

CHAPTER FIVE

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Introduction

Nineteenth century cotton industries escalated European demand for raw materials, among them cotton assumed overwhelming importance as a raw material for English cloth manufacture. Cotton industry also dramatically reduced the cost of bulk transport than that of supplying English cotton factory products. At the same time, industrial technologies enabled Europeans to expand and tighten their political power in strategic corners of the world economy, to secure markets and improve their terms of trade.⁴⁷⁹

Cotton cultivators and cotton traders in and around Thoothukudi participated in the worldwide upsurge in cotton agriculture along with European industrialization. They did so in an Anglo-Indian imperial setting, and therefore under the influence of Europe's leading cotton industrial power. Tirunelveli region received particular importance in South India, because it produced high quality cotton that fetched high prices in the Company's remittance cotton trade, and then in English agency house cotton trade with English and other European manufactures of cotton cloth.

⁴⁷⁹Headrick., *Tools of Empire, and Wolf, Europe and the People without History*, London, pp. 310 - 384.

In addition, government efforts under Company and Crown to lower transport and communication cost, with both military security and commercial development in view, cheapened cotton commodity exchange among the diverse cotton agricultural communities that composed in and around Thoothukudi, as a result, rapidly expanding peasant cultivation of cotton for export converged in its effects on the region's economy with steadily increasing production of all variety of cotton commodity crops. A traditionally active region of peasant and merchant enterprise thus rapidly became even more active during the nineteenth century, with important social and political consequences. Expanded cotton commodity production in and around Thoothukudi diverse agricultural and social environment slowly but steadily shifted the social distribution of economic power, and stimulated social conflicts that would, by century's end, animate early nationalist politics.⁴⁸⁰

In Thoothukudi, there were ten European cotton trading firms. They were agents for the British India Steam Navigation Company; Messrs. Volkarts Brothers., agents for the Asiatic Steam Navigation Company and Exporters of Cotton, fibre and cotton goods; Messrs. A. and F. Harvey (Managing directors of the Coral Mills, Ltd.), agents for three lines of steamers, and cotton traders; Messrs. Ralli Brother, who conducted an enormous export trade in cotton; the New Berar Company, Exporters of cotton; Messrs. Dymes & Co; and Mr.Zellweger, cotton merchant. The Bank of Madras and the National Bank, Ltd. had agencies in the place for providing bank loans to cotton traders and industrialist. Cotton traders and brokers in Thoothukudi were Vellalars, Nadars, Paravars and Muhammadians.

⁴⁸⁰David Ludden., *Peasant History in South India*, Madras, 1989, p.130.

Besides its sea borne cotton trade, the town had extensive dealings with the taluks of Srivaikundam, Virudhunagar, Srivilliputhur, Tiruchendur and Kovilpatti. They formed, like cotton Pettai further west, the important centre in the east and south for the distribution and collection of cotton goods. The coolies recruited by the Ceylon Labor Commission were embarked and landed here and form the bulk of the 250,000 passengers who pass through the port in a year.⁴⁸¹

Emergence of Cotton Society and their Economical Changes

It is interesting to know how the cotton society had projected itself into cotton agriculture, cotton industry and cotton trade during 19th century. The first group of people to enter cotton trade was the merchant communities in the port city of Thoothukudi who had some acquaintance with cotton industry and contracts with cotton imports and cotton exports. Others came into industry much later. The second group was the prosperous cotton agriculturists. They were used to grow cotton and they came into contact with the cotton ginneries. The more adventurous among them entered the cotton trade which was highly speculative and later, some Britishers established cotton spinning mills in and around Thoothukudi. The third, group of people participated with cotton handlooms and weavings in and around Thoothukudi. Other groups to enter industry were the money lending class. Each of this group brought their own traditional, ways of work, as well as their virtues and limitations to the industrial field.⁴⁸²

⁴⁸¹ H.R. Pate., *Gazetteers of Tirunelveli District*, Vol. I, Madras, 1917, pp 160 – 246.

⁴⁸² Kasthuri Sreenivasan., *India's Textile Industry*, Coimbatore, p. 15.

These cotton production was given share among the different communities like, Reddiyar, Nayakar, Vellalar, Pallar, and some of the Nadar community. The Nadars, Vellalars, Chettiars and some of the Paravas and Muhammadians were occupied in the cotton trading centre and cotton commission malls; the Challiyars and Chenkunda Mudaliyar community people performed cotton handweaving works and cotton handicrafts works; and finally, the few number of private ginning factory owners like, Naidu, Chettiars, Mudaliyars and Nayakars found the private cotton ginning factories.⁴⁸³

Economic Improvement of the Society

Agricultural commodity of cotton economically impacted many levels of cotton society. From 1888 to 1909 cotton was an uplifted commodity among people in and around Thoothukudi. Due to the forwarded developments of cotton in society, there were economic changes in each attempt. However cotton economically changed the cotton cultivator's classes, cotton trader's classes, cotton related industrial laborer's classes, and cotton weaver's classes.

Turned in the first place to the rural areas in and around Thoothukudi, there was an increased degree of local specialization in cotton crops, especially in those grown for cotton export. Cotton was longer planted in small patches in almost

⁴⁸³ Clinical Interview, P. Vengadasamy @ Ponnu Nayakar, s/o Perumel Nayakar, Age - 91, (Ginning Master and Cotton Trader, experience since 1919) Interview Dated, 28th Aug, 2010, Nalattinputhur, Kovilpatti Taluk, Thoothukudi District; A. Kurusamy Nayakar, s/o Achava Nayakar, Age – 84, (Cotton Trader, Experience since 1930) Interview Dated, 30th Aug, 2010, Kurukkusalai, Thoothukudi District; Durgaiammal, w/o Ramasay Pillai, Age – 78, (Cotton cultivator, 63 years Experience) Interview Dated, 28th Aug, 2010, Kadampur, Thoothukudi District; S.S.V. Michial Raj s/o S.S. Visuvasam Nadar, Age – 89, (Cotton Trader, experience since 1920) Interview Dated, 28th Aug, 2010, North Vandanam, Thoothukudi District; S. Kurisamy s/o Sanmuga Devar, Age – 73, (Cotton Trader experience since 1935) Interview Dated, 28th Aug, 2010, South Vandanam Thoothkudi District.

every village where conditions were not absolutely prohibitive, but was concentrated in areas which were specially adapted to its various types. The dry plains of Kovilpatti and Virudhunagar were admirably suited to a short stapled but prolific kind; while the river fed zones of the Srivaikundam, Ambasamudram and Tirunelveli were produced an increased quantity of longer stapled types, which were also grown in the retentive soil and moister climate of Kovilpatti and in the well – irrigated areas in and around Thoothukudi. The peculiarly favourable climate of Thoothukudi had tempted the ryots to extend their cotton cultivation. A visible sign of this movement might be seen in the abandoned cotton mills laid near villages in and around Thoothukudi. The people had led to make this change by the cheap railway and steamer transport and by the construction of roads, which, while facilitating the introducing of foreign imports, also rendered available to the farmer in his distant and land locked village a large share of the price offered by far off nations, for articles which once merely supplied the needs of Thoothukudi rural life. Markets had sprung up on or near the railway, where the foreign exporters or the larger country collected firms had their agencies; and the ryot was not far behind hand in his knowledge of the fluctuations in the world – prices of the principal crops which he grew.

