CHAPTER VII

The Weavers, Society and the East India Company in the Seventeenth Century

The Seventeenth Century saw the heyday of the Honourable East India Company. Like the proverbial camel in the Arab's tent, the East India Company had come to stay. It became an inevitable part of the politics and economy of South India and found its way into the society and even the vocabulary of the local people. The 'Kumbini' as they called it was not be ignored. As with the rest, the spinners and weavers, the washers, dyers and the once powerful textile-merchant guilds had their links with the Company factories. Of course, there were a few who operated independently of the Company, but their proportion was marginal.

The positions of the various professional weavercastes was in a state of flux and one major indication of the changes was the mobility of the weaver-castes but in certain areas the traditional caste continued. The Kaikkolars were still heard of in the Tamil country and one very interesting reference to them comes in the caste disturbances that took place towards the close of the Seventeenth Century.

In the Diary and Consultations of Fort St. George on 15th January 1708, it was recorded that both the left hand

1 Cited in C.S. Srinivasschari, 'Right-hand - and Left-hand Caste Disputes in the early part of the Eighteenth Century, P.L.H.C., Vol. XII, Gwalior December 1929, P.73
and the right-hand castes had complaints against the 'Kaicullawarr' weavers because they were very fickle and sometimes declared in favour of one caste and sometimes in favour of the other. The Sālēswar are referred to in the Company records as ancient inhabitants of the Tamil country with whom a direct contract was signed for the delivery of coarse and fine unbleached neckcloths. The Sālēswaru seems to indicate the Telugu Sālēs but since they are referred to as ancient inhabitants they were probably the Saliyar who are the earliest weaving community to be mentioned in the Chola inscriptions. Another weaver caste with whom the Company is said to have entered into direct dealings around the same period, i.e., 1694, were the Janrawars who are said to have "lately come from Kāveripākkam." This apparently was one of the groups which had become mobile in search of economic opportunities. Their immigration into the Tamil country from Andhra five years earlier is also recorded in the Consultation of 1689-90. "The President, having for several years used his utmost endeavours and interest in this and other countries to invite and bring as many of the several castes of weavers to inhabit and settle their families and trade in this town..."

2 Diary and Consultation, 19th Nov. 1694, P. 131
3 Inscriptions relating to the Saliyas and the relationship between the Telugu Sales and the Tamil Saliyas is discussed in the beginning of Chap. II of this thesis.
4 Diary and Consultation, 19th Nov. 1694, P. 131
having been long treating with the Jānrawār (inhabiting Canerese and Telegu districts) a fine caste of weavers, persuaded near fifty families of them to come hither. To whom, after having viewed and allotted them ground (in Peddamsikpetts) separate from other castes of weavers and other conveniences for their trade and worship, gave them a cowl (charter). Apart from these traditional castes, the weavers also came to be known by their specialisation and perhaps these formed into new castes. For instance, the Caingaloon weavers meant those who wove cloth destined for the Malsy archipelago since the word Kain in Malsy means cloth and eulon means rolled. The supply of gold thread to the Caingaloon weavers at Armagson is referred to in a Company letter dated 1629 and they were also involved in the major left-hand - right-hand up in the 1650's. Similarly, the Mambaloom 'Painters' are also referred to, i.e., those who specialised in the production of painted chintz. The Mooree weavers produced superior cotton cloth used as base for chintz making. The name seems to indicate that they were Muslims. The Devanga weavers

6 See Glossary of textile terms in this thesis
7 Foster, 25th June 1629, p.342
8 Ibid, The Text of Brahmins Declaration 4th April, 1654, p.256, also see p.241
9 Ibid, 26th Oct. 1646, p.52
10 Ibid, 4th April 1654, p.256
of the Andhra and Karnatskas regions continue to find mention in the inscriptions of the period. One new caste of weavers emerged in the South especially in Madurai and nearby areas in the seventeenth century, i.e., the Saurashtras or the Paṭṭunūlkārans.

The Saurashtras claim to have a long history of migration. According to their tradition, their earliest home was the Saurashtra region. In the Mandasor inscription dated A.D. 473\(^\text{12}\) a class of silk weavers called 'Paṭṭavāyakās' (the sanskrit equivalent of Paṭṭunūlkāran) are said to have constructed a temple to the Sun God in A.D. 437 and to have renovated it 40 years later. The record praises them as excellent weavers of silk and skilled in archery\(^\text{13}\) and states that they originally immigrated from Lats (Gujrsat). After their evidence there is no documentary or epigraphical information to trace their further migration into South India. However, the various stages of their emigration from Saurashtra right till Madurai is covered in a unique folk tradition known as Bhovlas.\(^\text{14}\) This was a sort of question and answer session

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11 E.C., Vol.X, Ch.2 dated 1600, E.G., Vol.XII, H1 31 dated 1656, etc.

12 Fleet, Gupta Inscriptions, No.18. See also Indian Antiquary Vol.15, 1886, Page 194, No.162

13 The peculiar affinity of weavers to the soldiering profession was not unique to the Paṭṭunūlkāran. For instance, even the Kakkōlēs are referred to in the Chola period as 'muttuval-perra Kāikkōlar' because of their skill in sword fighting. This point is discussed at some length in Chap.II.

14 One of the most reliable versions of this literary tradition is to be found in Yuchido Norihike, Oral Literature of the Saurashtras (India, 1972), pp.47-52. However, there are different versions of the Bhovlas with slight variations
which took place between the bride and the groom at the
time of engagement. According to this tradition, the
Saurashtra emigrated from Somnath towards Nagaradesh
(Lata, South Gujarat) Devagiri (Daulatabad), Vijayanagar
and Madurai. Apart from these major places a number of
other places are also mentioned, mainly pilgrimage centres,15
but these point to efforts at self-glorification rather
than to the actual facts. There is one very striking aspect
about these stages of migration that make them historically
plausible. Somnath was the first to come under Muslim
attack (the invasion of Mohmud Ghazni) and the regions
subsequently mentioned all came under Muslim sway at one-
time or the other. Another, more practical proof of the migratory
pattern of the Saurashtra is the peculiarity of the Saurash-
tran dialect called Patnuli. This is a mixture of Marathi,
Canarese, Telugu and Tamil vocabulary.16 Their ethnic
affinities also lend credence to these traditions regarding
their origin.17 The epigraphical reference to the

perhaps depending on the particular locality in which a
group came to settle. Thus, the Saurashtra of Kilakkulam
mention apart from Madurai even Tirunelveli and Papanasam
in Tanjavur (Ibid, PP.51-52) Other versions of the Bhoylas
are to be found in I.R. Dave, The Saurashtrians in South
India (Rajkot 1976) PP.32-34. etc. A much earlier version is
to be found in Saurashtra Brahman Charitram (no author)
(Madurai, 1914) P.15. Some of the authorities cited to prove
the veracity of these traditions are The Skandapurusa, the
Bhagavad Gita, etc! (Ibid, P.5)

15 Yuchido Norihiko, op.cit, P.47 and PP.50-51
16 An excellent analysis of the Patnuli is to be found in the
same book. Ibid, Chapter II. Also I.R. Dave, op.cit.
Chapt.IV.
17 J.H. Nelson, Manual of the Madurai District, (Madras, 1868),
P.87. Also I.R. Dave, op.cit. P.40 etc.
Pattunulkaran comes from Pattisvaram (near Kumbakonam, Tanjore district). The extent to which they replaced the Kaikkolas as the dominant weaving caste in the Tamil country cannot be gauged since the Company records begin to refer to weavers by their mode of textile specialisation rather than by their caste nomenclatures.

