Chapter 3

RELATIONS OF PRODUCTION

This chapter classifies organisational changes. The basic process highlighted is a replacement of the producer-cum-seller household by largescale capital, producers or traders. This conception of organisational change is not a new one. Buchanan and Gadgil, the first historians of industry, came very close to suggesting that industrialisation in capitalist enterprises had come to include the handicrafts than taking place at their expense. Yet, in their writings and in those of contemporary crafts experts there remained a gap between the level of empirical analysis, static description of forms of relationships, and the generalisation implied, a process wherein all such forms were transitional. Consequently, while the generalisation was far too general to be seriously followed, the particular was reduced to a catalogue, relationship between the elements of which remained arbitrary in the absence of a conceptual framework.

The attempt here is to reinterpret the facts as descriptions of a transition and explore the transition in its general aspects. We begin by outlining the basic movement, reduction of 'independence' of weavers to 'dependence' on capitalists and clarifying what the terms meant. Forms of dependence varied and so did the nature of the capitalist associated. These differences, which moreover had a systematic regional component, are then developed in the three sections that
constitute the rest of the chapter.

1 The General Tendency

References to a material and moral decay in the textile handicrafts were as frequent at the end of the nineteenth century as in the 1850s when Marx wrote on 'the misery inflicted by the British on Hindustan'. The famines of the last quarter proved the weavers the most vulnerable of the rural classes. They were the first to be reduced to starvation because they had no store of grain and as soon as grain became dear demand for their cloth ceased. 'Most of them are unfit for the heavy labour of the ordinary relief works'. Town weavers reacted politically. Behind the food riots that broke out in Nagpur on the eve of the 1896 famine, weavers were 'prominent among ringleaders'. Where decay was gradual and resistance did not find an immediate object protest turned back on society. Thus Bankura silk rearers in the 1910s were referred in official records as criminal tribes and Julahas of Azamgarh were reputed to be a 'turbulent race' prone to riots.

In the twentieth century political resistance was replaced by a state of resignation. For the official engaged in upliftment this mood was translated into 'stupidity and ignorance', for any arbitrary intervention aroused only suspicion and incredulity among the craftsmen.

The series of reports produced in the thirties made it
sufficiently clear that the concrete economic process reflected in all this was not an all-embracing decline as the nationalist writers interpreted them to be, but a differentiation. A distinction came to be made between the 'rank and file', the 'waifs and strays of the community' and the large producers for whom the former represented a proletariat. The ordinary weaver, 'wherever he survives today is eking out a miserable subsistence by working as a mere wage earner in the numerous handloom factories and powerloom mills'. In the mid-thirties, to which this statement refers, factory workers were numerically a minority. But even those outside the factories, i.e. not yet dispossessed of their looms, were being delivered of the right of possession over output and effective control of labour process-- 'relieved of the responsibility', as the Tariff Board put it.

In contemporary terminology this represented reduction of 'independent' weavers to various forms and degrees of dependence. The precise characteristics to which these terms referred were not necessarily identical nor always specified. In spite of this inexactitude the underlying distinction was real and easily grasped. Independence most commonly meant right of possession over finished goods, a right actually exercised through sale to consumers direct or to the merchant who bid the highest. Sale was necessarily not tied to a particular buyer. Typically, the weaver would be a travelling salesman, a hawker at the weekly village market or, as with makers of agricultural implements, working to orders from users. Dependence, by contrast, always implied tied sale. But this distinction need not suggest that the movement was
Dependence could progress towards a system of contracts for sale of products or contracts for sale of labour power. Thus a dependent weaver may or may not retain the right to sell to other parties if not satisfied with the terms. In the former case he is a seller of cloth and bargains over price, in the latter he sells labour and bargains over wage. Decisions on technology and product composition were left to the capitalist in either case. The difference was less clearcut with possession of capital. A wage worker often leased in looms or worked in a factory. But dispossession was not a necessary characteristic, partly of course because the basic implements were cheap enough.

In the typical putting out arrangement where the weaver retained his loom, the distinction between wage-contract and price-contract showed up in forms of capital. The person organising the transaction could be a merchant buying cloth, a yarn-dealer or moneylender receiving cloth in repayment of past debts or a large-scale producer. The implicit contract itself betrayed his identity. For instance, price-contract was characterised by the presence of yarn-debts. Indebtedness was rarer in wage-employment, and always involved consumption loans where it was present. Buying cloth meant bargaining on price which took place afresh with each round. Cloth transactions, by implication, were typically terminable contracts whereas wages, though not stable over the long run, were not necessarily revised between rounds. The merchant capitalist's first reaction to
crisis was termination of contract while a large producer tried wage-cuts.