Improved means of communication had another important effect in altering the nature of the cotton developments to which so large a part of Thoothukudi was exposed, and lessened their disastrous results. The development of irrigation and the improvement of agriculture enabled the country in the normal year to grow a much larger quantity of cotton than before. It was possible because of the

railways which diverted supplies of cotton from the export trade to the famine stricken tracts. Famine did not connote so much scarcity or entire absence of food, as high prices and a lack of employment in the affected areas. The terrible calamities which from time to time depopulated wide stretches of country were not to be feared. The problem of relief was scientifically studied, and the system worked out was put into operation as soon as the recognized signals of approaching distress were apparent. Failure of the rains always meant privation and hardship, but it did not mean wholesale starvation and loss of life.

It was clear that, if the basis of employment also widened, crop failures would lose much of the severity of their effects. The extension of industries, in as great a variety of circumstances permitted, to do more than anything to secure the economic stability of the laboring classes.

The Government, in effect, used the rich land revenues from the wet zone to finance cotton exports, and in addition merchants brought in piles of coin to contract for cotton supplies from inland native merchants. This new flood of cash poured especially into dry zone villages endowed with black cotton soil, as cartloads of cotton rolled out of villages towards the port of Thoothukudi town. In the cotton-growing north, marketing centers at railway junctions where cotton exporters also located ginning facilities grew three times faster than the average rate for the twenty-four towns. District headquarters, fed by the growth of government income and employment, grew 92 percent, when we consider Tinnevely and Palayamkottai considered as one urban complex. The port of Thoothukudi grew 72 percent, and by the last quarter of the century cotton exports from Tuticorin surpassed those from the

port of Madras. Urban growth during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, indeed, surpassed the rate of growth during the first two decades of the twentieth century, when overall growth slowed down to 14 percent, though the relative rapidity of population growth in cotton towns, district headquarters, and Tuticorin continued.⁴⁸⁴

Scarcity of Capital for Cotton Agriculture

The capital in the hands of Thoothukudi cotton traders had proved insufficient to finance the ordinary movements of the cotton crops, and the seasonal calls for accommodation from the main financial centres constantly increased. This lack of available capital was one cause of the high rates that the ryot had to pay for the ready money which he needed to bring seed and to meet the expenses of cultivation. On the other hand, money was largely invested in the purchase of landed property, the price of which had risen to very high figures in many parts of Thoothukudi.⁴⁸⁵ Proprietors freely spent their savings from current income on the improvement of land in their own cultivation, but loans from private persons for this purpose were obtainable as a rule only on terms quite disproportionate to the value of the improvements. These were also almost invariably made on land in the investor's own possession, not in that of his tenants. The demand for capital for land improvement had hitherto perhaps been modest; but the stimulus afforded by the Madras Agricultural and Industrial Departments, especially in Tirunelveli, had led to the introduction on a small, but rapidly increased, scale of modern appliances to

⁴⁸⁴David Ludden., *op.cit*, p.130.

⁴⁸⁵Report of Indian Industrial Commission during the year 1916 – 1918, Calcuta, 1916, pp. 2 – 7.

replace labour, improved cultivation, or supply irrigation water. Towards the provision of working capital for cotton cultivation, something had been done by the co-operative movement, initiated and fostered throughout by Government action, and far more might be hoped from it in the future. But the no less urgent necessity of relief for the ryot from the enormous load of debt, with which he had been burdened by the dearness of cotton agricultural capital, the necessity of meeting periodic demands for rent, and his social habits, had hitherto been met only to a very small extent by co-operative organization.⁴⁸⁶

Labour and Wages in and around Thoothukudi

It is impossible to pass from this brief sketch of the cotton agricultural position without some allusion to the rise in the rate of wages and the growing scarcity of labour in most parts of Thoothukudi. The rise in the cost of labour was due mainly to the increased demand, but in some places due to the decline in the laboured population consequent on the ravages of plague during the past twenty years and on famine in the last decade of the nineteenth century, the population as a whole increased by some twenty millions between 1901 and 1911. This period of distress was followed by a sequence of more favourable seasons combined with higher world prices. This prosperity in its turn led to greater expenditure by government, railway companies, and private enterprise, necessitated increased employment. Simultaneously, the increase in world prices, which became effective in Thoothukudi owing to the rapid extension of communications, brought the cotton cultivator more

⁴⁸⁶ Report of Indian Industrial Commission during the years 1916 – 1918, Calcutta, 1916, pp. 2 – 7.

money, and the consequent rise in the cost of living furnished an additional argument to the labourer in his claim for higher wages. This rise told heavily on those sections of the population which were not benefited by the increased cotton agricultural and cotton industrial production, and had accentuated the tendency of the village artisan to migrate to the towns, where better pay was obtainable.⁴⁸⁷

Cotton Agricultural Class – Cultivators and Field Labourers

The Vellalars were the great farmer cast of the Tamil country, and they were strongly represented in every Tamil District Especially in Tinnevely districts. The word ‘Vellalan’ was derived from ‘Vellanmai’ meaning rather than a man of a particular tribe or country”.⁴⁸⁸ At Srivaikundam in Tirunelveli were found one of the oddest people in the world; a tribe of Vellalars who lived within the circle of a lofty mud wall, and denied admittance to strangers. They carried female seclusion beyond the limits of insanity, their women were not allowed to leave the houses in which they were born, much less go abroad within their fort.⁴⁸⁹ Much number of Vellalars participated in cotton cultivation in Ottabidaram, Srivaikundam and Srivilliputhur cotton tracts.⁴⁹⁰

The Nadars might also be looked upon as a cotton agricultural caste. In large portions of the Sivakasi, Kovilpatti, Virudhunagar people who had involved dry

⁴⁸⁷ Report of Indian Industrial Commission, *op.cit*, pp. 2 – 7.