An ancient proverb of the Pattunulkaran weavers says "If you have money, dipswali, (the Hindu festival of lights) if not a Pota (bamboo reel for winding yarn)". The saying is apt, for the fortune of the weavers was a fluctuating one - from conditions of near prosperity in times of European competition to starvation deaths in times of famine. There was considerable stratification among the weavers. The 'cooly' weavers and painters seldom rose above the poverty line and could not even put the cloth on the loom without an advance. In times of famine they also had to be supplied with rice. The master-weavers, on the other hand employed artisans under them and some became merchants themselves.

18 A.R.E. 257 of 1927 from Kumbakonam
19 E. Thurston, Castes and Tribes, op. cit, Vol.III, P.31
20 Yuchido Norihiko, op.cit P.144, No.22
21 Diary and Consultations, 1st March 1654, P.238
22 Ibid., 22nd June 1693, P.100 Simon Halcomb's paper. Also refer William Langhorne's statement - Ibid, 28 Sept.1675, P.74
23 Foster, 4th April 1654, 'The Brashmins' Declaration', P.362
competing with the Company in the internal and external trade.24 Any estimate of the standard of living of the weavers vis-a-vis other social classes must remain a highly tentative one because of the following limitations:

(a) Inadequate data on the incomes of weavers and other social groups; (b) the disparate information on the paddy prices which are not steadily available over the years nor are they continuously available for a specific region and (c) the artificial level of cloth prices maintained by the East India Companies through their contracts with the merchants.25 Keeping in view all these limitations one can still attempt a very broad and tentative study of the standard of living of the various social groups.

The earliest reference to the wages of artisans comes from the account of Methwold. (1688-22). He says that the average artisan was paid 3 pence a day 26 and there was very little variation in the wages of the lower class of artisans.27 This works out to an income of roughly 2½ rupees per month. This was the standard wage of the weaver, the smiths and others. A domestic servant was paid between 4 shillings 6 pence and 5 shillings per month, i.e., around Rs.2.28

24 Ibid., 5th Nov. 1694, PP. 121-22. The factors lament that two merchant-weavers - Namashavay and Bussaporte had won over all the weavers to their side and were employing them in the production of Manilha cloth.

25 Refer to the table attached to this thesis and also P. 40 of Chap. VI. For a similar view see Debendra Bijoy Mitra 'Cotton Weavers of Bengal' (Calcutta, 1978), P. 62 and table IV.

26 W.H. Moreland (ed.) Relations of Golconda, op. cit P. 27

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid.
Methwold says that a palanquin bearer was paid no more.

A Dutch record of 1652 states that a weaver was paid $3\frac{1}{2}$ *panams* (or *panams*) for the production of a Guinea cloth.\textsuperscript{30} (35 yards). Since a weaver working on an ordinary loom can produce between 3-3\frac{1}{2} yards in a day, he may be estimated to produce around 26 pieces of Guinea cloth in a year, i.e., his monthly wages must have been roughly between $2\frac{1}{2}$ to 3 rupees. Compared to the weaver the diamond worker in the mines was paid much less for according to Tavernier (1641-1667) they earned only $\frac{1}{2}$ rupee per month.\textsuperscript{31} Streynsham Master (1680) on the other hand, gives the wages of a miner as nearly Rs.4 in money and corn.\textsuperscript{32} He also gives the wages of the washerman as Rs.1 per month\textsuperscript{33} and the servants as ranging from Rs.3\frac{1}{2} to 7.\textsuperscript{34} Thomas Bowry (1669-79) gives the wages of a peon (not much higher than a domestic servant) at Rs.2 per month.\textsuperscript{35} That wages did not show much variation over the years is demonstrated by the fact that in 1737-38, the monthly wage of Rs.5 demanded by the Bombay weavers was considered a high figure.\textsuperscript{36} In 1790 a weaver

at Vishakapatnam earned Rs. 4 per month and at Cuddalore the earnings of the weavers ranged from Rs. 3½ to Rs. 5½ per month. 27 During the same period a sepoy in the army was paid only Rs. 7 per month. 38 A 100 years earlier, i.e., 1694, a sepoy was paid Rs. 8 and the record states that previously his wage had been only Rs. 2. 39 It is extremely interesting that Buchsnam (1807) describing the situation at the turn of the century should state that while a weaver of fine cloth could make as much as 8 pence per day, (i.e. around 6½ Rs per month) a weaver of ordinary cloth earned 3 pence per day, (i.e. 2½ Rs per month) 40 precisely the same figure Methwold gave two centuries earlier. Buchanan also comments that the weavers were much better off than those engaged in agriculture. Roughly during the same period the spinners were paid much less only 1 d to 1½ d per day. 41

As with the incomes of the weavers, the cloth prices paid by the Company also show only negligible variation. The price of ordinary long cloth always averaged around 25 pagodas per Corge 42 and that of Sallampores 14 Pagodas

38 Ibid
39 Diary and Consultations, 22nd Feb. 1694, P.12
40 Hamilton Buchanan, A journey from Madras through the Countries of Kanara and Malabar, 3 Vols (London 1907) Vol.I, P.216
41 Elijah Hoole, Madras, Mysore and the South of India, (London, 1844), P.48
42 Ref. Table attached to this thesis in Chap.VI
per Corge right from 1675 to 1700 irrespective of pressures on the production front due to famines, wars etc.

In contrast to the wages of weavers and cloth prices, the price of paddy which constituted and still constitutes the staple diet of the common people in South India, shows considerable fluctuation. In the following table an effort has been made to show the fluctuations in paddy prices from 1675 to 1700. Even from the limited evidence available it is clear that the price varied considerably spatially, from region to region and also over the years. In times of famine the price of paddy shot up by nearly 400 per cent. During the 1688 famine a maund of paddy at Masulipatnam cost Rs. 2, while the wages of a weaver ranged only from Rs. 2½ to Rs. 3 per month and that of other classes was even lower. In 1694, again a time of famine, wages remained constant at 2-3 rupees per month. Paddy sold at Madras at Rs. 1.8 per maund, while the price of cotton thread at the same time was around