Broadly speaking handloom weaving in Bombay-Deccan, Hyderabad and the deep south was witness to a greater extension of intra-producer differentiation. In all three regions producers formed a powerful class and many emergent systems of work were really results of large producers diversifying into trade. Immigration of a weaving proletariat in Deccan and Hyderabad, moreover, facilitated direct wage contracts leading to full-fledged handloom factories. In Bengal and the east coast, in contrast, the merchant-producer difference was fundamental reflecting presumably a prior penetration of commercial capital and emergence of comprador classes. Producers were far more homogeneous than in the south. Silk was an exception, but here cases of collapse of weaver aristocracy were reported as finance and trading capital continued to consolidate itself. Alongside these pure forms there were many variants in existence. In northern India, especially Punjab, moneylenders were closely associated with textile trade until the late twenties when a certain setback was reported, apparently owing to enforcement of legislations (actual or anticipated) restricting employment of usurious income. Parallelly large producers had survived, either independently as competitors or in collaboration with merchants as subcontractors. In the subcontract system the two pure forms converged.

The context for increasing dependence was a slowly growing
and sharply fluctuating market for cotton cloth. Competition from mill cloth was intensified in the thirties after Tariff restrictions enabled the mills to diversify into finer weaving. Competition, however, did not eliminate options for the handlooms, for product-differentiations were still considerable. Specifically, diversification into the more expensive noncotton fabrics could be a successful way out, but there were strong barriers to entry for the rank and file.

The uncertainties found expression in the numerous and increasingly arbitrary extra charges which the professional merchants imposed when approached to undertake sale of cloth on behalf of the independent weaver. The speculative nature of sale was reflected in frequent allegation of cheating on price. Along with the ability to bear such noncontractual obligations creditworthiness imposed barriers to independence. The weaver who wished to sell to the highest bidder must wait and must persuade his yarn supplier or moneylender to wait. The mere possession of a loom was not enough because the loom had little redeemable value. Only the owner of a number of looms or one otherwise propertied could avoid tied sale. But while the vast majority was thus excluded from freedom of sale, those who managed to diversify and survive were doubly better off: earning a higher unit rate of profit and sharing a market with fewer competitors. Competition with machinemade cloth did not simply deindustrialise but intensified the differences among craftsmen.

The ordinary weaver entered into contracts for the
security of employment it entailed. Contracts also eliminated bargaining and deferment of payment as could happen to an independent weaver. Insecurity was heightened by the presence of marginalised, itinerant, nonhereditary and immigrant weavers, an invariable feature of the factory towns. Bombay-Deccan, Amritsar, Salem were never short of a reserve army. A large proportion of the karkhana workers consisted of recent settlers and a population still highly mobile.

An early estimate of composition of weavers is available from Bombay. The 1921 census identified a class of workers in cotton who could not be definitely specified as mill or 'home' workers and can be presumed to consist of hired workers in large households and small factories. Together with workers in registered handloom factories they formed 17 per cent of all handloom weavers.

Somewhat more detailed statistics are available from FFC who conducted a census. It is not clear how the definitions were operationalised. But even within a large margin of error the data do reveal a regional contrast (Table 1). A decade and a half later percentage of factory workers had doubled in Madras, stabilised in Bombay, and stood at 4 in West Bengal. Elsewhere, as in Punjab, addition to labour force was largely absorbed in the small-scale powerlooms.
Table 1: Status of Handloom Weavers in 1940

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Independent</th>
<th>On contract</th>
<th>Factory workers</th>
<th>Cooperativised</th>
<th>Total No (’000)</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bombay</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>117.1</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deccan States</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madras</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>427.7</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travancore</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>32</td>
<td></td>
<td>19.0</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hyderabad</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>109.0</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punjab</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>355.9</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bengal</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>64</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>202.0</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bihar</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>102.7</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orissa</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>79</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Under essentially similar inducement cooperativisation also proceeded apace: the members were 'in fact wage earning weavers with employment guaranteed by the societies'.

2 The Proletariat

This section describes three specific instances of wage-contract, from Sholapur, southern Andhra and the Tamil Nadu towns. The evidence suggest that proletarianisation assimilated and utilised parallel tendencies of social marginalisation of ordinary weavers. The reserve army consisted of distinct social groups, this fact may well explain its formation in the south at first.