⁴⁸⁸ Madras Manual., part II, P.31. Dr. Oppert considers Vellalan to be etymologically connected with Pallan, Palli, learning “the lord of the Vellas or Pallas”. – Madras Journal of Literature and Science for 1887 – 88, p. 133.

⁴⁸⁹ Census of India, 1911, Vol. XII, Madras, Part. I, Report by J. Chartres Molony., *The section dealing with Industries and Industrial occupations in the Presidency*, by Alfred Chatterton., Madras, 1921, p. 160.

⁴⁹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 163.

land cotton cultivations and produced much more. These people number 291,053. The Kshatriyas were suspected to be mostly Nadars who allocated to themselves titles which implied a higher place in the social scale than that, assigned to them by the general accord of other castes.⁴⁹¹

Cotton Field Labourers

The Devars known in and around Thoothukudi as Maravars were chiefly the cotton agricultural servants or sub tenants of the wealthier ryots under whom they cultivated, receiving a share of crop varying from one-fifth to half. An increasing proportion of these castes were becoming the ryotwari owners of land by purchase from the original holders. Many number of Devars or Maravars participated in cotton cultivation in Sankarankovil, Tirunelveli areas.⁴⁹²

The Pallars were a community class of cotton agricultural labourers found chiefly in Vilathikulam, Ottabidaram, Kovilpatti, Kayattar, and Sankarankovil. The ordinary derivation of the name is from 'Pallam', low wet land, but this is not satisfactory. Dr. Oppert considered it to be only another form of the ryot found in Paraiyans.⁴⁹³

Economical Change among Cotton Cultivation Classes

⁴⁹¹Census of India, 1911, Vol. XII, Madras, Part. I, *op.cit*, pp. 114 -16.

⁴⁹²A.J. Stuart., *Manual of the Tirunelveli District in the Presidency of Madras*, Madras, 1879, p. 14.

⁴⁹³Dr. Oppert., *Journal of Literature and Science for 1887 – 1888*, p. 102.

During the 18th century all the economical transaction depended upon agricultural commodities; cotton was a second main agricultural commodity in and around Thoothukudi. Meanwhile Thoothukudi was one of the main cotton agricultural tracts in Madras Presidency. After 1888, the agriculturists were maximum interested with cotton cultivation because, Europeans cotton related industries depended upon local raw cotton cultivation. So the efforts to introduce modern methods of yielding cotton harvested among native cultivators in and around Thoothukudi.⁴⁹⁴ The then, Madras Government also improved cotton by gradual scientific experiment among cotton cultivators.⁴⁹⁵ In order to make improvements of cotton cultivations they introduced variety of modern seeds, modern plugged system, modern methods of cotton plantations and soil improvements, and also they provided agricultural loans seasons by seasons under Land Improvement Agricultural Loan Act.⁴⁹⁶ That was why the Government planned to start Cotton Agricultural Research Station at Kovilpatti in 1909.

So, the agriculturists' economical status was gradually elevated under these cotton cultivations and improvements. Especially in Thoothukudi some poor communities were forwarded, such as, cotton field labourer communities like Pallars, Paraiyars, Maravars of Ettaiyapuram, Vilathikulam, Kovilpatti, Virudhunagar, Tirunelveli, Kalugumalai, Sattur and Sankarankovil got land owner life status. At the same time cotton land owner's community or agricultural communities like Vellalars,

⁴⁹⁴ NNPR, month of November, Madras, 1889. p. 244; News Paper, *The Hindu Janabhushany*, Madras, Dated, 9th November, 1889.

⁴⁹⁵ NNPR, month of April, Madras, 1889, p. 86; News Paper, *The Tarangay Naison*, Madras, Dated, 13th April, 1889.

⁴⁹⁶ NNPR, month of March, Madras, 1889, p. 70; News Paper, *The Hindu Janabhushany*, of Madras, Dated, 23rd March, 1889.

Nayakars, and Vadugars of Thoothukudi, Tirunelveli, Srivilliputhur, Ottabidaram, Vilathikulam, Kayattar, Ambasamudram and Srivaikundam handled both cotton cultivation and cotton trade simultaneously. No doubt, these cotton cultivators classes were uplifted in their life status.

Cotton Traders Classes

With regard to cotton traders class, they were an intercourse between the Europeans and state authorities. Among the various groups of cotton traders, the Hindu cotton traders played a major part in textile trade as brokers and suppliers. The Christian merchants became strong under the English and became cloth traders. Like the Hindus, the Muslim merchants of the diverse group, participated in oceanic voyages. As far as the chief cotton traders were concerned, the English appointed them as intermediary to trade with local rulers. These chief cotton traders financed the Company's trade by lending them money. Hence, the chief cotton traders consolidated their social positions by being interceded between the English and local rulers.

Cotton traders formed a pivotal group in understanding maritime India and the commercial functions that were formed in the maritime zone. Cotton traders who traded in and around Thoothukudi were a diverse group, divisible into many categories on the basic ethnic and caste origins, nature of cotton commercial operations, area of activity and cotton commercial traded in. They were members of old traditional cotton commercial castes that had engaged for generations in that cotton profession. There were three levels of cotton trade activity existing in and around Thoothukudi such as local cotton trade, regional cotton trade, and long

distance cotton trade like Presidential cotton trade. The local trade engaged small cotton traders, who traveled from village to village and from village to town carrying small loads on their heads, got goods and cash in exchange for their wares, moved to the rhythm of the monsoon. They also carried items from localities in different parts of the Tirunelveli region, which they obtained through circuits of regional cotton trade between cotton agricultural zones. The Regional cotton trade was carried by bullock carts, and transported from local cotton markets to main cotton markets like Thoothukudi Cotton Market, Tirunelveli Cotton Market, Sattur Cotton Market and Virudhunagar Cotton Market and then it was exported to foreign or presidential cotton trades. Final, trade activities were Presidential cotton trade by train from one Presidency to other Presidency such as Mumbai, Bangalore and Hyderabad.

In Thoothukudi area the cotton traders group of society engaged in cotton trade activity were Nadars of Thoothukudi, Sivakasi, Sattur, Virudhunagar, Kovilpatti, and Kadambur who established cotton contract agencies and cotton commission malls and contacted with British cotton industries for supply of raw cotton from cultivated field. The Vellalars and Chettiars of Thoothukudi, Ottabidaram, Rajapalayam, Tirunelveli and Srivaikundam handled the wholesale cotton in and around Thoothukudi, and some Paravar communities who had participated in exporting cotton trade by Cattumaram from Thoothukudi port to neighbouring countries. The Naidus and Reddiyars of Vilathikulam, Sattur, Kovilpatti, and Virudhunagar who had worked out the cotton trade by bullock cart between cotton fields to cotton industries in and around Thoothukudi.⁴⁹⁷

⁴⁹⁷ Kanakalatha Mukund., *The Trading World of the Tamil Merchant*, Chennai, 1999, p. 59.

