orders and low income. This article reveals the social and occupational background of master goldsmiths in Coimbatore district of Tamil Nadu.

Key Words: Jewellery, Gold Control Act, Jewellery manufacturing process, problems of goldsmiths

1. INTRODUCTION

A goldsmith is a metal worker who specializes in working with gold and other precious metals. From older times itself, goldsmith is the only clan who with utmost devotion and dedication took up making gold ornaments and articles as their traditional occupation and carried it on till day. In this process they acquired high degree of artistic skill in the field. The extra ordinary skill that requires making highly aesthetic ornaments with precision is inherent in goldsmiths. All those masterpieces adorning the deities from ancient days are the creations of goldsmiths. All these ancient and modern ornaments depicting extra ordinary beauty and high degree of artistic splendour exhibit their artistic genius in this field. Gold jewellery has been created right from the Bronze Age by talented goldsmiths. Goldsmiths held high ranking status in the hereditary caste system within the Sudra group of the social categories of India. Out of all metal workers, the status of a goldsmith attributed ritual purity. The goldsmith is popularly known as sonar in the north, and that tatanachary or tattaasari in the south. But with the passing time and industrialisation the importance of gold smiths are getting reduced greatly. Due to these issues it could be seen that many of the goldsmiths are committing suicide due to burden of loans up on their shoulder. It can also be seen that majority of the gold smiths have left their hereditary profession and are forced to choose alternative employment due to low orders and low income.

2. STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Goldsmiths led comfortable lives making jewels for established retail outlets and taking orders from families during weddings and other functions. All these things changed since the late 1990s with the advent of imported jewellery making machines and with the withdrawal of Gold Control Act in 1990. Customers are now flocking to the jewellery showrooms instead of placing orders with goldsmiths. Huge collections of readymade jewels with eye-catching and enthralling designs offered by jewellery shops have induced consumers to prefer jewellery marts rather than goldsmiths to buy gold jewellery. The growing popularity of machine – made gold jewellery have a detrimental effect on goldsmiths. Non- availability of work and low wages has forced many highly skilled second or third generation goldsmiths to search for alternate employment. In 1990, each district in Tamil Nadu had more than 5000 goldsmiths who were actively engaged in jewel making. But today the number has been reduced to less than 1500 goldsmiths. At present, there are only 600 goldsmiths in Coimbatore district. At this juncture, an attempt has been made to study the Occupational and Economic Background of Goldsmiths in the Coimbatore District of Tamil Nadu.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To analyse the problems faced by goldsmiths in Coimbatore District
- To provide suitable suggestions for solving the problems of goldsmiths.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research adopted for this study is descriptive and analytical in nature. It basically seeks to extract information regarding gold smiths in Coimbatore district. The study is based on primary as well as secondary data. Primary data has been collected through Personal Interview Schedule from the area of study. The secondary data mainly comprises of data from published records, journals, web sites and publications. For collecting the information, the researcher adopted the Convenience Sampling Method. The sample size taken for the study is 120 respondents. Simple Percentage Analysis is used to analyse the collected information.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

- The study is limited to 120 samples from the Coimbatore District.
- The study is based on samples and sampling methods. So, the study has been affected by the inherent limitations of the study through samples and sampling techniques.
- The researcher was constrained by the time and cost factors.
- The study on occupational background depends on numerous factors and wide range activities performed. It is a daunting task to quantitatively estimate the behavioural aspects.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