Sholapur, the premier textile town of the Bombay-Deccan, represented the highest all-round development of handloom production in the twentieth century. The first factories in the town date back to 1890. About a decade or so earlier Sholapur
received a large number of migrant weavers from eastern UP and Telengana. The major expansion in the town, therefore, could have been a recent phenomenon, attributed by gazetteers to urbanisation itself. By the thirties the 8000 loom strong industry was the best-known example of direct wage-employment. Putting out and karkhanas worked side by side, but large producers dominated both. Combination of direct production and contract probably depended on a specific rationale, but might equally have been dictated by the coexistence of loomowning and loomless weavers, both available on hire. Migration sharpened the distinction. For loomowners were usually settled weavers, but hired workers formed a composite category consisting of locals and others.

The latter distinction corresponded to hired workers in households with 3 to 8 looms and workers in large factories. The first group consisted of local inhabitants, 'have homely surroundings of their own classes and castes' and enjoyed greater freedom, 'though .. inferior in position they freely mix with their masters'. Workers in factories were 'wholly different and more miserable'. By and large they were Telugu-speaking Padmasalis, immigrants from Andhra where real wages were higher but employment insecure. On coming to Sholapur they entered into an agreement with a karkhanadar. The agreement provided for living quarters, really 8 ft by 4 ft space 'by courtesy called rooms', work for women and children and triennial visits home. Against these privileges piece rates were much lower than labourers in households and could be arbitrarily revised, and hours longer. Consumption debts to the karkhanadar was both an
instrument of bondage and an excuse for wage cuts. In certain cases the worker could go home only by leaving his family behind as hostage.

Over the next decade that preceded a resurvey of Sholapur the factory workers increasingly resembled a class. Frequency of homeward journeys decreased and more immigrant families were permanently settling down in Sholapur. The Handloom Workers' Union had been formed and managed to enforce two relatively minor provisions of the Factories Act, regarding hours of work and weekly holiday despite a 'big hue and cry raised by local karkhanadars'. There was no improvement, however, in living conditions and wage bargaining was rare or ineffective, for reports of indiscriminate wage cuts continued, sometimes as fines for bad workmanship. The price-contract weavers had also organised themselves meanwhile to confront the arbitrariness surrounding sale of products -- discounts and commissions, sudden changes in order, termination of contract and unscheduled price revisions. This was a more heterogenous group and might have included potential factory workers, for they took ambiguous stand with respect to the latter.

The exact origin of migration to Sholapur remains unclear. But we have a late-twenties report on the urban weaving complex in southern Andhra, one of the likely sources of factory work force. Here direct wage-employment displayed features of a general decay. In carpet and silk weaving of Adoni large households hired workers. Unlike in Sholapur the households, in
turn, were subcontractors under yarn and dye merchants who were nonproducers by background, many of them Marwaris settled in recent past. This three-tier vertical dependence, called mungani locally, was the best known of its kind in the south and a point of contrast with Deccan and Tamil Nadu. All three tiers were secured together and tied sale of products or labour ensured by means of perpetual debts, in the form of yarn-advance or consumption loan as the case may be. The worker's debts were repaid over generations.

The severity of the contract might have been a recent development. Many workers were still owners of land, mortgaged to the master-weavers. Ranga (1930) found widespread unrest: the weavers were 'very mobile, impatient of any control, devoid of all sense of honour, very untrustworthy', etc. The most typical response was migration. The direction of this movement remains obscure though Assam plantations were casually mentioned. The local merchants in many cases reverted back from mungani to simple piece work, by-passing the large producers. In other reformed systems the merchant-master weaver side of the contract was brought under fixed prices thereby eliminating a speculative element. Despite these adjustments southern Andhra did suffer a relative decline in loomage in the twentieth century.

Factories of the size of Sholapur were rare everywhere, but labour-hiring households common throughout the south. A contemporary report on Tamil Nadu called them 'cottage workshops'. They were apparently the most dynamic element here,
associated with urban weaving. For the independent weaver, who came 'first in historical sequence, is fast disappearing . . . the fluctuations in prices . . . are too great for his slender means'. And price-contract with nonproducing merchants was apparently confined to special fields, chiefly the export trade to south-east Asia. Workshops were 'a more humane system' than price-contract. The rates were fixed and by piece, irrespective of the immediate market price. Payments were never deferred and no haggling took place9. And yet hereditary weavers probably retained an apathy for factory work for which they were earlier known.

Who, then, were the workers in the cottage workshops, also referred as coolies and, somewhat ambiguously, as 'assistants'? As in Bombay-Deccan they represented a genuine proletariat dependent on 'owners of handlooms' for their livelihood. In return they were paid at piece rates lower than what the price-contract weaver received, the difference being a 'rental' on loom. Cooly weavers were ubiquitous. 'Grinding poverty and absence of proper dwelling place' drove them to migrate. Such migrations rarely threatened the settled weavers of a place, for the latter were already arranged in a fairly stable hierarchy.