After the Europeans began to participate in local cotton trade in and around Thoothukudi, the cotton traders acted as the interface between them and local economy and state authorities. These cotton traders' capitalists were distinguished by some common, shared characteristics that were worth enumeration. They were large scale cotton export traders, often possessing their own ships, which traded extensively with South East Asian countries.⁴⁹⁸

During the 18th century in Thoothukudi totally 32,007 males as cotton traders, and 4,373 as conveyers, were classed under this head. In this district the Nadar formed the highest proportion and then, the Vellalars, followed by Chettiars, which class, in nearly all the other districts, occupied the highest rank in the list of cotton traders as regards their numbers.

Nadars	-	8,201
Vellalars	-	5,451
Chettiars	-	3,784 ⁴⁹⁹

The Muhammadians as cotton traders of Tirunelveli was mostly of mixed descent; nearly 60 percent of the whole were of the class termed Lubbais, while Arabs, Sheiks, Syads, Patans, and Moguls were hardly represented; 29.9 percent of the whole were unclassified, but it was probable that they belonged chiefly to the Lubbais or to converted Hindus of Low castes. The Lubbais were found chiefly in towns and settled along the coast; in the former they were engaged in weaving and in cotton trade; in the latter in seafaring pursuits, chiefly cotton trade by sea.

⁴⁹⁸ Kanakalatha Mukund., *op.cit.* p. 59.

⁴⁹⁹ Census of India, Report on the Census of the Madras Presidency, 1871, with Appendix, by W.R. Cornish., Vol. I, Madras, 1874, p. 320.

The Muhammadians of Melappalaiyam, Kayalpatinam and few from Thoothukudi engaged in cotton trade both regional and foreign. The Kayattar Muhammadians did some cotton related business in dyeing yarn. Red was the usual colour, and the finished article was consumed chiefly by Tirunelveli Kaikkilaiyans in the manufacture of cheaper cloth for women.⁵⁰⁰ At the sametime Marvadies of Thoothukudi and Tirunelveli were engaged in money lending business for providing financial aid for cotton industrialist and cotton traders for money interest.⁵⁰¹

Economical Changes among Cotton Traders classes

Ever since ancient times Tamil Nadu was a great trading centre in India. Thoothukudi especially was an epitome of commerce in Madras Presidency, that was way Thoothukudi was called “Gate Way of Tamil Nadu” because Thoothukudi port was historically famous for export and imports. After the Europeans began to participate in the local cotton trade, the cotton traders acted as the interface between them and local economy and state authorities. These merchant capitalists were distinguished by some common, shared characteristics that were worth enumeration.⁵⁰²

During the 18th century cotton was the main economical commodity in and around Thoothukudi. The Cotton was exported to cater to foreign needs, and at the same time compensated with local industrial and indigenous weavers needs too. After 1888, cotton trade was handled by Nadars, Vellalars, Muhammadians, and

⁵⁰⁰ Census of India, Report on the Census of the Madras Presidency, 1871, with Appendix, by W.R.Cornish, Vol. I, Madras, 1874, p. 320.

⁵⁰¹ A.J. Stuart, *op.cit*, p. 17.

⁵⁰² Kanakalatha Mukund, *op.cit*, p. 59.

Paravars. Due to the developments of cotton trade in and around Thoothukudi many traders in communities economically uplifted their life status.⁵⁰³

In Tirunelveli district the Nadars only drafted Toddy, (Palmyra Juice), but after the developments of cotton trade many Nadars of Thoothukudi, Kovilpatti, Sattur, Virudhunagar, Sivakasi, and Tenkasi gradually elevated their professions as 'cotton agents' and 'cotton commission mall owners'. Then, agricultural communities of Vellalars gradually elevated their professions as 'cotton contractors' from cotton fields to cotton industries. At the sametime some Paravas of the fishing community of Thoothukudi handled cotton trade by cattumaram, (Indigenous Boat) from Thoothukudi to Sri Lanka and some Muhammadians of Melappalaiyam, Kayalpatinam, and Thoothukudi handled cotton trade within the states. No doubt these traders classes were economically uplifted their status.

Cotton Industrial Classes

In Thoothukudi, the advancement of cotton industry was bounded up with the advancement of cotton industrial developments. The industrial advance of Thoothukudi had been mentioned; with a large increase in the number of cotton ginning factories.⁵⁰⁴ For cotton industries to exist there must be raw material to work upon, which might be either of local origin or imported. The finished product of one cotton industry was often the raw cotton material of another. It would be convenient to designate as primary cotton industries those which deal with the cotton products of

⁵⁰³ NNPR, month of November, Madras, 1889. p. 261; News Paper, *The Arya Jana Paripalini*, Madras, Dated, 1st November, 1889.

⁵⁰⁴ Census of India, 1911, Vol. XII, Madras, Part. I, Report by J. Chartres Molony., *The section dealing with Industries and Industrial occupations in the Presidency*, by Alfred Chatterton., Madras, 1921, p. 189.

the earth in their natural state, as examples of which might cite such cotton manufacture as cotton yarn. There was the manufacture of machine tools or locomotives, of cotton cloth.⁵⁰⁵

During 1900 onwards Tirunelveli districts contained large numbers of cotton spinners and cotton factory hands, which was due, no doubt, to the existence of at least three spinning mills, one at Papanasam next in Thoothukudi, and the other in Kovilpatti and of a number of cotton presses in and around Thoothukudi.⁵⁰⁶ So this cotton related industries needed a number of labourers. Due to this demand, some communal people engaged industrial employments. Totally 104,936, or 12.5 percent of the male population, were classed as labourers, who were drawn chiefly from the following classes in and around Thoothukudi:

Vanniars	33,811
Paraiyars	26,178
Vellalars	11,808
Nadars	14,661 ⁵⁰⁷

Nearly 12 percent, or 96,283 males, follow cotton industrial occupations; a fourth of this number deals in dress, and nearly twice as many in food. 10,568 out of 23,679 classed under dress were Weavers, 4,082 Pariahs, and 4,719 Muslims also come under this head.

Economical Change among Cotton Industrial classes

⁵⁰⁵ Census of India, 1911, *op.cit*, p. 196.

⁵⁰⁶ Census of India, 1891, Madras, by H.A. Stuart., Vol. XIV, Madras, pp. 340 – 341.