1. **Ananthapadhmanabha Achar (2013):** conducted a study on, „Impact of Globalization and Liberalization on Jewellery Artisans“. The main objective of the study was to understand the functional dynamics of the cluster and to analyze the nature and strength of current stakeholders of the cluster. This study was based on Mangalore jewellery cluster. The information collected from the interactions and deliberations with the key stakeholders in the cluster i.e., artisans, entrepreneurs, trade associations and the institutions supporting the cluster. The study was conducted during July 2010- March 2011. It revealed that, due to liberalization and globalization new international jewellery brands from China, Italy and Indonesia entering into the business. So, the traditional goldsmiths are facing competition. The limitation of the study is that, it only focused on the disadvantages of liberalization and globalization on goldsmiths.
2. **Subhashis Sahu, Biswajit Roy and Subhabrata Moitra (2013):** conducted a study on, „Assessment of Lung function Status of the Goldsmiths Working in an Unorganized Sector of India“. The study was aimed to investigate whether the occupational exposures to fumes and gasses might alter the lung functions of the goldsmiths. The primary data were collected from 184 goldsmiths, from various places of India. ANOVA, regression analyses were used to test the objectives. The study observed that, long exposure to gases and fumes were significant risk factor for pulmonary fitness amongst the goldsmiths of Indian unorganized sector. The study concentrates only on one aspect of goldsmiths“ life, which is health; other aspects like economic and social factors are not considered.

3. **Tirthankar Ghosh, Banibrata Das, Somnath Gangopadhyay (2010):** Gold ornament making industries are one of the widespread small-scale industries of India. These industries belong to the unorganized sector of the state. A large number of goldsmiths are working there for prolonged period in cross leg posture at semiconfined workstation. From the observation and analysis of the result it was concluded that health of the goldsmiths were highly affected improper body posture and workload. Twisting, bending, and over-reaching are the resultant of poorly designed workstation. These actions force them into a non-neutral position that increases the overall discomfort and pain at the lower back, neck, and shoulders. Moreover, lack of proper illumination at work site also exerts an additional adverse effect on the health of the goldsmiths

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA

Among the 120 respondents considered for the study 58% are male and the remaining 43% are female. Majority of the respondents belongs to the age group of 30 - 45 years (57%). 80% of the respondents have an experience of 20-30 years in this field. The monthly income of the gold smiths is between Rs. 10,000 – Rs.20, 000 and 80% of them opined that they could save only an amount less than Rs. 5,000 per month from the earnings they make. The study also showed that small ornaments like earrings, short chains etc are mainly produced by them and for other items they are having only few orders.

