

CHAPTER II

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CHAPTER II

ROLE OF HANDLOOM INDUSTRIES IN TAMIL NADU

INTRODUCTION

The spinning and weaving of cotton cloth was very much a part of every day life in ancient India. The loom is used as a poetic Image in several ancient texts. The Atharvana Veda says that day and night spread. Light and darkness over the earth as the weavers throw a shuttle on the loom. The Hindu god Vishnu is called Tantuvadan or 'Weaver' because he is said to have woven the rays of the sun into a garment for himself. The word tamu (warp) and 'ottu' (woof) are to be found in The Rig Veda.

Cotton textiles of very superior quality were being produced and exported from centers like Kanchipuram, Madurai, and Tanjavur. The evidence for this is to be found in many of the Sangam classics like

HANDLOOMS IN ANCIENT PERIOD

Silappadikaram and Manimekalai. Silappadikaram refers to the weaving of cotton and silk cloth and its export from the Port of Pumukar otherwise called as Kaveripumpattinam. It describes the separate streets for weavers which were called Karugar vidi or aruvai vidi. Madurai also had equally prosperous and skilled weavers. Even Kautilya in his Arthasatra refers to the fine textile of Madurai. Fine woven cloth is said to be delicate and transparent as the vapours of milk. Garments

were woven with borders or with embroidery on them. Silk cloth is referred to as pattadai.

In Agananuru as well as Natrinai, both Sangam texts, the Carders' bow is used as a poetic simile – the fluffy cloud in the sky after the rain is said to resemble cotton well beaten by the 'Carders' blow. Such evidences shows that the bow for carding was introduced in South India between the second and sixth centuries, not in the medieval period as has hitherto been believed. There are several references to the spinning of yarn, and from the texts it is clear that this was mainly the occupation of widows. The earliest type of loom in operation was Vertical loom.

The sangam texts are also replete with references to India dyes. Indigo was a commonly used vegetable dye and cloth dyed with indigo is referred to as Nilikachchai in Purananuru. Huge brick dyeing vats pertaining to the first and second centuries have been unearthed from Arikamedu in Pondicherry and Uraiyur in Trichirapalli, both known to be important weaving centers from the account of periplus.

The ancient tailors are referred to as tunnakkara. The reference to tunnar and tunnavinajnar also come from Manimegalai. The indigenous textile merchants were called aruvai vanigar. Silappadikaram 'escribes the aruvai vanigar vidi or the street of cloth merchants, where quantities of cloth woven of cotton thread, hair or silk were sold. Cloth merchants are also referred to as aruvai vanigar in a Brahmī inscription from Alaganamali pertaining to the second century. An important poet

of the sangam age was known by the name of Aruvai Vanigar Elavettanar indicating that he must have been a cloth merchant of considerable prominence.¹⁰

When Alexander invaded India in 327 B.C. he was impressed by our textiles. He took back with him some of our printed cotton, as well as many of our finely woven silk comparable to those of the master weavers of China, though the manner of decoration was similar to that of Pers.

When the Mohammedan invaded India in 711 AD they were intrigued by the Indian painted and printed cotton fabrics. They carried these with them along with Indian brocades (Brocade is a kind of weave and is also called embroidery made on a loom) heavy with gold heavy with gold and embroidery.

IMPORTANCE OF THE HANDLOOM INDUSTRY:

When there was no mill sector, this was the industry predicting the cloth needed by the people. As such it was an industry of tremendous importance because it satisfies one of the basic needs of the people as a whole. As a traditional industry, it met what the people wanted, and the supply, demand relationship was based on mutual interest of employment, profits and satisfaction of wants. This state of affairs continued until the mill sector had its rise with the industrial evolution and this was echoed in India in course of time with the gradual introduction and growth of a similar mill sector which at present controls a substantial segment of the industry. The growth of the mill sector has had its impact on the handloom industry. The mill sector is capital intensive with

sophisticated methods of production, catering to diversified and variegated needs and wants. The handloom Industry found it difficult to face this type of competition.