⁵⁰⁷ Census of India, Report on the Census of the Madras Presidency, 1871, with Appendix, by W.R. Cornish., Vol. I, Madras, 1874, p. 320.

In the beginning stage, in India better system existed. The coolies were paid in harvested commodities. But, after the coming of the British in India, especially in and around Thoothukudi, they first introduced pay in cash for workers of the cotton and cotton related industries, because they knew about the mentality of the cotton society people. They had developed economical sufficiency to their work more effectively. Many Paraiyars and Pallars peoples of Srivaikundam, Ottabidaram, and Vilathikulam migrated to settle near cotton related industries in and around Thoothukudi as cotton mills labourers.

Before 1870, in Thoothukudi rural villagers depended upon agriculture only, but after 1888, many village agricultural field labourers changed their professions as cotton mills workers. Since all the cotton related industries in and around Thoothukudi were worked out by rural villagers, no doubt these industrial classes peoples uplifted their economical status by cotton related industries in and Thoothukudi.

Cotton Weaver's classes

As far as the weavers were concerned, there was an increased competition among the Europeans to procure cloth from the weavers. The head weavers played a major part in supplying the goods by eliminating the middlemen. The master weavers acted independently as agents to the Company. Thus, the English who came as adventurers to South India and especially to Thoothukudi established themselves as cotton traders. With the coming of English cotton industrialists to Thoothukudi therefore cotton trade was carried on prosperously by cotton traders and native cotton weavers obtained their social status like that of the English officials.

The weaving industry in common with other industries was organised into castes and guilds, which were sometimes identical and sometimes not. There were certain professional weaving castes to which weaving was generally the sole means of livelihood. It was stated, "Usually, each sub caste wove a particular type of cloth, and could seldom be induced to make any other." It was difficult to effect a change even in the dimensions of the cotton cloth.⁵⁰⁸

In the beginning of the nineteenth century the Kaikolar and Sourashtra Communities were found engaged in cotton weaving in Madras, Kancheepuram and North Arcot Districts. Vellalars, Vanniars and Udayars were found engaged in South Arcot and Madurai districts. Besides, communities of Sedans, Paraiyars and Devangas in Salem, Coimbatore and Trichirapalli districts; Brahmins, Chettiars, Naidus and Mudaliyars in Tanjore, Ramanathapuram Tirunelveli and Kanyakumari districts, carried cotton weaving in Madras Presidency.⁵⁰⁹

The weaving of cotton cloths in and around Thoothukudi was the hereditary employment of the Kaikkilaiyans, Pattasalaiyans and Pattunulkarans and formed the chief occupation of a large number of Muhammadians and Iluvans and a few KoiliyaParaiyans. Wide streets lined with double rows of trees to give shade to the workers at the long line of outstretched warp were the familiar signs of a settlement of weavers; and in many of the taluks it was seldom necessary to go far to find one. The most prosperous centre of the industry was the Ambasamudram Taluk;

⁵⁰⁸ Dodwell., *The Madras Weavers under the Company*, Vol. IV, Indian Historical Records Commission, (Madras, 1922), p. 29 – 36.

⁵⁰⁹ Edgar Thurston., *Monograph of cotton fabric Industry in the Madras Presidency*, 1897, p. 12; F. Arthur., *Manual of North Arcot*, 1894, p. 161; B.S. Baliga., *Madras District Gazettees*, South Arcot 1962, p. 221; W. Francis., *Madras District Gazettees*, 1906, p.145.

and here, in Ambasamudram itself, in Kallidaikurichi, Viravanallur and many neighbouring villages, Kaikkilaiyans (with their caste title Mudali) were found in large numbers. In the TenkasiTaluk, the headquarter town and Kadaiyanallur were their chief centers; large numbers were found in the town of Tinnevelly, and in various places in the SankarankovilTaluk. Pattasalaiyans (whose cast-title is Adavi) were found chiefly in the AmbasamudramTaluk, Viravanallur and Pattamadai being their important centres. Pattunulkarans (who assumed the title Ayyar and posed as Brahmans) were numerous in Viravanallur and Palayamkottai.⁵¹⁰

Muhammadian weavers were found all over the district Pottalpudur (AmbasamudramTaluk), Melappalaiyam (Tinnevelly), Eruvadi (Nanguneri), Kadaiyanallur (Tenkasi), Kayalpatinam (Tiruchendur) and Seydinganallur (Srivaikundam) being their more important stations. Iluvans were commonest perhaps in the Ambasamudram and Srivaikundamtaluks; a large settlement exists also in Puliyangudi (SankarankovilTaluk). KoiliyaParaiyans were most numerous in the AmbasamudramTaluk but were found elsewhere, as for instance, at Sawyerpuram (SrivaikundamTaluk).⁵¹¹

Weaving classes of Sengundan or SengunthaMudaliyar community people mostly engaged cotton weaving in Ettaiyapuram, Kovilpatti, Rajapalayam, Srivilliputhur, Kalugumalai, and Sivakasi. Population of these communities in and around Thoothukudi was 5,823. The Kaikkilaiyans in Kalugumalai, Ettaiyapuram and Vilathikulam wove the ordinary cloth for local cotton sale and a few families of

⁵¹⁰ F. Buchanan., A Journey from Madras through countries of Mysore, Canara, and Malabar, London, 1907, p. 152.

⁵¹¹ A.J. Stuart., *op.cit*, p. 102 and pp. 283 - 284.

Kaikkilaiyans wove the clothes worn by women, coarse towels and a class of bed sheet known as rettu. They used to do their own dyeing but then imported coloured yarn from Madura. From information furnished in the Statistical Atlas of the Madras Presidency it appears that in 1900 there were 167,806 handlooms in Thoothukudi distributed as: 10,196 handlooms.⁵¹²

No recent attempt had been made to estimate the number of handlooms in and around Thoothukudi, but it was not probable that there had been any great change in the numbers. Through efforts fostered by the government there had, however, been a marked development in the use of the fly shuttle slay, which increased the output of each loom on an average by not less than 50 percent. The Government deputed a special officer to investigate the matter, and in 89 villages 6,528 fly shuttle looms were actually counted. It was estimated that the total number was not less than 10,000, and indeed it was put at a very much higher figure than this by merchants engaged in the trade. A review of all the evidence available led to the conclusion that the handloom industry was holding its own, and that the general increase in prosperity was leading to an increased demand for its finer products. This was borne out by the marked increase in the number of handloom weavers in such centres of fine weaving as Rajapalayam, Ettaiyapuram, Kovilpatti, Sattur, Srivilliputhur, Ambasamudram, Virudhunagar, and Srivaikundam. The increase of