Venkatraman (1935-6) found the workers in the cotton handloom factories by and large nonweavers by caste: Panchamas and Muslims in the Tamil districts and Balijas and Malas in the Telugu country. On this aspect later reports suggest continuity. In Kanchipuram silk immigration of coolies was confined to the
Vanniyas, Yadavas, Naidus and Nadars, all nonweavers and some of inferior status socially. Conversely it appears that members of the upper-tier weaver castes, even if reduced to dependence, were protected from selling labour. For price-contract usually involved weaver castes. The difference could be plainly in ownership of looms. But the differential and frequently marginal social status of the labourers suggests that an element of right to own looms might have been at work.

Although caste does seem to interfere with economic processes it would be sweeping to conclude from the above anything about the nature of this interference. Mines (1984) suggests that in the formation of industrial cooperatives caste affiliations were indeed significant, but they did not necessarily diffuse intra-caste differentiation in the long run. Nevertheless it remains an open question to what extent intervention of status might explain the simultaneous progression in Madras of democratic cooperation and capitalist relations.

In contrast to the south polarisation among producers was distinctly weaker in eastern India. The descriptions usually refer to villages where merchant-financiers constituted a distinct class. Yarn and cloth merchants, distinct elsewhere, were united in the universal term 'mahajan'. Correspondingly producers remained buyers-and-sellers but sale was tied: 'the weaver is not [the mahajan's] employee but attached to him'. Transactions displayed typical features of a sale of product: price-differential in yarn with respect to wholesale rates.
charged as 'transport costs' analogous to loom rentals elsewhere, cheating on quality of material, haggling over margins. On occasions, and more commonly in silk, large producers tried to bypass the local merchants, by travelling to Calcutta for instance. But rarely did they succeed in superseding the clique between merchants in the silk belt and those of the city\textsuperscript{12}. The distinction between trader and the 'capitalists among the [weaving] community' was not altogether absent and a later report surmised from aggregate statistics the presence of loomless workers 'just as there are landless agricultural labourers'. But this was a late tendency and predictably had an urban bias.

The connection between towns and wage employment reappears consistently in reports on Punjab and UP and, as in the south, incidence of wage-contracts including karkhanas was associated with stratification among producers\textsuperscript{13}. The Punjab evidence on silk is clear on the decline of buying and selling contracts and on the emergence of a reserve army. Similarly in Benares' many tiered and hierarchical capitalist order the karkhanadars were definitely identified as a growing class. With Benares and Santipur excluded the north had no weaving town comparable in size and complexity with the southern and no urban clusters comparable to, say, the Deccan or southern Andhra. Consequently the proletariat appeared sporadically and with barely discernible characteristics.
3 Forms of Capital

As with ordinary weavers differences within large scale capital were increasing. Contemporary accounts distinguish between capital based in trading-moneylending and in production, between yarn trade and cloth trade the latter involving greater familiarity with craftsmanship and technology, between producer caste and trader caste and between producer-turned-trader and trader by origin. These differences really arose out of one principal development, emergence of large producers with or without interests in cloth trade. The contrasting patterns can be posited as follows: relations of production changed to adapt to the coexistence of different kinds of capital as in the south where factories were far more common, alternatively coexistence of capitals adapted to the prevailing distribution of power. This happened in the north and east where large producers were nowhere clearly dominant, their entry could lead to conflict with merchants as in Malda silk, or to various forms of collaboration as in the 'karkhanadari' of Benares or Amritsar. Some of these instances will be studied in this section.

The large karkhanadar (literally factory owner) of Sholapur was a weaver, a yarn-processor and a wholesale cloth merchant. The distinction between yarn and cloth trades was systematically maintained in the sources on Bombay-Deccan and Hyderabad. Large producers or 'sowcars among weavers' were closer to cloth trade, in the capacity of subcontractors, and pure yarn transactions by 'shopkeepers' often involved explicit usury. The
Sholapur large producers were neither numerous nor powerful about the time of the Industrial Commission, but 'since then the movement in this direction has been rapid'. By the late-thirties 'the karkhanadar occupies the most important position in the structure of the industry'. The movement also implied stiff competition. Signs of confrontation with professional merchants were discernible, though by the late-thirties institutional means of settling disputes had been devised.

Size structure of factories suggests that economies of scale in production concentrated at two points rather than being distributed evenly. Two sizes were preponderant, with 3 to 5 looms, essentially large households, and with loomage exceeding 30. The double-humped character of the distribution is corroborated in ITBS data on Hyderabad silk and mixed factories. The specific advantage of large scale seems to have been that of combining trade and contracting with direct production whereas the 3-5 class, being a mixture of household and factory, could economise on labour.