43 Ibid.
44 Foster, 27th Dec. 1630, pp. 117-18, Letter from Henry Sill and others at Armagaon to factors at Armagaon. The factors themselves comment on the inefficiency of such a method because the merchants compensated themselves by squeezing the weavers who ultimately reacted by running away, resulting in serious shortfalls in supply.
45 Refer Table. Price of paddy in 1688 at Masulipatnam. Also see 1694. at Madras when the cost of paddy doubled itself.
46 Letters to Fort St. George, 13th March 1688, P. 26
47 See discussion on the weavers incomes in the previous pages of this chapter.
48 Diary and Consultations, 26th Nov. 1694, P. 134
## Price of Paddy in the 17th Century at Periodic Intervals of Time

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Price</th>
<th>Price in Rupees</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
<th>Quantity in Kgs.</th>
<th>Price per Maund in Rupees</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1685</td>
<td>Masulipatnam</td>
<td>1 Pannam</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>48 measures of paddy at 30-32 shillings</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>The company complains that although the market rate was 48 measures for one Pannam they could get only 30-32 measures for the same.</td>
<td>Foster, 27th December 1685 P.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1685</td>
<td>Madras</td>
<td>3 sols (3 pence)</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>5 pounds</td>
<td>2.31</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td></td>
<td>Travels of Abbe Carre, Vol. II, P.696</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1685</td>
<td>Madras*</td>
<td>2 Pagodas</td>
<td>16 Rs.</td>
<td>1 candy of paddy</td>
<td>740</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
<td>The Diary and Consultation Master, 1st Jan. 1677, P.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1685</td>
<td>Madras</td>
<td>8 Pagodas</td>
<td>around 24</td>
<td>1 grace of paddy</td>
<td>4000</td>
<td>108</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ibid, 23rd December 1678, P.150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1685</td>
<td>Madras</td>
<td>33 Pannam</td>
<td>16 Pagodas</td>
<td>1 grace of rice</td>
<td>4000</td>
<td>108</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1685</td>
<td>Madras</td>
<td>22 Pannams</td>
<td>1 grace of rice</td>
<td>4000</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1685</td>
<td>Madras</td>
<td>1 Re.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7 maunds or rice</td>
<td>258</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td>Dispatches from England, 12th Oct., 1687 P.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1685</td>
<td>Madras</td>
<td>12 Pagodas</td>
<td>1 candy of paddy</td>
<td>740</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td></td>
<td>Letters to Fort St. George, 15th March 1688, P.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1685</td>
<td>Madras</td>
<td>5 Pagodas</td>
<td>5.6 mercall of paddy</td>
<td>380</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot; &quot; P.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1685</td>
<td>Madras</td>
<td>1 Pannam</td>
<td>5.5 pounds of paddy</td>
<td>1.5 kg</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>1.75</td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot; &quot; 16th July 1689, P.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1685</td>
<td>Madras</td>
<td>24 Pagodas</td>
<td>1.75 grace of paddy</td>
<td>7000</td>
<td>188</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td></td>
<td>Dairy and Consultation, 23rd December 1687, P.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1685</td>
<td>Madras</td>
<td>1 Pagoda</td>
<td>25 mercall of paddy</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ibid, 18th March 1685, P.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1685</td>
<td>Madras</td>
<td>1 Pagoda</td>
<td>13-14 mercall of paddy</td>
<td>150-140</td>
<td>3.5-3.7</td>
<td>0.95-0.65</td>
<td>This constituted company fair price in time of famine</td>
<td>Ibid, 20th Sept.1694, P.100 and 19th Nov.1694, P.130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1686</td>
<td>Madras</td>
<td>1 Pagoda</td>
<td>7 mercall of paddy</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>1.71</td>
<td>Madras region badly hit by famine</td>
<td>Ibid,28th Nov.1694, P.134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1686</td>
<td>Madras</td>
<td>1 Pagoda</td>
<td>20 mercall for land: paddy</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>Jadiya fear of Madras robbing the country intially brought more grain into the market cheapening the price.</td>
<td>Letters, 20th June 1696, P.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1686</td>
<td>Madras</td>
<td>25 Pagodas</td>
<td>1 grace for sea paddy</td>
<td>4000</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>The letter uses two peculiar terms sea paddy and land paddy. Not defined in Hob-Job. Seye price of sea paddy has risen since land paddy has become scarce. Perhaps the chief distinction lay in the mode of transportation of the paddy.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1688</td>
<td>Madras</td>
<td>1 Pagoda</td>
<td>70-100 mercall of paddy</td>
<td>380-400</td>
<td>10.3-10.6</td>
<td>0.32-0.30</td>
<td></td>
<td>H. J. Love, Vestiges of Madras, 1840, 1800, Vol.I P.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1700</td>
<td>Madras</td>
<td>1 Pagoda</td>
<td>30-50 mercall of paddy</td>
<td>4000</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td></td>
<td>Lov Vol.I, P.252</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1733</td>
<td>Madras</td>
<td>25 Pagodas</td>
<td>50-60 mercall of paddy</td>
<td>4000</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1784</td>
<td>Madras</td>
<td>80 Pagodas</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>1 grace of paddy</td>
<td>4000</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>The day that advice was received of peace with Tippoo, the price of rice fall from 115 to 80 Pagodas per maund.</td>
<td>Hobson-Johnson vol.364</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The Diary and Consultation of 25th January 1876, P.78 gives the price of Bengal rice as 0.50 Rs per maund and compares it with the price of rice in London which was 18-22 shillings (i.e. Rs.7.32) per maund. The factors contend that considering the enormous difference in price, it is cheaper to import rice from the Bayoar, the Coromandel Coast.

Rs.5 per maund. Even from the limited examples cited it is clear that the wages lagged far behind the prices of the necessities. Wars, however, had at times a peculiar effect on paddy prices. In a letter from Fort St. George dated 20th June 1696, the Agent says that they had stored up about 100 garce of paddy (4000 kg) and 40 garce of rice since paddy was being sold at 20 mercall (200 kg) per pagoda because "the fear of the Maratha army coming to rob the country hath induced the farmers to bring their paddy hither in considerable quantities for sale." But this constitutes an unusual occurrence and by and large both wars and famines did tend to inflate prices. While on the one hand paddy prices and the price of cotton etc. shot up during times of famine and other troubles, both wages of the weavers and the price of cloth were kept artificially constant by means of the contract. The merchants compensated for the squeeze from above by pushing the weavers below the

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49 Diary and Consultations, 1st May 1693, P.74
50 Letters from Fort St. George, 20th June 1696, P.57
51 Foster, 1659, P.257 pp. Also Diary and Consultations, 15th April 1672, P.4, P.6 etc.
level of subsistence. The short sighted policy of the Company could have but one effect. The weavers violated their obligations and fled from the place, resulting in bad debts and serious short falls in supply. The hopeful opinion was held by some factors that famines would bring more cloth into the warehouses at cheaper rates because the weavers would have to work twice as hard to survive. The argument is fallacious because beyond a point even this incentive for survival could not be there. What did happen were starvation deaths on a large scale and change over to other professions.

53 Foster, 27th Dec. 1630, pp.117-18, Letter from Henry Sill and others at Armagason to factors at Bantam. The factors themselves comment that even in times of famine they were able to get the cloth from the weavers at the old prices. C.f. Debendra Bijoy Mitra, The Cotton Weavers of Bengal op.cit pp.62-63 ff. Also see Table IV.