⁵¹² Census of India, 1911, Vol. XII, Madras, Part. I, Report by J. Chartres Molony., *The section dealing with Industries and Industrial occupations in the Presidency*, by Alfred Chatterton., Madras, 1921, p. 207.

weaving had been from 465 to 1,824, and in the latter from 9,353 to 15,117, the average in the above being 60.8 percent.⁵¹³

Economical Change among Cotton Weavers classes

The condition of the handloom weavers was generally assumed to have steadily deteriorated owing to the effect of competition, and of indirect evidence there were plenty to support of this idea. The weavers themselves complained that their condition had steadily become worse, that they had to work harder and that the coarse weavers, even by the most unremitting toil, were only able to make a bare livelihood. If it had been uniform throughout, it would have been possible to state definitely whether the number of weavers was increasing or decreasing; but unfortunately there had been many changes in the methods of grouping trades or branches of a trade at each census, and it was difficult to arrive at any certain conclusion.⁵¹⁴

Cotton spinning and weaving by hand, which formed the chief manufacturing industries in Thoothukudi, steadily declined before the cheap machine – made goods imported from European countries. Owing to the loss of their usual occupation, several of the weaving classes in Ettaiyapuram, Rajapalayam, Kallidaikurichi, Tirunelveli migrated to town in search of employment.

After 1905, the Government, upon the report of the Director of Industries in the Madras Presidency, had expressed its opinion that co-operative credit societies might be established for the benefit of the weavers also, as had been done

⁵¹³Census of India, 1911, Vol. XII, Madras, *op.cit*, p. 208.

⁵¹⁴Census of India, 1911, Vol. XII, Madras, Part. I, *op.cit*, 1921, p. 207.

for the agriculturists. There was no doubt that this was very essential. The Government of Madras had started this movement. Next to agriculture, weaving was a source of livelihood for many people, and so it was very necessary that these had been in a good condition. As a matter of fact, the weavers were in a worse plight than the agriculturists. The latter had more or less a settled income. If, in one year, they lived by borrowing, owing to the failure of crops consequent on the scarcity of rain, they got on without any anxiety next year, when the lands yielded well owing to timely rainfall. But this was not the case with the weavers. Already, on account of the rivalry of Manchester, they had lost their ancient source of livelihood. Even the little which they had was not sufficient for them on account of their poverty. Just as the agriculturists suffered on account of the debts incurred by them, the weavers also borrowed from the traders and, after paid the latter they gained which they got from their industry, suffered from starvation. These did not possess forethought, education and good behaviour. Even the qualities which were essential to workmen, viz., union, preservation of the common good and spend money for the sake of future gain, were not found in these men. In addition to these, drinking, which was the greatest evil habit of the workmen, was very common. Moreover, all the workmen did not act as told to them to do.

The weavers were the worst among all of them. When there was sign of famine in the land, these were the persons who suffered first without livelihood. Therefore, it would be a very great thing if the Government had uplifted them. If they were taught the advantage of working for the common good by uniting together and

placed confidence in one of them, there could not be a greater benefit conferred upon them. The self-interested traders would check the advancement of the weavers.⁵¹⁵

Other Classes of Cotton Society

During the 19th century cotton development was much more in and around Thoothukudi, so some group of people which supported to help cotton trades and industries were the Vandipettai communities, moneylender communities, and Karikazham community. To account work in these cotton institutions, there arose a need for clerks. To part the carts which came from the villages carrying cotton, 'Vandipettai' was established. To get the raw material cotton, money was landed by finance companies, which developed as a business of getting interest. Coal was imported for the use of machines which were operated in steam power. This coal was heaped in one portion of the port, which was called 'Karimedu' or 'Karikazham'. To work in these factories and Karimedu, a lot of people from the neighbouring places came and settled in Thoothukudi.

In Thoothukudi area cotton was transported from cotton field to cotton market, by means of bullock carts because bullock carts could easily move unmedaled rural roads. So, during the time of cotton development there emerged some Vandipettai communities. Mostly Paraiyars and Pallars had been both bullock carts owners and drivers.

⁵¹⁵NNPR, month of January, Madras, 1910, p. 133; News Paper, *The Swadesamitran*, Madras, Dated, 18th January, 1910.

All the cotton markets got Vandipettai (Cart Parking Stations or workshop). This Vandipettai was maintained by Vandipettai communities like Visvakarma or Kammalar or Assariar. These Visvakarma people handled repair works of bullock carts. Due to the development of cotton trade they too were economically uplifted. All the commercial activities depended upon financial sources, from 1888 to 1909 in Thoothukudi areas much number of Undiyal Kadai⁵¹⁶ was established by Marvadies communities and Chettiars. Undiyal Kadai provided financial aid to cotton traders and industrialists by sufficient interest.

Then, they maintained proper debit account and these accounts were handled by Kanakku Pillai communities. Some Europeans' industrial accounts also were handled by Kanakku Pillai communities. In order to the development of these Undiyal Kadai many Marvadies migrated from north India to Tirunelveli regions. At the same time traders classes' people of some Chettiar communities were established Undiyal Kadai in and around Thoothukudi.

The Rural people of Paraiyar community unloaded coal from Thoothukudi port to coal field or coal godown that was called 'Karimedi' this coal field was called Karimedu, the economical status of these communities were also uplifted.

Total Population of Cotton Society in and around Thoothukudi from 1881- 1891

Group and Occupations	Distributions of Occupations		
	Total	Males	Females

⁵¹⁶ Undiyal Kadai Means financial centre engaged by Marvadies and Chentties Peoples.

1. Cotton Cleaners, Pressers and Ginners	7,051	831	6,220
2. Cotton Carpet and Rug Makers and Sellers	141	108	33
3. Cotton Spinners, Sizes and Yarn beaters	18,194	2,761	15,433
4. Cotton Weavers, Mill Owners and Manager	59,498	30,785	28,713
5. Cotton Factory hands (undefined)	794	438	356
6. Cotton dyers	1,843	893	950
7. Cotton Yarn and Thread (for weaving) sellers	554	124	430
8. Cotton money lenders and pawnbrokers	28	16	12
9. Cotton Brokers agents, dubash	1,154	726	428