As in Sholapur divisions within trade were considerable in the Tamil Nadu towns and hereditary producers were close to cloth trade. At the same time nonweaver merchants were prominent in specialised branches, such as the export trade. Pure traders, moreover, nowhere appeared as a class but fragmented into several castes and regional divisions. The export merchants were mainly the Komati Chettis, village-to-village long distance trade in cloth was associated with the Labbais of Karur and Marwari.
moneylenders sold garments to the urban working class.

Again as in Sholapur the large producer-cum-trader was the product of a shift, noticeable from around the First World War. The War itself 'destroyed the power of many old-time distributing firms' of Salem and Madura, controlled by weaver castes and dealing in imported raw material, and might have induced a relocation of capital in production. But the shift had a basis also in production. It depended on the capacity to successfully intervene in technology. The Industrial Commission distinguished between the 'banias' and the master weavers, the former would not be upto the reorganisation being proposed by Chatterton and his associates. Others also dwelt on the divergent attitudes towards direct or indirect intervention in labour process. The professional merchant was rarely willing to 'finance the weavers for the purpose of equipping their looms with improved sleys and harnesses'. Preparatory processes were decentralised, methods of processing as well as the loom itself remained primitive and crude. The weaver-merchant on the other hand, frequently a workshop owner himself, was known for his tendency to rationalise production and in the larger towns worked in close collaboration with the technicians and policy-makers of Madras.

In contrast to the south yarn and cloth trades were more tightly integrated in Bengal, cotton as well as silk. Large producer's attempts to enter trade or retain hold over the existing sphere of control resulted, in Malda silk, in a protracted conflict. Sources close to the turn of the century
project the master weavers as a familiar and powerful element in silk. To the large producer trade as well as land were avenues of accumulation and it was not uncommon to 'rise from the ranks' to become substantial. Coexisting with the master weaver was the merchant-financier, the mahajan, reduced to a type in official literature. The term originally seems to have connoted moneylending. In addition to professional moneylenders who sometimes received cloth in repayment, traders in silk, especially the Marwaris, engaged in moneylending. But the more powerful element in silk was an all-European network, complete from filatures to trading houses, who supplied the export market for Bengal silk. The greater Indian market was served by several north Indian houses of which the Chinoys were probably the largest.

Of these various segments the small-scale trader-moneylenders proved more stable in the long run while a prolonged crisis in Bengal sericulture eliminated both the Europeans and the larger of the north Indian firms. The space thus vacated was filled up by the more flexible elements. Specifically it now became possible for the cloth merchants to tie up raw material trade. This was helped by rising indebtedness in sericulture, a natural development in an industry crippled by disease and depression leaving 'the best reelers and rearers no better than beggars in Malda'. Within weaving a similar retreat took place. The 'local mahajans', erstwhile master weavers, 'were thus eliminated' from trade resulting in a deconcentration of loomage and dependence on merchants.
Price contract was common in Bengal cotton handlooms, more so in the western districts than in the east and apparently inversely correlated with the prosperity of the industry. Weavers were their own sellers in the larger towns of Hooghly and Nadia districts. Here freedom of sale for those who exercised it could be effective because of proximity to the wholesale bazaars in Calcutta. Also here large producers were a category to reckon with. Price contract receives harsh treatment everywhere: Nadia weavers are 'in the clutches of mahajans', in Murshidabad 'practically enslaved' by them, in Dacca the bani rates are 'the lowest possible', and so on. There was, moreover, a noticeable continuity between weaving and most other crafts on 'the baneful effects of the present organisation under the average mahajan'. FFC data do suggest that middleman's margin might have been higher for comparable samples in Bengal. But there was also the mahajan's outsider status. Mahajani was one of the occupations 'the intelligentsia content themselves with'. His remoteness, 'divorced from the actual practical observations of the industry, .. parasitical than integral to it', thus had a social basis. As elsewhere the contrast between mahajan-control and control by large producers extended to the capacity and willingness to adapt.

Conflict was also reported in Punjab silk. In the towns large producers had always existed as undercontractors of merchants, as foremen in factories owned by the latter. This was the exact sense of the term karkhanadari in its northern usage. The practice was widespread. In the thirties moneylending as part
of yarn trade seems to have suffered a certain decline\textsuperscript{20}. One of the consequences was redirection of saving into cooperative credit societies which were going through an unprecedented boom. There might also have been investment in production, for in some of the art silk factories set up in the thirties sahukar capital was involved. Interestingly it was in connection with the cooperatives that large producers who had 'escaped from the sahukars' found mention. Cheap credit was used by small factory owners for expansion into trade. In Multan similar attempts resulted in a confrontation. Sahukars met the threat by allowing easier terms on retail cloth sale, by manipulating yarn prices, by collusive agreements, while weavers responded by innovation in designs.