A commercial report by George Morton Pitt, the Governor of Fort St. George dated in the last quarter of the 18th Century demonstrated how, if the price of cloth was kept fixed at a time when the cost of raw cotton and yarn was rising, the only consequence would be a reduction in the share left to weavers, leading to serious shortfalls in supplies. By the table provided by Pitt it is clear that in average years the percentage share of weavers' remuneration was around 35, but, when the harvest was bad and the price of thread rose, it fell to a level as low as 10 per cent in the case of coarse varieties - Home Miscellaneous Series Vol.383, pp.261-2 - K.N. Chaudhuri, op.cit.P.267

54 Dispatches, 29th Jan 1736, P.31, P.63, K.N. Chaudhuri, op.cit P.365

55 Foster, 23rd Sep.1648, P.215, Ibid, 26th Oct.1646 P.55, etc

56 Diary and Consultation, 20th March 1722, P.48 cited in K.N. Chaudhuri, op.cit. P.269
Famines occurred with great frequency throughout the Seventeenth Century. Famine broke out at Masulipatnam in 1630-32. Price of cloth soared and cloth became scarce and the factors wrote to Bantam "the major part of both weavers and washers are dead, the country being almost ruined .... occasioned by the great dearth of rice and other grain". In 1647 famine raged in the Madras region as well as at Masulipatnam. The factors at Fort St. George reported that 3000 had died at Madras while San Thome and Pulicat lost five times that number. "People gave themselves for slaves to any man that will but feed them." Ivy, the President at Fort St. George wrote to the President and Council at Surat "How violent the famine hath been here is not to be credited .... here is not above one-third of the weavers, painters and washers living of what were formerly. This hath made cloth 15 per cent dearer..." Ivy also reported that cloth was very scarce and shortfalls in supplies were expected to last three years. In 1659 famine again broke out at Masulipatnam and continued until 1661.

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57 Foster, 31st Jan., 1632, P.P. 203-4
58 Ibid. Also see Ibid 2nd Nov.1630, P.70 and 27th Dec.1630, p.p.117-18 for further accounts of the famine of 1630.
60 Ibid., 26th Nov.1646, P.55
61 Ibid, 9th Oct. 1647 P.163. It is however to be noted that seldom did the company upgrade the price of cloth in times of famine. In fact the old rates were artificially maintained - See Foster, 27th Dec. 1630, P.117
62 Foster, 4th January 1647, P.70
63 Ibid, 17th Jan. 1659, P.263 etc.
64 Ibid, 11th Jan 1661, P.402
In 1673 there was a severe famine at Madras. In 1688, famine recurred at Masulipatnam and Madras which can be termed the most severe in the entire century. The price of paddy increased by 400%.65 The last decade of the century again witnessed a famine in 1694–95 at Madras.66 Grain was imported into Madras from Godavari delta, from Visakhapatnam, from Ganjam and even from Bengal.67 Many merchants indulged in the dubious practice of making a profit out of grain.68 So also perhaps did the East India company which managed to store up more than 100 garce of paddy and 40 garce of rice.69 This was the time when the weavers no longer worked for a wage but for payment in paddy which was given in advance.70

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65 Letters to Fort St. George, 13th March 1688, P.25. Also 16th July, 1689, P.37
66 Diary and Consultation, 26th Sept. 1694, P.100; Ibid 19th Nov.1694, P.130; Ibid, 26th Nov.1694, P.134, etc.
67 Original Correspondence, 16th Jan.1695, Vol.50, No.5960; Dispatches, 31st Jan.1696, P.41 cited in K.N. Chaudhuri op.cit P.207
68 Ibid, p.207
69 Letters, 20th June 1696, P.57
70 Diary & Consultation, 19th Nov.1694, P.130
In many respects the social position of weavers in the 17th century stands in sharp contrast to their position in the earlier phases - that is the Chola and Vijayanagar periods. From the few rare inscriptions of this period it appears that weavers guilds did survive into the seventeenth century but they were no longer a privileged group. Lack of royal patronage had destroyed much of their importance if not their initiative. The numerous records endowing them with social and ritual privileges in the heyday of the Vijayanagar empire are virtually absent in this period. Instances of individual or collective endowments by the weavers are noticeably rare. But nevertheless they were made and contrary to the theory that all local and caste organisations began to decline from the Vijayanagar period onwards, one finds the survival of weaver and merchant guilds and even local and caste assemblies right into the seventeenth century.

Reference to a collective donation by the weavers guild comes from Tiruppulivansam, Chingleput district in the year 1678. (Sri Ranga III who was virtually the last ruler of Vijayanagar died in 1672 A.D.). The people of the Nadu and


74 This is a major aspect of Stein's arguments which recurs in all his articles and in his book (Peasant, State and Society, New Delhi, 1980) op.cit see Chapter IV Supra.

75 A.R.E., 356 of 1928-29
Desam of the Kaikkola guild made a provision for mid-day offerings and worship to the God Palesvarasvamin. Yet another record (undated) from Kaliyapettai, Chingleput district, registers a cowle (Charter) given to the weavers of Kanchipuram by Angalgu Krishnappangaru, the agent of Kasturi Rangappas Nayskar and the founder of the village after his master. The weavers also made several joint donations to temples in cooperation with merchant guilds and other professional groups. In 1680, at the initiative and leadership of the Ayyavole, one of the most ancient guilds in South India, a joint gift was made to the God Nanjundesvara of Lepakshi-Sthala (Hindapur Taluq, Anantapur district) in which the Tantuvayins (weavers) and Devangas (Telugu weavers) contributed certain fixed rates on looms. Similar contributions were also made by other specialised castes in textile production like rejakas (washermen), vastra-bhedakas (cloth dyers) and vastra-rakshkas (tailors) and professional castes like the potters, barbers, etc.

76 The Kaikkola guild is said to have been divided into 4 disai nāḍūs, 18 kilsi nāḍūs and 72 nāḍūs. The kaikkola corporate organisation has been discussed in Chap.II of this thesis.

77 A.R.E. 411 of 1923-24

78 A.R.E. C.P. 18 of 1917-18

79 Another instance of a fixed contribution from looms being made by weavers comes from Kallidasikurichchi, Ambasamudram taluq, Tirunelveli district, dated A.D. 1597 where the Kaikkola-Mudalis made a gift of 10 panam on each loom and ½ on each cooly (cooly loom). A.R.E., 318 of 1916-17

80 A.R.E., C-P.18 of 1917-18
again under the leadership of the Ayysvole, all the professional castes of Arsikere (Hassan district) who were adherents of Vira-saivism made a joint donation to the temple of Siva - an addedu (?) of grain being paid by the shops of the cloth-sellers, tailors, goldsmiths and grain dealers and for each loom of the Billimagga (weaver caste) and Devanga (Telegu-Ksnerese Weavers). In another instance from Koratagere (Maddagiri taluq, Tumkur district), the Devanga weavers made a joint contribution at the rate of 1 hans (Pansm) per house for Kamatesvara Durga Mahakali under the leadership of the Pansalam. The record is dated 1656. The only instance of weavers casting images and setting up deities in the temple, an expensive form of temple service comes from Kadiramangalam (Kumbakonam taluq, Tanjavur district). In 1789 the weavers of Kadiramangalam had new images of Drupadi-Dharmaputra cast for the temple and made an agreement to contribute 1/8 of a rupee per year for the worship.