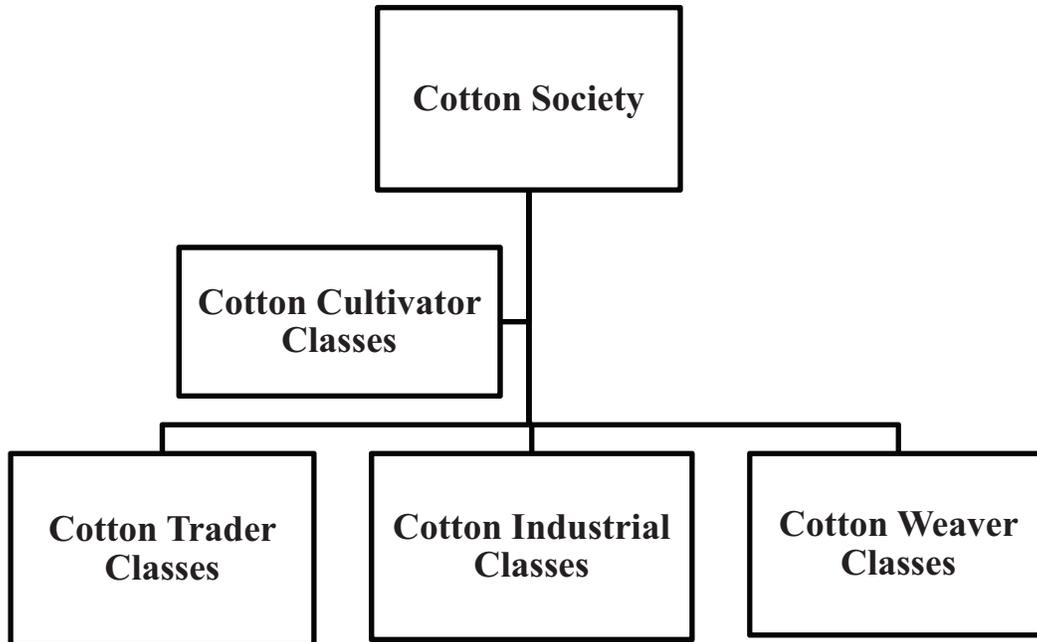
Source: Census of India, 1891, Vol. XIV, Madras, Tables I to XVII – C, British Territory, by H.A. Stuart., General Tables for British Provinces and Feudatory States, Vol. II, Statistics of Cast, Tribe, and Race, combined with Literacy and Infirmities; Territorial Subdivisions, and Birth and Deaths, Table. XVII, London, 1893, pp. 566, 572, 602, 608.

Total Numbers of cotton Society in and around Thoothukudi from 1901 – 1911

Type of Cotton Occupations	Males	Females
1. Cotton Agriculturalists	231	40
2. Cotton Traders	902	319
3. Money lenders and dealers	644	197
4. Cart Owners, Drivers Etc.	92	21
5. Clerk (Non Government)	136	-
6. Cotton Weavers and Mill hand	799	114

Source: Census of India, 1911, Vol. XII, Madras, Part. II, *Imperial and Provincial Tables XV - B*, by J. Chartres Molony., Madras, 1913, pp. 216 and 219.

Stages of cotton Society



Thoothukudi Textile Mill Workers Union 1905

In early period trade unionism would had been unthinkable. The workers power had been achieved by no deliberate strategy; they had grown out of the body of our society.⁵¹⁷ If so many people in so many walks of life had joined them, that was because they had common needs. The power of trade union had came to yield and had been acquired in the course of historical development, in which the systematic pressure of economic and social forces had been punctuated by the contingency of events. The study of this process helped towards the understanding of Thoothukudi Coral Mills Trade Union Movement.

Definition of Trade Union

⁵¹⁷Henry Phelps Brown., *The Origins of Trade Union Power*, London, 1983, p. 1.

Sidney and Webbse point out that “a trade union is a voluntary organisation of workers formed to promote and protect their own interest by collective action”.⁵¹⁸ The Indian Trade Union Act 1926 defines trade union as “any combination whether temporary or permanent formed primarily for the purpose of regulating the relations between the workers and employers or for imposing restrictive condition on the conduct of any trade or business”.⁵¹⁹

Some labourers felt that the trade union movement was necessary for improving the personal contract between the employers and the workers of the modern factory system. According to some communist group of labourers, they felt that “Trade union is a voluntary organisation of workers formed to promote and protect their own interests and rights by collective action and bargaining”.

Labour Union was an organisation of employees whose purpose was to begin with an employer or a group of employers over paid and working conditions.⁵²⁰ Historically the term ‘Labour’ was defined as those men and women in a society who worked to secure an economic compensation for the production of distribution of economic goods and services owned by others, called employers.

A Labour Union was traditionally defined as an organisation of such men and women for economic ends. Then, these ends had extended into social goals.⁵²¹ However trade union had so many definitions and various ideologies but all the definitions and ideologies had same central theme that was to promote welfare of workers and living conditions. Again all the various ideologies and meaning

⁵¹⁸ *Hind Mazdoor Sabha, Silver Jubilee Year Book*, Madurai, 1979, p.9.

⁵¹⁹ S.C. Pant., *Indian Labour Problems*, Allahabad, 1974, p. 65.

⁵²⁰ *Grolier Academic Encyclopedia*, Grolier International, Vol. 12, 1983, p. 152.

⁵²¹ *The Encyclopedia Americana*, Grolier International, Vol. 16, 1983, p. 621.

emphasized the improvement of labourers' social welfare and their economic conditions.

The Industrial Union

This first appeared in the late 19th century wherever machinery and mechanical power replaced handicraft, skills and natural energy in the productive and distribute progress, while the earliest of these unions was established in Britain.⁵²²

Labour were self governing organisations. Major decisions at all levels were made by the elected leadership. In the administration of their internal affairs and in their relations with employers many unions had developed a high degree of professionalism.⁵²³ Leaders often devoted full time to their union positions in addition to this; unions occasionally employed lawyers, doctors, economists and publicists.

Aims and Operations of Labour Unions

All unions had similar internal structures ranging from the business agent on the site or the shop steward on the floor to the top or employer representative. They handled a multitude of job problems such as hiring, working conditions, grievances, dismissals and layoffs,⁵²⁴ discrimination concerning women and minorities, use of new technology, and flexible working hours. All unions had developed similar programs such as Minimum hours, Adequate Wages, Job Security, Extra Vocational Benefits, Paid Holidays, Vacations, and Sick Leaves. The trade union had developed unemployment and retirement benefits.

⁵²²Grolier Academic Encyclopedia, *op.cit*, p. 153.

⁵²³Ibid, p. 154.

⁵²⁴P. Ramamurthy., *Tamil Nadu Thozhil Sanga Iyakkam Ninaivugal* (Tamil), Madras, 1985, p. 13.

Origin of Thoothukudi Textile Workers Union 1905

After the Industrial Revolution, the British Government passed several Laws and Legislations. These Legislations were applied by them in their own British India. The Industrial workers now and then opposed the laws and Acts passed by them in relation to the Labour Problems in India.