4 Large Producers

Abstracted from the context factories were common in urban crafts. Several peripheral branches of weaving, carpets, shawls, blankets, block printing and painting, were practised in large workshops. At least in a few locations these were in the nature of royal manufactories. The small, close-knit, often immigrant communities who practised these crafts, the Sadhs of Farrukhabad printing for instance, facilitated cooperative work which resembled factories. The specialised nature of the market for some, exports for pile carpets and prints, required greater degree of standardisation. But these segments remained peripheral in the twentieth century, perhaps even dissolved to some extent, and did not directly contribute to the transition in question\textsuperscript{21}.  

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The direct preconditions for large scale weaving seem to have been possibility of taking over trade, investment in processing and finishing and utilisation of inherent economies of scale. The latter refers to the somewhat larger households who might have had an advantage in use of labour. These conditions were interrelated. While centralised production necessitated concentration in processing, the latter in turn encouraged centralised production by undermining the basis of households as family labour is made redundant.

Large Households  Descriptions of transitional units, midway between household and factory and bearing characteristics of both, enable us to infer the nature of prior differentiation among producers. In the towns of Deccan about 1900 'few workrooms have only one loom'. Settlements in Sholapur in 1872 reported more looms than there were weavers. Rich weaving families with 5 to 6 looms were common in Salem and Coimbatore at the time of the Industrial Commission. In Mau the bigger broker weavers were called girhasts, literally the householder, and were 'regarded by the weavers with some affection'.

Large households invariably hired labour. Yet not until much later can we discern the existence of a weaver proletariat. On the contrary loomless weavers who would willingly offer their services for a casteman showed marked antipathy for factory work. Clearly relations obtaining within a large household were different. As FFC wrote of Deccan: 'The average weaver in the employ of an independent weaver who has more than one loom still
retains some of his old social position especially if his employer is of the same caste, but those who work in the karkhanas are regular wage workers and in that respect are at the bottom of the ladder'.

In an example from the north, the hired workers in the silk-woollen factories of western UP were all relatives of the owner, as if an extended family was at work. But the 'relatives' occupied a lower status as they neither lived in the same house nor shared a kitchen. They were paid at rates considerably lower than the notional market wage rates. While they formed the surplus labour of the community 'they would not serve anybody else for four annas'. The ambiguity of the relation containing elements of both authority and contract provided the employer with unrestricted possibilities of exploitation22.

But this very ambiguity also made the cottage workshop vulnerable. The intense and overt exploitation, even physical oppression, to which workers in the southern Andhra towns were subject, emigration of coolies and subsequent decline suggest inherent instability. Counteracting influences to mungani might have existed, little known because internalised within the household. At any rate places where workers were actually recognised as family members, as in Sholapur, were probably ahead in this respect of the rest23.

Processing Reorganisation The external circumstances leading to centralisation in processing of pure silk included an
increasingly stiff competition from east Asia since the mid-twenties. The preceding half century or so had witnessed a crisis in indigenous silks which had its origin partly in natural events (pebrine disease of worms) and partly in economic (withdrawal of foreign filatures from Bengal). The immediate effects were deteriorating quality, falling prices and loss of the European market to Italian and Levantine silks. Within the home market a straight substitution was difficult because local and imported silks were of different quality. A limited substitution could be attributed to preference shift, the fact that foreign silks took dye well and bright colours were valued more. But the main advantage of the latter, and a threat to the local silk, was their ready-processed nature. The Canton steam filature silk came to the market reeled, twisted and standardised while the Bengal or Mysore were neither uniform nor ready for the loom.

Threatened by a changeover local silk merchants and master weavers set up twisting and re-reeling houses. In Mysore the tendency received state patronage. Some of the largest plants were in fact weaving units with integrated processing facility. In the two premier silk weaving towns of Bombay, Surat and Yeola, mechanisation was combined with greater division of manual labour. In Surat proximity to the mill industry was turned to good account reeling being done by a machine adapted from the mill practice.

Centralisation of preparatory operations either displaced families specialised in them or merely detached these functions
from those hitherto performed by the weaver household. The former was reported from Benares where division of labour was already advanced. Elsewhere members of the weaver's family became surplus and available for employment in a branch of the factory. This happened in Multan and Amritsar.

Perhaps more than in silk, cotton yarn processing was integrated within the weaving shop. Also unlike silk no exogenous condition can be located. The view that by virtue of large scale and mechanised processing 'powerlooms enjoy a great advantage over the handloom' is relevant only when the specific advantages of small scale processing, on demand side of having short warps and nonstandardised designs and on the supply side availability of family labour, had already weakened somewhat. The need to standardise finished product and an already proceeding breakup of the household must have provided the bases for the reorganisation.