Nevertheless, the industry has been able to maintain its own identity. This is due to the fundamental fact that it has an organization and structure which is very different from the mill sector. It is unique in its individuality and in the production of quality goods which maintain their own identity. It may be stated for the sake of argument that the handloom goods are just above the same as mill made products. "This is only practically true. In organization, the industry is based on co-operative and other forms of ownership which also may be similar but not identical. For example Silk Sarees of Kancheepuram, pafola of Gujarat, Paitan Sarees of Maharashtra, tie and dye of Orissa, Chanderi of M.P., Shantipur of West Bengal, Salem Silk Dhoties, Sowriyur vegetable Sarees, towels and home textiles of Erode and Chennimalai have an uniqueness in terms of craftsmanship and uniqueness which cannot be claimed by the mill sector.

A)FUNCTIONING:

The industry is independent of the mill sector except in so far as it depends for its yarn supply. It is the mill sector which supplies all the yarn that is needed by the handloom industry. However, the weaving mill sector is independent and is in competition with the products of the handloom industry. The industry has been able to face this competitor and survive.

B)UNIQUENESS:

The uniqueness of this industry lies in the quality of its products. As already observed, the textile manufactured by handlooms have a market of their own, because of the differences in quality and products. The designs have been changing from time and the market has always reacted favourably to the new products and their quality.

C)PROBLEMS:

The problems of the industry are mostly in the nature of low wages to the workers, unused capacity which is marginal and low profits for certain sectors. There was a need for a detailed study of this sector and this has been attempted in the subsequent pages.

TAMILNADU HANDLOOMS:

As per the handloom census 1987-88 there were 4.26 lakh handloom weavers in the State supporting 2.6 lakh weaver families. Nearly 30% of those engaged in weaving activity in the state were women.

In addition to weaving, the handloom activity provided employment to another 2.4 lakh persons in the state who were engaged in preparatory work such as winding of yarn, preparation of warp, sizing etc., Nearing 89% of the preparatory workers were women and children. Together with those engaged in the weaving activity the handloom sector provided direct and indirect employment for 10.22 Lakh persons in the state accounting for 6.81% of the state rural work force.

A loom's productivity in the state (average production per loom per day was 4.8 meters as against 5.1 for the country. The intensity of handloom activity in the state average number of days worked per annum per house hold) was reported to be 261 days as against 194 for the country as a whole.

Of the 2.5 Lakh weaver household in the state 1.9 Lakhs or 72% registered a monthly income of less than Rs. 500 per household. Only 13% of the weaver families in the state reported an income of more than Rs. 750 per month from handloom weaving.

THE STATE SUPPORT:

The government of TamilNadu have set-up an elaborate and comprehensive infrastructure for extending physical, technical and financial support to the handloom weavers in the state.

ADMINISTRATION

The Director of Handlooms and Textiles (DH & T) at Madras is the State of authority for planning and Co-ordinating the implementation of the various programmes for the promotion and development of the handloom industry. The DH & T is also state register for weavers Co-op. Societies and Co-op. Spinning mills in the state. The DH & T is assisted at the state and the district levels by administration and technical officers. The entire state is divided into 18 circles and each circle is under the control of an Assistant Director of Handlooms and Textiles. The Head Quarters of the 18 circles are at Kancheepuram, Vellore, Thiruchirapalli,

Chidambaram, Salem, Thiruchengodu, Erode, Coimbatore, Madurai, Virudhunagar, Dindugal, Manamadurai, Thirunellveli, NagarKoil, Cuddalore, Thiruvarur, Kumbakkonam, Thiruvallore. A diagram will show the Departmental circles in the state for administrating handlooms and industry. The DH & T has total staff of 609 as at the end of 1992-2000 of which 137 are head quarters staff while the rest are distributed over the district.