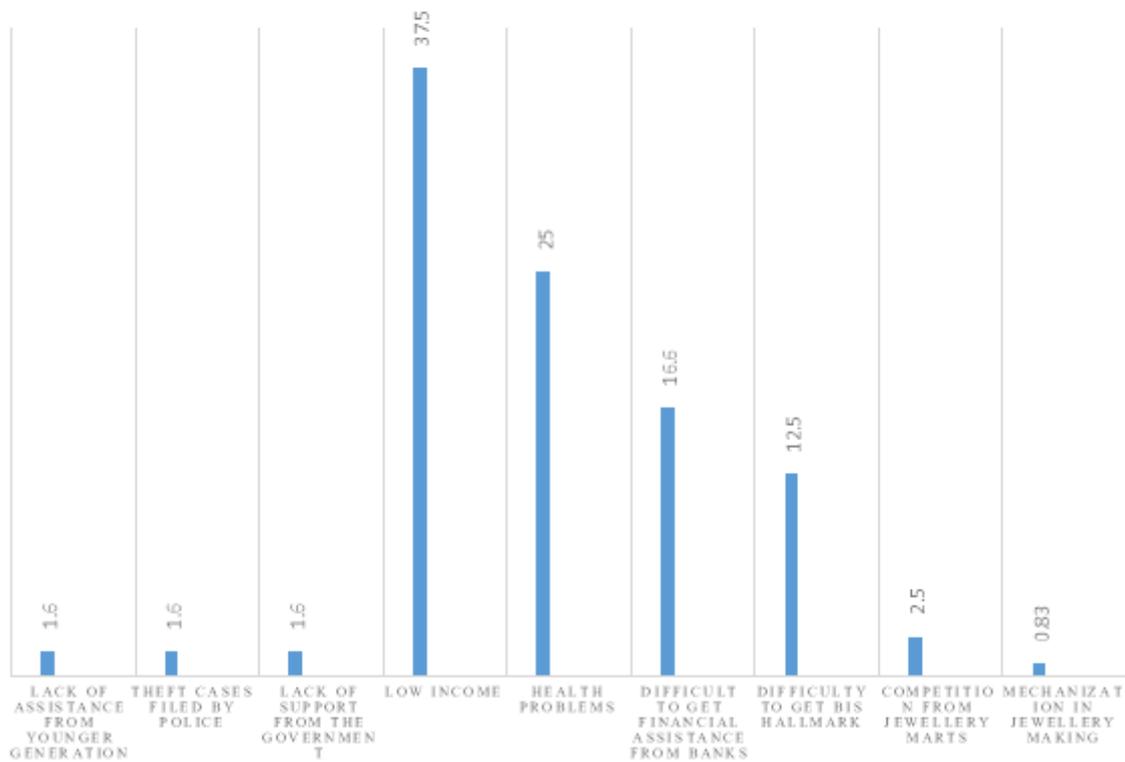
TABLE NO.1

PROBLEMS FACED BY MASTER GOLDSMITHS

| SI No | Problem | No of respondents | % of respondents |
|-------|--|-------------------|------------------|
| 1 | Lack of assistance from younger generation | 2 | 1.6 |
| 2 | Theft cases filed by police | 2 | 1.6 |
| 3 | Lack of support from the government | 2 | 1.6 |
| 4 | Low income | 45 | 37.5 |
| 5 | Health problems | 30 | 25 |
| 6 | Difficult to get financial assistance from banks | 20 | 16.6 |
| 7 | Difficulty to get BIS hallmark | 15 | 12.5 |
| 8 | Competition from jewellery marts | 3 | 2.5 |
| 9 | Mechanization in jewellery making | 1 | 0.83 |
| | Total | 120 | 100 |

Source: Primary data

CHART NO.1
PROBLEMS FACED BY MASTER GOLDSMITHS



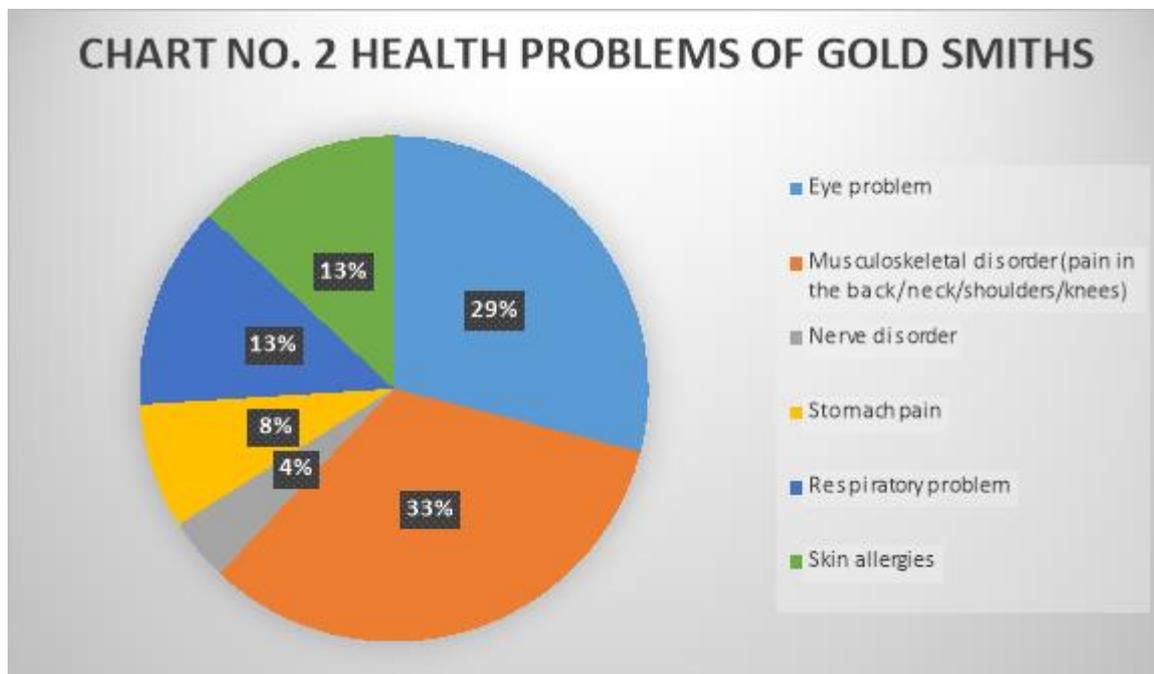
From the table it is evident that the gold smiths of Coimbatore are facing a number of issues. Around 45 respondents are of the opinion that they are getting a very low amount as earnings from this profession. 30 respondents said that they are facing serious health issues due to this job like back pain, gastric issues, etc.. 20 respondents said that it is very difficult to get financial assistance from bank and other financial institutions. 15 respondents said that it is very difficult to get BIS hallmark for the ornaments made by the goldsmiths. A few of the respondents said that they are not getting enough assistance from their younger generation, theft issues and cut throat competition also affected them badly.