Some rare instances of individual donation also exist. Valudinasaksaperumal Ulagamuludum Nikkachcheydan, a Kakkola landlord owner constructed the temple of Mayakkuttan in Perungulam (Srivasikuntam taluq, Tirunelveli district).

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81 E.C., Vol.V, Ak.94
82 E.C., Vol.XII, Ml-31
83 A.R.E., 36 of 1945-46
84 Ibid
85 A.R.E., 244 of 1932-33
There are a few instances of grants of land being made to weavers by the temples in recognition of their service to the temple. In 1632, the Kaikkōla-Mudalis of Pallikkondai who performed for the Uthara Ranganathaswami temple, the service of bearing the image of the God in procession, were given a hereditary grant of some land and a portion of the Prasadam (offering to the deity) 86. The Kaikkōlas of Valikandapuram in Teviyur (Perambalur taluq, Tiruchirapalli district) were given 200 Kuli (.66 acres) of wet land for the service of bearing the deity Sribali Naysaka. 87

The quarrels between the various castes over the question of privileges extended into this period. These disputes continued to be contained in the root-paradigm of the Idangai (left-hand) and Valangai (right-hand).

Interestingly, in the few epigraphical records pertaining to the Kaikkōlas in this period they are referred to as "Senguntar", their alternative caste name 88 by which they are known in present times. This seems to suggest that the

86 A.R.E., 472 of 1925-26
87 A.R.E., 287 of 1943-44
88 Both the terms Senkumtam and Kaikkōl are to pertain to a peculiar hook-like weapon used by the Cholas warriors. The Kaikkōlas formed a regiment in the Chola army and were known as the 'terinja Kaikkōlas'. See Chap. II supra for a discussion of this point.
Kaikkōlās became downgraded socially and it is extremely significant that even now the term "Kaikkalsav" is a term of abuse in the Tamil country. The social degradation of the Kaikkōlās is however only a surmise which cannot be substantiated in terms of actual evidence for this period. However, only social degradation can account for such rigorous attempt to change their nomenclature and glorify themselves. A copper plate from Rasipuram (Salem District) gives a long panegyric of the Senguntar community referring to all their legendary exploits. In another record known as the 'Morur Kangeyar' copper plate, the Senguntar of the Idangai are said to have performed a great act of sacrifice as a reward for which they were paid annually 12 panams from contributions levied by all communities like the oil men, the artisans etc. The Paṭṭunūlkāran weavers are, for the first time, mentioned in the inscriptions in connection with a fight over privileges. At Kumbakonam (Tanjore District) during the

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89 The text of this inscription was provided for me by C. Raju of Erode and Kavignar Kandasami of Rasipuram. The full text is published in Sengunta Malar, silver jubilee number, (Coimbatore, 1976).

90 The incident known as 'vellansī venradu' in which the Kaikkōla warriors captured a terrible bandit and then spared him in their magnanimity is narrated here. Another legendary exploit was the self-sacrifice committed by thousands of Kaikkola warriors to provide inspiration to Ottakkutur (a famous poet who flourished in the 12th century and was himself a Kaikkola) to write the Itti Elupatu. These legends find detailed reference in their community literature like the Sengunta Prabandha tirēṭṭu, op-cit. Also see Chap. II supra for a brief discussion of the same.

91 The text of this inscription was given to me by C. Raju, the epigraphist of Erode. This is also published in Sengunta Murasū No.15, November 1975.
period of Tirumalsi Nayak, a quarrel broke out between the Paṭṭunulkārans i.e. literally silk weavers and the Chetties over the question of precedence in the matter of receiving betelnut on marriage occasions. The issue was resolved by determining that a cloth, some betel leaves and nuts were to be given to the goddess and then to the Chettis and Paṭṭunulkārans simultaneously. The record makes a very significant point - that the Paṭṭunulkāran weavers had emerged in a pre-dominant position in the Tanjore region. Social privilege did not merely mean the claiming of certain symbols of ritual precedence but sometimes even extended to social legislation. An extremely interesting example of social legislation comes from Honnavalli (Tiptur Taluq, Tumkur District) in circa 1600. The record states that the various castes of Honnavalli village like the Devanga weavers, the washerman and the potters, made some regulations about women who lapsed from marriage. The inscription is cryptic since it offers no explanations for a legislation of this sort but it is nevertheless a proof of the continued activity of caste organisation and local assemblies in the seventeenth century.

The only attempts at claiming a brahmanical status among the weaver castes were made by the Paṭṭunulkāran weavers which again indicates that they were probably

92 A.R.E., 257 of 1927
93 E.E., Vol.XIITp.130
economically on the ascendant during this period. In A.D. 1704 in Madurai on the occasion of Avani Avattam (an suspicious day in the year when the holy thread is changed) 18 Saurashtra "brahmins" were arrested by the officials at the behest of the brahmins for performing rites forbidden to them. When the issue came up before Rani Mangammal she resolved it in favour of the Pattunulkaran or Saurashtras. If this evidence is reliable then this record provides an interesting example of 'sanskritisation' in this period.

However, as in the earlier periods the main protagonists of the weaver castes in the social sphere were not the brahmins but the other Shudra castes. Seventeenth century traveller Fryer makes a very penetrating comment on the attitudes of the various castes. The brahmins by virtue of their superiority kept out of social wrangles.

"But the most insolent were the artificers; as the engravers, refiners, goldsmiths, carpenters, and the like, who behaved themselves not only disrespectfully to their superiors but tyrannically to those of a viler rank, as the husbandmen and labourers. Whereupon they jointly

94 This inscription is said to have been found on the west wall of the shrine of Sri Venkatesh Perumal at Madurai. This is said to be the main piece of evidence presented by the Saurashtras to be Superintendent of Police to bolster their claim to brahmanical status - See The Caste Questions in the Saurashtra Community, (Madurai 1941)

95 This copper-plate inscription has not been mentioned in the Annual reports of South Indian Epigraphy and one cannot vouchsafe for its veracity.
conspired their ruin, and with that their own slavery, taking the Moors to their assistance who not only reduced the usurpers to composition, which was that they should be accounted the scum of the people and as base as the Holencores (Scavenger caste) and not be permitted to ride in a palanquin at their festivals... but on horseback which they count as high disgrace; but they (the Moors) also took power into their own hands which though despotic the gentus endure".96

The left-hand - right-hand conflicts and social tensions generated as a result of the clamour for social privileges among the lower castes took on a new complexion during the seventeenth century. In the Vijayansagar period all such conflicts had centred around the temple and had mainly involved precedence in temple honours and ritual recognition. But in the seventeenth century all conflicts between the left-hand and the right-hand castes were invariably related to the company and its interests and the scene of many of these caste fights was the black town which lodged the weavers, merchants and other artisans affiliated to Fort St. George. The company faced the task of legislating and regulating the affairs of the entire Madras region. Thomas Pitt, the Governor of Fort St. George in the closing years of the seventh century once said in desperation

"I never met with so knotty a villany in my life, nor even with anything that gave me so much trouble and perplexity as this (the left-hand - right-hand factionalism) has done."\(^7\) Pitt ultimately had to resign his governorship because of his failure to handle the left-hand - right-hand issue properly.\(^8\) He was however not the first to leave under a cloud over this same issue. President Ivy and his successor Greenhill had been equally harassed by the problem.\(^9\) Greenhill was in fact personally involved in the quarrels.