Chatterton, who sensed the genesis of capitalist enterprise in crafts more acutely than most contemporaries, assigned to yarn processing an instrumental role: 'what we may look forward to in the future are groups of from fifty to two hundred weavers centred around a dressing plant. This will supply warps to the weavers who may either be collected in a shed or will work in their own homes'. Elsewhere he expressed confidence in the master weaver as one who could accomplish this. The plan itself formed part of the informed opinion on revival of handlooms and was probably influenced by impressions of the
Japanese experience\textsuperscript{25}.

Chatterton more or less anticipated the system that appeared in major weaving towns. The government weaving factory in Salem was a failure but it 'materially contributed to the success of the movement' by popularising fly shuttles and hand warping mills. By 1918 substitution of stick by drum warping was more or less complete in Salem and all processing shops were owned by weavers. Mechanisation in other processes progressed slowly. Dresser sizers were a later introduction and sizing was less sensitive to widening options. But rapidity of diffusion on the whole defined areas where experiments could concentrate. Sholapur had an equally impressive record, by 1940 over 90 per cent of the warping here was done in factories\textsuperscript{26}.

Exploitation of female labour constituted 'a definite advantage over the small weaver'. In this respect the handloom factory and mills had progressed together. The contract which bound the immigrant weaver in Sholapur to the karkhanadar provided for employment for his wife in the winding section but, unlike with the men, left the rates of pay unstated. In the factories of Pune, of Tamil Nadu and Malabar women and children performed more or less the same tasks which they did at home.

5 Preconditions

Despite circumstances being similar handloom weaving in the south proved more progressive than in northern and eastern
India. Certain probable conditions can be indicated. The weaver in the east was more of a part-time weaver and more of a cultivator than his southern counterpart. A possible reason why proletarianisation was weaker in Bengal was the relative ease with which craftsmen became cultivators. The underlying occupational structure reflected and reinforced the predominantly rural character of Bengal weaving. By excluding similar alternatives the arid tracts of Deccan forced weavers to congregate in a few localities. In Tamil Nadu the correspondence between caste and occupation, the left-hand and right-hand dichotomy, might have performed a similar function although the rigidity of this correlation was evidently in decline.

The role assigned to large households in a transitional period suggests that social and demographic factors which determined the formation of extended families and their partitioning might have had an influence. A 1940 Sholapur survey indicate that the ‘composite family’, a corporate of several distinct family units was the typical form appearing among large households of the town, a concrete instance of ‘family cooperation’ being the basis of capitalist cooperation in handicraft factories. Similarly the 1961 census reported a proportion of males in weaver households of Madras much above the state average.

A systematic contrast between rural and urban structures emerges through the literature. Classes could be distinguished among town craftsmen and wage employment was far more common.
Product structure was oriented to skill intensive varieties where craftsmanship itself was a productive force. By contrast the low skill content and small scale of village weaving restricted concentration of capital in production. Correspondingly merchant capital was more differentiated in the towns to cope with the scale whereas in the village the middleman often combined yarn, cloth and finance. Dispersed location, predominantly rural character, greater incidence of part-time weaving, of coarser, plainer weaving -- this interrelated complex of characteristics distinguished the north and the east from the southern handlooms, more urbanised and more skill intensive.

If merchant-producer difference was stronger in eastern India it can be seen as a consequence of colonial trade suppressing an original hierarchy. Hossain an Arasaratnam mention head weavers in Bengal and Andhra coast in the eighteenth century. The latter represented a structure which was utilised and transformed by the trades. By becoming a part of it the head weavers were subordinated to merchants and financiers who were paid officials of the company and alien to the production system -- a process resented, often violently, by the former.

Conclusion

Emergence of capitalist relations, convergence of small and large, household and factory, was mirrored in the characteristics of the labour force: the gradual development of proletarian identity from out of caste or familial affiliations.
The first trade unions appeared in the Bombay-Deccan and Malabar. Widespread wage cuts in Bombay around the great depression encouraged formation of collectives. A 1937 Malabar strike involved 3000 workers. Somewhat later threatened wage cuts in Sholapur led to a spate of strikes affecting 200 karkhanas. More often, however demands centred on implementation of specific clauses of the factories act. As we have seen Deccan weavers were only partially successful in this endeavour.

But continuous changes in labour process imposed a constraint on the success of collective movements. A consequence of payment for labour being fixed by contract was that prices of products became a function of material costs. This may have induced, in noncotton in particular, diversification into inferior substitutes often ahead of actual changes in preference. The new products, being more standardised, were less skill intensive: in noncotton synthetics compared to pure silk, in cotton greys compared to finished fabrics and in both, piecegoods compared to garments. The last two were more recent developments.