TABLE NO 2

HEALTH PROBLEMS FACED BY GOLD SMITHS

| SI No | Health problems | No. of respondents | % of respondents |
|-------|--|--------------------|------------------|
| 1 | Eye problem | 35 | 29 |
| 2 | Musculoskeletal disorder (pain in the back/neck/shoulders/knees) | 40 | 33 |
| 3 | Nerve disorder | 5 | 4 |
| 4 | Stomach pain | 10 | 8 |
| 5 | Respiratory problem | 15 | 13 |
| 6 | Skin allergies | 15 | 13 |
| | Total | 120 | 100 |

Source: Primary data



The above mentioned table makes it clear that gold smiths are facing numerous health issue. 33% of the respondents are of the opinion that they are facing musculoskeletal disorders. 29% are facing eye problems and 13% are having respiratory and skin problems. Few of them are having nerve disorders (8%) and stomach pain (4%).

FINDINGS

- a. The study reveals that gold smiths are not getting enough income from this job so as to meet the both ends of their life.
- b. It can be understood that majority of the respondents are facing musculoskeletal disorders as they are continuously sitting in one place and doing their work.

SUGGESTIONS

- a. Government and other financial institutions should introduce various financial assistance schemes in order to support them financially.
- b. Master goldsmiths should learn new technologies and upgrade their skills. For this purpose training programmes should be undertaken.
- c. Goldsmith Associations should function effectively in order to get their demands fulfilled by the government and other local authorities.
- d. Training institutes can be set up in all the districts to train young minds and the art of goldsmithing can be offered as a vocational education course by Universities in Tamil Nadu.

CONCLUSION

The study reveals that there a number of problems faced by gold smiths in Coimbatore District. They are not able to make enough earnings from this job. Also they are facing a lot of health issues as they are sitting in a specific place and working for the whole day. They are getting orders for small pieces of ornaments and orders are mainly from jewellery shops rather than from consumers. So they earn only a moderate income from jewellery making. Increased cost of living has forced almost all the goldsmiths to borrow loans mainly to meet their personal requirements. Only a few goldsmiths do not save even a meager amount of Rs.500 per month. Goldsmiths could save only a little amount due to moderate income and huge expenses. The economic background of most of the master goldsmiths is low when compared to jewellery retailers in the study area and they are the least benefitted people in the jewellery industry though Indian Jewellery Industry is the second largest foreign exchange earner of the country. It could be concluded from the study government and other local authorities should take necessary steps to help the gold smiths otherwise they will be forced to leave their hereditary profession.

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