CO-OPERATIVE ORGANISATION:

Traditionally, handloom weaving is an household industry. The weaver with only the loom and his labour as his capital, has been dependent on Master weavers and other middle men for the supply of inputs and marketing of the finished goods. A major scheme initiated by the Government is to bring the handloom weavers in the state under the Co-operative fold. The Institutionalization of the weaving activity through formation of weavers Co-operative Societies is to enable the weavers to organise production and marketing function and other assistance from the state.

The organisation of production in the Co-operative sector is carried out though the formation of different types of weaver societies to suit the needs of different categories of weaves in the state.

1096 Primary Weavers Co-operative societies covering mostly cotton varieties.

83 Silk weaver's Co-operative societies covering mostly cotton varieties.

150 Industrial Weaver's Co-operative societies which provided worsted type infrastructural facilities for loom less weavers.

Industrial societies are also set up for Adi-Dravidar weaver's with financial assistance from special components plan and cluster development programme.

In addition, there are industrial weavers Co-operative societies formed exclusively for the rural women under NABARD aid Programme.

Co-operative intensive handloom development project for providing continuous employment and increased earning to the weavers members through modern methods of production and innovative marketing strategies. The project also provide all the pre-loom and Post-loom infrastructure facilities to the weavers.

WEAVING COMMUNITIES

The Devanga Weavers originally hailed either from the Andhra or Karnataka regions. At some stage, the Devangas seem to have moved into the Tamil country and more specifically the Kongu region in large numbers, during the expansion of the Vijayanagar Empire. Reasons for the migrations of the new Telugu ruling class were the enormous opportunities and desire for economic advancement. The reference to Devanga weavers comes from Chengulpat, Thanjavur and South Arcot districts besides Salem and Coimbatore where they were numerous.

An important weaver community of medieval time was the Sale or the Saliga Community classified as the Padma sal and the Patu Sale. This was probably the

same community as the saliya of the Tamil country. The root of both names comes from the Sanskrit word 'Shakily which means weaver'.

The leading weaver communities of the Tamil country were the Slayer and the Kaikkolar. During the Chola period, that is roily from the 10th to 14th centuries, it was the Saliyar who formed the major weaving community and they were called as Choliya-Saliyar. The Kaikolar seem to have functioned in the Chloe period primarily as soldiers and members of the special troop of the king. The Kaikolar combined weaving with soldiering. With the disbanding of the army of Raja Raja III and the foundation of the Vijayanagar Empire, the Kaikolars became full-fledged weavers and emerged as the predominant weaving community in Tamil Nadu.

TEXTILE TYPES

The weavers produced various types of cloth for the requirement of the temple, the royal household and the common people. Or of the main articles of weaving was the Pudavai. The Pudavai (Sari) was the dress of the women. The Jivaka Chintamain says that women wore sarees with folds and drapes at the end. The main articles of clothing woven for the common man were Vetti and Uttiriyam. The Vetti worn from the waist downward being roughly one and a half yards in length and the uttiriyam worn to cover the upper body. During the period of Kulothunga Chola (1070-1122) reference is made to the Surrupudavai, Niravadipudavai, Pavadi Pudavai and men's apparel such as, uddi and uttiriyam.

The weaving of ordinary cotton sarees is referred to in an inscription from Nilamangalam in Bangalore. Reference to Vetti and Pudavai is also made in the reign of Raja Raja III in 1243 A.D.

In cotton, muslins and chintz were mainly woven. Muslin was called sella. The Masulipatam region was famous for its muslin. Chintz was known.

As Vichitra. The Monosollasa of Someshwar, which belongs to the 12th century, refers to the excellent textiles of Paddalapura Chirpalli, Negapatna and Cholapatna and also to the cloth of Tondaimandalam. It describes and products of cotton (Karpas) as well as silk (Pattusutram).