The first major left-hand - right-hand conflagration occurred in 1650-52. The company's chief merchants, the brahmins Venkata and Kannappa who had held office under Ivy\(^10\) (1646-47) were sought to be replaced by Seshadhri and Koneri Chetti\(^1\) (Balsijiga Chettis or Komati which are used as synonymous terms in the records) who had originally held this post under Greenhill. The brahmins had the support of the then president Baker.\(^1\) Accusations and counter-accusations were hurled by both the parties and the entire black town population of which the weavers, 'painters' (i.e. weavers of Chintz) and washers formed a sizeable part, were dragged in. The weavers took advantage of the insecure position of the

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90 Foster, Volume IX, 1651-54, Passim
100 Foster, Vol.IX, 1651-54, Introduction, p.XXXVII
101 Ibid.
102 Ibid, P.246 and Passim
brahmin chief merchants in Greenhill's regime to decamp with the advance made to them. As a punitive measure, Rudriga and Timmanns (the supporters of Seshadri) the brokers were imprisoned while the brahmans went unpunished because of Baker's intervention. In 1651 the first caste war broke out in the black town and following this President Baker made his award on 5th Nov. 1652 determining the various streets through which the left-hand and right-hand castes could pass with regard to their weddings and funerals and any violation of this was punishable by a fine of 1000 dollars.

By 1653 tension had again begun to mount fanned by the brahmans on one side and the Komatis on the other. The Beri Chettis took a stand against the Komatis (due to competition for the company's contract for cloth). The brahmans declared that Timanna and Rudriga tried to persuade the 'Mooree' and 'Caingsaloone' weavers to put themselves under Seshadri's protection but only the Mooree weavers joined him. Seshadri provoked a left-hand - right-hand quarrel by inciting the Moorees to take their funeral procession through the West gate forbidden to them. The 'painters' also eventually

103 Ibid
104 Ibid
105 Ibid, P.135
106 Ibid, 29th Jan.1653 PP 152-3
107 Moorees were Muslim weavers specialising in the weaving of a particular high grade cloth, while the Kaingsaloon weavers specialised in the weaving of cotton cloth for the Malay archipelago. For both terms see the Glossary of textile terms in this thesis.
108 Ibid, P.256
109 Ibid
joined Seshadri. They were persuaded by Seshadri to quit the black town in protest. Precisely the same accusations were hurled by Greenhill and his supporters at the brahmins. In a document titled 'Charges against the Brahmins by the painters, weavers and others inhabiting Chennapatnam', the brahmins were accused of creating a rift among the painters and winning the support of the cooly painters. As a result with their support the Brahmins got themselves appointed the Samaya mantri, i.e. head of all the right-hand castes in Madras. This statement is extremely interesting since it shows that the painters 'weavers of chintz' were classified as right-hand. The other weavers like the Kaikkolar were classified with the left-hand. On the incitement of the brahmins a section of the weavers left the black town in protest. After the painters came to town again, a quarrel

110 Ibid, P.233
111 Ibid, P.238
112 Ibid
113 The Kaikkoläs were consistently classified with the left-hand castes - see Chap.II Supra for elucidations. In the left-hand - right-hand dispute in 1707 the Kaikkoläs declared for the left-hand castes - see Srinivasa Iyengar's article in P.I.H.R.C. op.cit P.72. However the Kavarai, a caste of weavers are referred to by Abbe Carre as having belonged to the right-hand (Abbe Carre op.cit. Vol.II, P.595).
114 Foster, 1st March, 1654, P.240
115 The use of the terms 'weavers' and painters as synonyms in this context shows that the 'painters' were also 'weavers' but only of the Chintz variety.
was sought by the brahmins with a goldsmith for tenancy the same house in spite of his low birth. The Caingsloone weavers seem to have been victimised by them. The brahmins also seem to have played a double game with the bera chettis, sometimes siding them and sometimes opposing them. The brahmins as sameys mantris collected 100 pagodas from the inhabitants of the black town and levied a contribution from the washers. When a fight broke out between the Pallis and the painters the brahmins supported the Pallis upholding their right to take out their marriage and funeral processions limiting the Balijawar to

116 Foster, 1st March 1654, P.240. The statement shows that the position of the Kammalan had fallen considerably from what it was in the days of the Vijayanagar empire when they vied with the merchants for social honours. Their fall in social status in the 17th century is also obvious by the traveller Abbe Carre's comments (1673) that "the Kavarsai weavers are far more esteemed than the Goldsmiths, carpenters and blacksmiths". Abbe Carre, op.cit. Vol. II, P. 595

117 Foster, 1st March 1654, P.241

118 Ibid, PP.239-41

119 Ibid, P.243

120 The Pallis are basically an agricultural caste and in this particular instance they are clearly in opposition to the 'painters'. But the traveller Abbe Carre (1673) says of them "The Pallis are Painters, who do the designing and tracing of the first lines in the manufacture of printed calicoes and stuffs". (Abbe Carre, op.cit. Vol. II P. 595). The explanation is not as contrary as it seems because it is likely that it was the Pallis who actually did the painting and had some sort of altercation with the 'Painters' (actually weavers).
the Komati Street. The quarrels lasted till 1654 when the courts decided the case in favour of Greenhill, recalled Baker for his partisan attitude and dismissed the brahmins.