Skill intensity and product differentiation, according to generations of craft historians, formed the very basis of the survival of handlooms. This basis was being replaced by another, exploitation of cheap labour. Not the simple commodity producer but his very antithesis, the factories, ensured survival by exploitation of cheap labour. It is this reorientation from quality to cost of labour, a process that reinforces itself through product structure adjustments, that defines the
contradiction in the situation of the handloom-powerloom worker in recent times.

Notes

1 Oversimplified frameworks, usually attempts to situate the transition in the industrial revolution sequence, were also available and reinforced the gap. See, for instance, ITBS, 1933, Report, pp103-4.

2 Gazetter, Belgaum, p 347. Also, Kakade (1947), p 10

3 ITBS, 1940, Report, p 2


6 The mid-fifties estimates are from Textile Enquiry Committee. FFC left out Bengal from their census. We have adjusted the Textile Enquiry Committee figures assuming factories to constitute a negligible proportion. Factory workers as a class do not appear at all in any of the surveys conducted in the thirties.

7 The three basic sources on Sholapur used here are Joshi (1936), Kakade (1948) and Bombay (1948a).

8 Ranga (1930)

9 Venkatraman (1935-6), p 62-64. Also Madras (1948) on location of price contract.


11 Mines (1984), pp 107-20, passim. Nevertheless intercaste wage employment might have been a generalisable characteristics. The Textile Enquiry Committee (1954) supplies several instances. Labourers in Surat handloom and small powerloom factories were mostly 'Mahomedans, Harijans and other backward caste people', Trivedi (1949), p 450. In Madras 'the majority of the nonhereditary weavers are first employed as Korvai assistants for low wages', Census (1961d), p 110.

12 The basic sources are Bengal, 1929, 1937, 1940 and ITBS, 1940, Oral Evidence. See also memorandum of the Bengal National
Chamber of Commerce and Industry to Banking Enquiry Committee, p 386.

13 Main sources on northern towns are Latifi (1911), Banking Enquiry Committee (1929), Punjab, vol 2, United Provinces (1924) and ITBS, 1935 and 1940, Evidence.

14 Kakade (1948), Table 10 and ITBS, 1935, Written Evidence, Appendix X of evidence of Hyderabad government.

15 Indian Industrial Commission (1918), Evidence Vol III, p 185 and passim. 'The small workshop system ... is a feature of that branch of the industry where strict supervision of the work is required', Venkatraman (1935-5), pp 66-8.

16 See on this tendency ITBS, 1940, Written Evidence, p 414 and Oral Evidence, pp 669, 689, S93, 700-02 and memorandum of Bengal National Chamber, op cit.

17 ITBS, Written Evidence, p 414, Oral Evidence, p 693

18 Bengal (1929), p 8 and Bengal (1940), p 32.


20 See, for a typical description, Banking Enquiry Committee, Punjab, vol 2, pp 856-7. Reference to Gurdaspur. The decline was attributed to legislation restricting usury. This came in 1930, but cases of largescale bankruptcy occur in immediately preceding years as well. This might reflect anticipation of the new laws.

21 Several instances of dissolution, reversal from factories to cottages, were supplied in United Provinces (1924), e g Lucknow, p 23.


23 In Sholapur 'the weaver is unwilling to join hands with any force seeking to curb the power of the employers to whom he is sometimes related', Bombay (1948a), p 37.

24 ITBS, 1935 and 1940, Evidence, passim

25 Chatterton (1912), p 33 and Maxwell-Lefroy and Ansorge (1916), p 142


27 An early report observed, 'no apology can be offered for the peasants indifferently quitting the plough to use the loom and the loom to resume the plough. Industry cannot be worse directed', H D Colebrook et al, Remarks on the Husbandry and
Internal Commerce of Bengal, London, 1806. Mukherji reported many landowning silk weavers in the Malda-Murshidabad complex. FFC found the percentage of part-time weavers in Bengal (25) and Orissa (40) significantly above those in Bombay (12), Madras (13) and Hyderabad (15). A decade later Textile Enquiry Committee reiterated the findings.

28 These characteristics bear on the possibilities of the weaver becoming a labourer. To the extent nonweavers, ie mainly cultivators, were also selectively offering their labour in handloom factories, there could be other, related, conditions. 'Wet' agriculture, as in the east, being more labour absorbent, was probably a constraint on labour supply. This could be a reason why even largescale factory proletariat in Calcutta were mainly immigrants. I owe this point to Sumit Guha.