TEXTILE TECHNOLOGY

Some stray references to the existing textile technology are to be found in the contemporary literature and epigraphically records. In medieval literature the loom is a part of innumerable poetic similes and metaphors. A 10th century verse of the saint Manikkavasagar compares flights of fancy to the rapid movements of a shuttle on the loom. A description of the processes involved in preparing the yarn for weaving comes from the Jaina author Malayagiri in the Sripindanajkti. It says that batting means making loose the cotton (ruta) by means of the bow (Pinjana). It also says that the cotton was ginned in the Gin (lotinyam lotayanti). The description of Pinjana as butting instrument, a bow for loosening the fabrics is confirmed by the Sanskrit dictionary Abidana Chintamani of Hemachandra also pertaining to the 12th century. The evidence of the continued use of the spindle

for spinning yarn in the 13th century comes from the jaina saint and poet Bhavanandi Munivar.

TEXTILE TRADE

There was brisk internal as well as external trade in textile during medieval period in South India. From very early times, many regions in the South seem to have been leasing textile manufacturing and trading centres. In the Tamil Nadu there were several major weaving centers while those catering to the internal demand were linked to the Prevail or grand highways. Those supplying to the export markets were connected to the nearest ports. For instance, in the Tanjavour district, Shiyali, Arantangi, and Kumbakonam taluks were cotton growing areas and weaving centres and there were linked to the chola ports as is evident from references to the highways leading to the pattinam in the inscriptions. In Ramanathapuram district, Tirupattur as well as Sivagangai taluks, cultivation of cotton and the existence of cloth merchants is mentioned. Madurai was a centre of cotton production and weaving and also had a port Korkai. Chinglepat again had numerous cotton production centres and the outlet was Chaturavachagappattinam, the flourishing port Sadras of the 17th century. Mamallapuram had been the pallava post for Kanchipuram during the 17th and 18th centuries and even later it continue as an active port.

TEXTILE VARIETIES

The types of textiles which were in demand in the indigenous market do not seem to have changed much from the earlier period. Ordinary cotton cloth for local consumption was woven in the locality itself. The native aristocracy

Besides the use of silken and cotton patulous and the finer varieties of Muslin was also attracted by certain varieties of English cloth like broadcloth, scarlet and arrears. For a time the company even brought vast cantos of these cloths in the hope of vending them in exchange for Indian Calico. Broad cloth was given in part payment for fine percales, mores and gingham's. But this market was extremely limited and the English ended up merely giving them as presents or peshkashes to win the goodwill of merchants and local officials.

The textile varieties meant for the export market had however a much greater significance in view of the particularity of the various markets where Indian textiles were sold. The painted cliches of Coromandel, the tapechindes, the sparser and sallies that is different types of coarse muslin and chintz were the only cloths in demand in the Malay Archipelago and the demand for particular variety in the eastern markets was a great headache to the companies.

The themes most popular with the Hindu weavers from the epics, Mahabharta and Ramayana. Other popular themes were Sivalila, the divine play of Siva, The Bhagavatam or the story of Krishna and Bhagavad Gita, the depictions of these are in the Kalamkari textiles.

Some of the originality and creativity of the weavers seems to have been lost gradually in the course of the 17th century, when the European companies

Made them work to the perfection of the pattern based on company musters. If the ultimate product were not to their satisfaction the company would reduce payment of the weavers. Nevertheless, the weavers and painters continued to excise their imagination, although the effect was not always aesthetically pleasing.

TEXTILE TECHNOLOGY

It is an undisputed fact that in the 17th and 18th centuries India was the major exporter of textile to England and other European countries. It was only in the early 19th century that the industrial revolution in Britain altered India's position. It was then that machine and science sought to replace man. It was then that the combined effect led to the invention of spinning Jenny. The power loom and the chemical dyes dealt a serious blow to the handloom industry and threw it completely out of gear, With the introduction of these, hand spinning which provided occupation to a large number of people was completely replaced by the increased use of mill yarn. At the outset, large quantities of mill yarn were imported and subsequently dudgeons mill yarn was made available to handlooms and this struck a moral blow to the independence of the industry. However, in spite of such harles the handloom industry managed to survive largely because of the strong preference of Indian women to Sarees and Khans (bodice cloth) and the handloom industry managed to survive. But with the establishment of the first

textile mill in Bombay in 1851 handloom industry started facing competition from indigenous textile mill too.