The East India company, by virtue of its jurisdiction over the artisan and merchant population of the black town was compelled to get involved in caste questions and social issues. In 1672 the President of Fort St. George had to determine the proportion of contribution (in Paddy) to the temple (not specified) by the various castes. Anyone who violated the regulation would have to pay to the company a fine of 12 pagodas. The company seems to have respected caste feelings and the records show that a washerman's street was made alongside the potter's street separated by the Gentoo Street (Brahmin street?). The company conceived of an extremely interesting idea of winning over the black town population by forming a joint corporation, having members from the East India Company as well as the local population. The dispatch from England dated 1687 expounds this idea in a masterly manner:

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121 Foster, 1st March 1654, P.239. This incident figures in Greenhill's accusation and also in the brahmins' declaration, Ibid. 4th April 1654, P.256
123 Diary and Consultation, 13th Aug. 1672, P.131
124 Ibid
125 Ibid, Oct.1675, P.76
"If you could contrive to form a corporation to be established of the natives mixed with some English freemen... we might give the members of that corporation some privileges and pre-eminences by charters under our seal that might please them (as all men are naturally with a little power) (Sic) ... and it is not likely but the heads of your several castes, being made Aldermen and some others Burgesses, with power to choose out of themselves yearly their mayor and to tax all the inhabitants for a town hall or any public buildings for themselves to make use of.... and wise governments may so manage such a society as to make them proud of their honour and preference and yet only ministerial and subservient to the ends of the government"(!) The company further made the wise injunction that in the nomination of aldermen no two members of the same family or the same caste were to be appointed but "to mix the castes that you might always hold the balance."128

126 Dispatches, 25th Sept.1687, P.90, para 80
127 The same idea was expressed by Napoleon more than a 100 years later when he revived the practice of giving honours and titles saying, "what do people care for equality, all that they want is glory".
128 Foster, 28th Sept. 1687, P.92, para 97.
This idea of forming a grand corporation of the various castes did not work out. The only time the castes worked in harmony was when the company sought to impose a tax for meeting the military expenses on the black town population. The castes combined to the detriment of the company's interests and organised a strike against the enhanced taxation. Otherwise caste tensions continued resulting in the second major flare up in 1707. The main issue was the competition between the left-hand and right-hand merchants for securing exclusive trade contract with the company for the procurement of textiles. The right-hand merchants had so long held exclusive contract for cloth and when in 1694 the company sought to give Moods Verona's place to Japa Chetti a merchant of the left-hand caste, the right-hand caste merchants protested. The company however, finally chose to form a joint stock consisting of both left-hand and right-hand caste merchants. Timmappa and Allingsall from the right-hand caste and Bassapra, Japa Chetti and two "weaver-merchants", Namashavaya and Bussaporte from the left-hand castes were made the company's chief merchants.

129 Madras Reports, 1686-92, 3-7; 1, quoted in the travels of Abbe Carre (ed) Fawcett, op.cit, on P.596.
130 Diary and Consultation, 5th Nov. 1694, P.122
131 Both these weaver-merchants were originally competing with the East India Company in certain export markets - Ibid, 26th Nov.1693, P.134.
132 Ibid. 5th Nov.1694, P.123
In 1696, the company was called upon to settle the quarrel between a goldsmith and a 'cooly chetti', employed by the Dutch as their merchant in Ternapatnam. The minor caste tensions of the 1690s combined with the major issue of an exclusive contract for textiles, to produce the great caste war of 1707. The issue began when the right-hand castes attempted a massacre of the left-hand castes on 26th June 1707 following a dispute between the two groups about taking wedding processions through certain streets.

Thomas Pitt wrote to Sir Edmund Harrison on 8th December 1707 explaining the origin of this quarrel which was seemingly based on such a petty issue:

"The grounds of these dissentions and what led the right-hand castes into this hellish conspiracy, I find to be that it had firmly been practised among them that the left-hand caste could not make any bargain or buy any goods unless one of the right-hand were joined with them to direct their shares, so that they governed the trade as they thought fit and the company's investment fall generally under their management ... To break the neck of which I put up papers upon the sea gate and other public places to encourage all merchants indifferently to bring in goods to be sorted out by the company's masters. The left-hand castes (who are

133 Letters, 17th June, 1696, P.57 and P.66
134 Diary and Consultation, 26th June 1707, cited in Srinivasachari op.cit., P.68
the only merchants that can serve you in this method being intimidated by threats of the Right... were prevailed upon by the assurance of our protecting and defending them. The Right-hand upon seeing their designs defeated and that the reigns of trade were no longer in their hands, fell upon this barbarous attempt to regain it, industriously spreading false remours amongst the poor and ignorant people to cause them to desert us..."135

The significance of Governor Pitt's statement can be seen by the fact that the dispute between left-hand and right-hand castes over marriage processions immediately followed the sale of the company's broadcloth to some merchants of the left-hand and the purchase of textiles from the merchants by the company at the Seagate.136

On 20th August all the right-hand castes left the black-town taking with them the washerman caste, the Mukuv or fishermen caste and some of the artisans.137 Galloway and Vincatte acquainted the company's board of enquiry that the factions were "more upon their making the investment for the company than that of the streets."138 and till these disputes were over nothing could be done. The Keikkolar caste of weavers as also the oilmen caste played

135 William Hodges, op. cit. Vol. III, P.113
136 Diary and Consultation, 26th June 1707, cited in Srinivassachari, op. cit. P.68
137 Ibid. p.79
138 Ibid.
a peculiar role in these quarrels sometimes siding with the right and sometimes with the left which led to bitter complaints against them and they were compelled to make their final decision and they declared for the left-hand castes.  

Thomas Pitt, the then Governor, failed to settle the issue of the left-hand – right-hand castes effectively, leading to his resignation. The factionalism between the two groups essentially over the question of the company's contract for cloth but apparently over flags and symbols recurred sporadically and in spurts throughout the eighteenth century - in 1725-30, 1746 and in 1786.

From the evidence presented so far on the social position of the weavers in the Seventeenth Century, it seems quite plausible to conclude that their position had undergone great vicissitudes since the heyday of the Vijayanagar empire. While they still retained some initiative and some bargaining power, their prospects were gloomy. They were steadily being drawn into greater and greater dependence on the company for their survival, in the process losing their independence.

139 Diary and Consultation, 15th January 1708, cited in Srinivasachari, op.cit. p.73
140 William Hodges, op.cit., Vol.III, pp.113-15
141 Dealt with in Chapter VI of this thesis.
The period of magnanimous donations to temples, of acquisition of economic, social and ritual privileges from the state and the temple was over and the weaver community records of the seventeenth century striving so desperately at self-glorification read more like an apologia. It must be noted that the East India company had a demoralising effect not only on the weavers but the majority of the artisan castes. Their administration had a long-time detrimental effect not only on handlooms but on handicrafts in general. The position of the weavers in the seventeenth century reflects what can be regarded as the beginning of the end for handlooms and the weavers.
This thesis has endeavoured to trace the vicissitudes of the weaver communities in the light of the changing fortunes of the handloom industry in medieval South India. The position of the weavers has been studied with reference to three distinct periods. The first period, i.e., from the ninth to the thirteenth century, was characterised by flourishing trade conditions, powerful guilds, village assemblies and caste-based armies. The second period, i.e., fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries, was the period of Vijayanagar domination. This period witnessed renewed urbanisation, the growth of trade under royal patronage and commercial wars between the Golconda and Vijayanagar kingdoms. Towards the end of this period, i.e., the close of the sixteenth century, Portuguese power was established at Goa. The introduction of this new element into the commercial politics of the area signified a crucial change.