All this compelled the Government for the first time to look into the condition of the handloom Industry. They approached the Board of Revenue and the Board twice, conducted Enquirer in 1871 and in 1890 and on both these occasions came to the conclusion that the chief causes of the decline of the industry were the competition with the mill industry and the collapse of the spinning industry.

EARLY ATTEMPTS TO REVIVE HANDLOOMS

In the years 1900 – 1934 many attempts were by the Government to revive it and this period may be called as “Period of experiments” Experiments in improved methods of weaving were commenced in 1901-1902 and a few fly-shuttle looms were set up. At the same time certain improved.

Methods of sizing, chiefly hand-sizing were tried. In 1903 Schools of Arts were introduced to continue the experiments.

ESTABLISHMENT OF WEAVING FACTORY

In 1905 it was decided on the advice of Mr.Chatterton who had been specially appointed as the Inspector of Technical Schools and the Superintendent of the School of Arts to continue the experimental work in a properly organized handloom factory. Accordingly in 1965. A weaving factory was established at Salem where there was a large weaving population.

This factory was working on a commercial scale. Besides, Cotton goods, Silk cloths and worsted shawls were manufactured and the sale receipts in some years amounted to nearly Rs. 12,000. But this success proved the factory's undoing. The chamber of commerce entered a protest. Lord Morally, the Secretary of State for India condemned the policy of attempting to create new industries by state intervention and the factory was consequently closed in 1910.

The Government convened an Industrial Conference at Ootcamund., This Conference of 1908 felt that the handloom Industry was in the main suffering from lack of knowledge and lack of organisation.

Shortly after the conference in 1908 a Weaving Expert was appointed and a Weaving Institute was opened at Madurai.

The first weaving party was organized in 1913 for work in the southern districts. It consisted of a superintendent and five weavers and was equipped with a warping mill, a beaming frame, a frame loom with automatic take up motion spare slays, dobbies and jacquard machine and card cutting machines. A second party for the weaving was organized in 1914..

ESTABLISHMENT OF WEAVERS CO-OPERATIVE SOCIETIES

During pre-war and post-war period many attempts were made to form weavers co-operative societies. The condition of the weavers in places like Cajeevaram, madurai, Paramakudi, Tiruchengodu and Salem was studied carefully. The problem of weavers had always been the disposal of finished products. The

small men were under the clutches of big men and the latter were unwilling to give the former equal treatment. After a consideration of these factors the first society was started in Canjeevaram in 1905. Other cooperative societies of weavers soon followed.

The state of the weavers of co-operatives was taken up in 1928 when the handloom Industry came to be considered afresh in all its aspects. It may be stated that there were then 63 weavers societies for the purchase of raw materials and sale of finished goods and 73 weavers credit societies.

In 1928 the Royal Commission on Agriculture felt the need for the development of village industries on co-operative lines, which was very essential for their survival in the face of increasing competition from the organized industry. In 1934 the Government of India announced a decision of subsidize State Governments by paying a sum of Rs. 5 lakhs give in further.

Still the grievances of the Industry remained unsolved and in 1941, the Government of India appointed a Fact Finding committee.

The committee recommended the formation of an All India Handloom Board to look after the raw material marketing and administration of grants in aid. An All India Handloom Board was constituted in 1955, which functioned till 1947.

In 1948 the Government set up a Handloom Standing Committee and a Handloom Debt Fund of Rs. 10 lakhs was also placed at the disposal of the Committee. As a result of this the Industry functioned fairly satisfactorily till 1951.

An All India handloom Board was setup in 1952. The function of the Board was to advise on problems of handloom industry and in particular, to examine schemes for the improvement of the industry. Based on the suggestion of the Board and several other committees the Government, from time to time, implemented several policies and programs for the rejuvenation of the Industry.

On the whole the policy of the Government was one of freezing the capacity of the mill sector and the increasing cloth requirements was to be met by the handloom sector.

Only after the Swedish movement in India the handloom industry began to be recognized and identified with the movement itself.

Even the merchant communities took advantage of the movement and they began to establish, first spinning mills and then composite mill. So, the competition was not only with foreign mill goods but also with Indian mill goods.

After Independence in 1947 both the state as well as the central Government took various measures to rehabilitate the handloom Industry but it is only since 1950 and more especially since 1952 that the industry has been placed on a somewhat organized footing as a result of which it began to show tremendous progress.

After the emergence of India as an independent country the handloom industry has re-established its own place in the national economy of our country. With the coming into existence of the All India Handloom Board in 1952 a new era

has begun in the annals of the handloom industry and under its aegis a massive program aimed at developing the handloom industry on sound co-operative lines and increasing production and marketing of handloom cloth had been undertaken by the Government.

HANDLOOM INDUSTRY IN SALEM

Handloom industry is second in importance only to agriculture in Salem. It is very ancient and some believe that the name Salem itself, is derived from the word 'salya' meaning 'weaver' or 'saeylai' meaning 'sarui', as a major household industry it exists in most of the towns and villages where members of the weaving communities dvangar (or) sedars, jangamar kaikola mudaliar, saliyar, sarashtarar, and seniyyar live.

The finding of a monolithic slick-stone in the servarayan and of spindle-wheels found in a pandukal tomb in irukkur attests to the antiquity of weaving in this region. The slick-stone was apparently used to rub the rough surface of the fabric and put a gloss upon the surface of the cloth while still on the loom. It is said that this was a practice followed by weavers in northern Ireland as late as the beginning of 20th century. The smallness of size of the irukkur spindle-wheel made of baked clay is indicative of the fineness of the yarn spun here.

In the 17th century the mercantile companies of England and France competed with each other to buy the products of the Salem handloom weavers. Anandarangam pillai, the pondicherry dhivibashi (interpreter) for the French

government, describes in his diary how the French compete with the British in buying textiles from Salem weavers. The British company traded with the Salem weavers through their fort St. David settlement in Cuddalore, south "Arcot while the French operated from Pondicherry Francis Buchanan found kaikolar and jedar made 'shills' (thin, white muslin) "deputes" coarse and sometimes 'striped shillas), saoman (same as above with silk border) 'shalay' thicker cotton cloth with red cotton borders) 'Romala' large handkerchiefs for tying round the head, and 'parcala' coarse plain cloth, Thomas Munro categorized the weaving caste of Salem and their specialties thus.

Kaikolas weave coarse long-cloth which go under different names according to their length, selampore hedumulam (literally long hand) 72 cubits turbans, dhoties, pankallies, sadis, handkerchiefs and shams of Muslims of all kinds. Manniwars are pariahs, they weave the finest kinds of turbans and none of the other cloths of the jaders, but all those made by the kaikokas. Their manufacture excels in fineness that of all other castes of weavers, sailors weave the same cloth as jaders, in every respect.

The power struggle between the British and the French, and the occasional Maharatta invasions often interfered with this trade and cloth was damaged in transit or storing. In such cases, the merchants were asked to payback the advances or make good the damaged portion. Because of this policy and a variety of taxes on thread, looms and house, the company faced resistance in recruiting weavers to

produce cloth exclusively. As soon as the area came under the control of the company, in 1792 and efforts were redoubled to exploit fully the weaving craft of 'the Salem country' the first commercial president of Salem Mr. mitchell known as 'the export warehouse keeper and investment manager" was appointed by the company's board of trade in 1792 to procure cloth. Alexander read was requested to provide every assistance to him.

In 1793 Thomas Munro who opposed the policies of the presidency eloquently pleaded for emancipating the weavers from their 'servitude' by removing "every shadow of restraint". In 1794 the company yielded to his recommendations and decided that all duties in the Baramahal and Salem and Namakkal countries upon the importation of cotton and thread and all duties upon the transit of cloth, cotton and thread throughout the districts.... be removed and that all impediments to the transportation these articles.....shall cease.