The seventeenth century which represents the third period constitutes a watershed in the history of Coromandel textile trade. This period can be sub-divided into three phases. Its opening decades witnessed a keen commercial competition among the Moors, the Portuguese, the Dutch and the English and the indigenous merchants, the Chettis. This was the phase in which whatever the weavers produced
was bought up and they were in a strong bargaining position vis-a-vis the Companies. The middle decades were distinguished by the great commercial struggle between the Dutch and the English. In the closing years of the century, Dutch power was clearly on the wane and the English East India Company was gradually working towards a commercial monopoly. But the last decade of the seventeenth century which witnessed the triumph of the English East India Company in India, also saw the victory of protectionist interests in England and the passing of the first of the prohibitory laws against the importation of Indian calicoes.

In the framework of this periodisation, this thesis has endeavoured to analyse the socio-economic position of the weavers. In the period of the Chola and Vijayanagar empires, the weavers, like other professional groups, formed a part of the temple complex but they catered not only to the needs of the temple and the locality, but also to the foreign demand for textiles. Two types of economies existed side by side - one which met the demands of the immediate local market by the sale of cloth by the weavers themselves at the local fairs and the other which catered to the export market and had wide ramifications composed of a chain of textile traders' guilds organised at various levels. The same distinction could be perceived in the variety and price of cloth which ranged from cheap, low-quality commonwear to extremely expensive export varieties.
State taxation seems to have been imposed at every level of the textile industry. Taxes on cotton yarn, thread, sales tax on cloth and profession tax are mentioned. Yet taxation was perhaps not so heavy because the various categories of taxes were most often consolidated into one tax under the head of capital tax on looms. Where the strain of taxation was felt to be heavy, the weavers restored the equilibrium by coming together and striking work. There are numerous instances of effective economic protests by the weavers both in the Chola and the Vijayanagar times. The state on its part adopted as pliable an attitude as possible towards the weavers, yielding in the face of economic protests and offering commercial concessions and tax remissions in new settlements.

The Vijayanagar period did not witness any major changes in the textile organisation and trade. Merchant guilds did not go into decline nor was the local administration drastically overhauled. The changes which crept into the system of textile organisation were gradual and came about in the late sixteenth-seventeenth centuries rather than with the foundation of the Vijayanagar empire. The most important development during the late sixteenth century was the rise of Portuguese power in South India. The Portuguese strengthened their control through a policy of political partnership towards either Vijayanagar or Golconda alternately and established their commercial monopoly by
adopting the system of cartazes or passes. They sought and obtained exclusive contracts for trade in textiles and spices. Following the Portuguese, the Dutch and the English Companies in the seventeenth century sought to capture the triangular trade and later on also expanded the directions of the export trade in textiles. The share of the indigenous merchants in this trade is a widely debated issue ranging between extreme viewpoints among historians such as those who hold that the Portuguese and other European companies destroyed Asian shipping and others like Van Leur who believe that native shipping and trade accounted for a considerable percentage of the overall trade. But whatever their position in the beginning of the seventeenth century, it was clear by the end of it that the English East India Company had virtually established a trade monopoly. The effects of this could be seen in the eighteenth century which witnessed the ruin of many great indigenous banking houses.

The endeavour in this thesis has been to treat every period as a 'historical block' and in the sense to combine economic history with historical sociology. Thus a chapter on production techniques, trade and organisation in the textile industry is followed by a Chapter on the social, religious and ritual role of the weavers in relation to their society.
In the Chōla period the main weaving community of the Tamil region were the Sāliyans while those of the Andhra and Karnataka regions were the Sāle, Jēcāra and Dēvānga weavers. But in the Vijayanagar period, the Kaikkōḷās who had essentially functioned as a military group under the Chōḷās emerged as full fledged professional weavers and replaced the Sāliyans in the Tamil country as the dominant weaver community. This change over to weaving was most probably the result of the disbandment of caste armies after the death of Nājarāja Chōḷa III (early thirteenth century A.D.).

Another notable feature of the Vijayanagar period was the mobility of the weaver castes. The Kaikkōḷās of the Tamil country settled in the Andhra and Karnataka regions while the Dēvānga weavers moved into the Kōṇju country from Karnataka. The motive was usually economic betterment although migration could also be caused by factors like famines or Muslim oppression as in the case of the Paṭṭunūlkāran caste of weavers who moved from Gujarāt to Madurai in stages.

The Medieval period was a period of urbanisation and temple activity under the patronage of the Chōḷa and Vijayanagar kings and the overall prosperity of the empire was marked by an extension of production, increase in trade and the cheapness of essential commodities. Society was in a state of flux and there was an upward
movement on the part of most of the Sudra professional groups. The weavers as an important artisan group were leading beneficiaries of the commercial prosperity of the empire. Textile trade till the sixteenth century was to a great extent in the hands of the merchant guilds but there was considerable economic mobility among the weavers so that some of them joined the ranks of the merchants while others became master-weavers employing workers under them. The weavers formed their own corporations with codes and regulations and any violation of these rules was punished by social ostracism. The status of the weavers in society can be measured in terms of the size and nature of the donations made by them to the temples, their ownership of land and the social and economic privileges extended to them by the state and the temple. The extensive donations made by the weavers (they figure in the inscriptions as donors next only to the merchants) is proof of their having been an important and prosperous professional group in medieval society. The temples reciprocated by bestowing on them certain ritual honours and the state extended to them the privilege of Sangu and Tandu (the right to blow the conch shell and the right to ride the palanquin) which were important status symbols. But the economic power and social privileges gained by the weavers and other leading professionals like the Kamalar (the smiths)
was hardly in keeping with the low place allotted to them in the ritual hierarchy. They tried to overcome these caste and ritual barriers by (a) the creation of legends attributing to themselves a glorious mythological origin (b) taking part in the schisms and conflicts within the left-hand - right-hand groupings and (c) participating in large numbers in the Vira Saiva and the Tengalai Vaishnavite movements. The upward movement on the part of the weavers manifested itself in caste exaltation on the one hand and social protest on the other.

With the establishment of the rival European Companies in the seventeenth century, the lives of the weavers no longer revolved around the temple but around the European factories and the black towns. The squabbles of the left-hand and right-hand castes invariably involved the crucial question of who was to secure the Company's contract for cloth. While the merchants turned middlemen, the weavers began to work systematically on the basis of advances and soon a situation was reached when the poor weavers "could not even put the cloth on the loom without an advance" as the Agent of Fort St. George, William Langhorne, commented in 1675. Their creativity and skill was also being destroyed since the injunction of the companies
was always to make them work "to the perfection of a pattern". In times of famine, the paddy was cornered either by the Company or by the provision merchants having a contract with the Company. While grain prices soared during famine, the income of the weavers remained fixed by the Company contracts, resulting in the death and destitution of the weavers. For the weavers the age of economic and social power, of the acquisition of land's and privileges, of donations to temples and effective corporate functioning were definitely over. With the turn of the century their plight worsened. The cotton revolution in England rendered redundant the products of Indian handlooms. As Lord Bentinck said in the 1820's "The bones of the cotton weavers are bleaching the plains of India". The present thesis ends with the passing of the first prohibition act against Indian calicoes in 1700, a warning of the shape of things to come.

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