The number of looms in the district at that time was 1963, distributed in Attur, Kattuputtur, Namakkal, Paramathi, Salem and Sendamangalam. of this a total of 598 were in the service of the company. The number probably kept increasing until the intensive methods adopted by the commercial residence. The investment itself ceased with the departure of JM HE OM 1925.

In order to help the weavers during the difficult year of 1870's cloth manufactured for government during the famine by distressed weavers made over the commission to Mrs. Mc Dowell and company, madras. In Namakkal there were

some 500 weavers who manufactured 'white cloth' of superior description. half of the production was sold locally, while the rest was exported to Bangalore, Mysore, Salem and tiruchirappalli. new encouragement came in the shape of weaver colonies by advancing money to the master-weaver and by exporting the finished goods to England.

With the invention of textile manufacturing machine and the resulting declining of exports of handloom cloth to England, there was steady fall in the demand for Salem products. Raw material exported to England came back to India as finished product, driving Salem products out of the market. The colonial Salem handloom was no match to the impious English mills. By the middle of the 19th century the industry had shrunk to a small dimension.

Experiments in improved methods of handloom weaving were commenced in 1901-1902. In 1906 a weaving institute was opened in Salem by sir, Arthur lawless, the governor of madras presidency, to improve the performance and living condition of the weavers. By introducing fly-shuttle slay, tests showed that the pit-looms fitted with fly-shuttle was as efficient as any other type of improved handloom in the market. Experiments were added on. Ultimately the type adopted at the Salem factory was the old English fly shuttle loom invented by john Kay in 1733 modified to suit the manufacture of indigenous cloth.

The use of fly-shuttle spread rapidly. The Salem factory began to work on a commercial scale and became very successful. Ironically as a consequence of its success it was closed in 1910 on the protests of the Madras Chamber of Commerce. It was then decided to introduce warping mill, dobbies for weaving simple designs and the frame loom. The jacquard machine, so called from Joseph Marie jacquard of Lyons, France (1752-1830) who invented this ingenious device for weaving figures, also came in use for weaving complicated patterns.

The Madras government organized peripatetic weaving demonstrations between 1913 and 1923. They went around the province persuading weavers to adopt fly-shuttle looms to reduce the cost of warp preparation, to produce textiles other than plain cloth and to weave finer and improved quality of cloth. A textile institute was started at Madras in 1922 to undertake studies and research in all aspects of handloom weaving including the construction and demonstration of improved weaving appliances.

During the years between 1923 and 1929 the monsoons were erratic creating severe fluctuations in the textile market. In the years following 1929 the import of Japanese textile and the increased production by the mills in Madras made the lot of handloom weavers intolerable. The reputation of Salem vests further suffered owing to the large admixture of Japanese yarn.⁴ The great depression of 1920-30

added to the severity. In 1930 the price of the finished handloom good dropped 50% throwing 3.00) weavers in Gugai and Shevapettai into unemployment. In 1931 the number of looms in the district was 39,310 and the total number of adult defenders of weaving was 3 times that number. In Salem city alone at least 35,000 individuals depended on the looms.

The Salem swadesi cloth merchants association and the Devanga Mahjana Sangam tried to mitigate the condition by trying to arouse the public to boycott the Japanese textile. They held meetings to burn the Japanese goods but there was little response. Two devanga merchants applied grains to fifty families of unemployed weavers while the collector tried to persuade the Yercaud coffee planters to buy more Salem cloth for the coolies in their estates. About the conditions of these weavers, the collector observed in 1932 that they were mostly illiterate, lived from hand to mouth and gave no education to their children, who are obliged to contribute their labor to the family income. Labour saving device they will not adopt, thrift is almost an unknown virtue among them and the drink-evil has taken deep roots in the community.

The year 1930 was the year of famine and the plight of weavers was so bad that a novel approach to the problem was tried out. The Salem weavers co-operative production and Salem society, the first of its kind in all of India was

started in Gugai by the efforts of Mrs.Barbara Todd the wife of the then collector and the Salem municipal council. The municipal chairman S.Thammanna chattier was elected as the president of the weavers society. The membership of 364 included not only weavers but also the local.