Before 1850, there were no large scale industries in India. There were only small scale industries and some handicraft works. After the revolt of 1857, lot of large scale industries were created by the British Company. They established some factories, cotton mills, cotton weaving industries, minor coal industries, and new railway lines in India.⁵²⁵ Because of these new industrial works, the Indians faced several problems such as no sanitary facilities and fixed wages.

During this time newspapers also published news about the poor living conditions of the workers and their grievances. Bengali newspaper played a vital role among the workers and published about the workers' bad living conditions and their grievances to the British Government.⁵²⁶ About the same time so many leading politicians and journalists worked for the betterment of the workers.

Among them Surendranath Banerjee, Krishnakumar Mithra, Kibnath Sastri and Sashtha Banerjee, were important leaders and worked for the workers. These leaders exposed the working condition of women and children to the British Government. Lastly the British Government passed the First Industrial Act of 1881.

⁵²⁵Hind Mazdoor Sabha, *op.cit*, p. 8.

⁵²⁶Ibid, p. 9.

This Act gave some beneficial measure to the women workers and child labourers such as rest hours, insurance, weekly leave, etc.⁵²⁷

During 1890 there arose so many new Labour Movements and Unions in India among them. They were as follows:

1. India – Burma Railway Workers Union of 1897
2. Calcutta Printing Press Workers Union 1905
3. Thoothukudi Textile Mill Workers Union 1905 and
4. Bombay Postal Department Workers Union 1908⁵²⁸

Tamil Nadu played a vital role in the origin and development of Trade Union Movement in India. When V.O. Chidambaram organised Textile Mill Workers' Union in 1905 in Thoothukudi Mill it was the First Trade Union Association in the history of Trade Union Movement in India.⁵²⁹ Without any fear and shyness all the workers united together under one union and willingly participated in strikes and agitated activities. After the strikes of this Union so many Unions were started in India.

Impact of Thoothukudi Textile Mills Workers Union

Trade Union Movement had its own effects and defects. After the growth of trade union power some changes were brought on in the economic and social life of the workers. In early times the trade unions were organised only for

⁵²⁷The Indian Labour Year Book of 1967, Government of India, Madras, 1968, p. 80.

⁵²⁸P. Ramamurthy., *op.cit*, p. 6.

⁵²⁹Ibid. p. 6 – 7.

expressing and exposing the labour problems. But in course of time trade unions changed their activities and they had been institutionalised for getting rights from management and Governments.⁵³⁰

The Government also introduced several Legislations and Acts regarding the problems of Labourers. These Legislations and welfare activities were the outcome of the trade union movement. Anyhow trade union movement had its own defects. Trade union movements created the problem of plurality of unions and paved the way for professionalism and opportunism in trade union organisations. Trade union movement had its own effects in legislative and social fields.

Before the growth of trade union movement there were no laws and security for the people of working class and there were no laws regarding the management relationship. However Thoothukudi Textile Mill Worker Union had vital participation under Swadeshi Movement on Coral Mills Strikes in 1908.

Swadeshi Movement in and around Thoothukudi

The Extremists considered the boycott of foreign goods as an integral part of the Swadeshi Movement. The Movement in Tamil Nadu soon began to have an impact on the production and consumption of Swadeshi Cloth. The import of yarn and textiles from England to the Madras Presidency began to decline. Meanwhile, indigenous cloth production showed a significant increase.

In October 1905, the National Co-operative Society of Mumbai sent one of its members to Tirunelveli to deliver lectures on the Swadeshi Movement. He

⁵³⁰Hind Mazdoor Sabha, *op.cit*, p. 18.

spoke on topics such as ‘Separation of Executive from Judiciary’ Representation of Indian grievances in the House of Commons. They demanded for an equal share in higher appointments for Indians and the curtailment of expenditure on the Indian Army. These speeches enabled the people to gain some ideas about the issues deliberated at the national level.⁵³¹ The Swadeshi Movement in Thoothukudi received another fillip in August 1906 when G.SubramaniyaIyer visited Thoothukudi to preside over the Swadeshi anniversary meeting. In 1908 when an European circus company the Abel Circus, performed in Tirunelveli town, it was totally boycotted by the people as it was foreign.⁵³²

Thoothukudi Coral Mill’s Strike

The Thoothukudi Coral Mill’s strike provided important insight into the class character of this phase of the nationalist movement in Tamil Nadu. The strike reached out to embrace all sections of Thoothukudi’s working class.⁵³³ The mill workers as a body rose in support of their fellow workers against arbitrary British action.

Of the three large spinning mills founded in the composite Tirunelveli district (in and around Thoothukudi) in the latter half of the 19th century, two mills like Tirunelveli Cotton Mill Ltd, Thoothukudi Coral Mill Ltd and Kovilpatti Cotton Mill Ltd.

⁵³¹ P.B. Gopalakrishnan., *Swadeshi Movement in Tinnevelly District, 1905 – 1908*, Article in Reflections on Trends and Themes in History, ed, S. Manickam., Scholl of Historical Studies, Madurai Kamaraj, University, Madurai, 1992, p. 121.

⁵³² K.S.K. Velmani., ed, *Gazetteers of India, Tamil Nadu State, Tirunelveli District*, Vol. I, Chennai, 2002, pp. 246 – 253.

⁵³³ T. Stalin Kunasekaran., *Vidutalai Velviel Tamilam (Spiritual Fire of Freedom in Tamilnadu)*, Vol. II, Erode, 2000, pp. 413 – 414.

Working condition in these mills was extremely poor.⁵³⁴ In 1908, a total of 1695 workers, 59 percent of them aged between 14 to 16, worked at Coral Mill at Thoothukudi. Their day started early at about 5.00 a.m., and they laboured until even in the evening. This long working hour was conducted in stuffy, insalubrious surroundings. The sanitation was not cared for, and the medical facilities were inadequate. The mill was running in a huge profit.⁵³⁵

On 27th February 1908, the workers of the Thoothukudi Coral Mills decided to go on strike. Their demands included the reduction of working hours and increase in pay.⁵³⁶ The workers' cause was taken up by V.O.Chidhambaram Pillai, who had long been interested in labour welfare, and the striking workers quickly won the sympathy and support of the people of Thoothukudi. Relief centres were started by public subscription for the feeding of the workers. Local merchants, lawyers, land owners, peasants, infant practically every section of the society became involved in the supportive effort.⁵³⁷

Espousing the workers' cause, V.O.Chidhambaram Pillai entered into negotiations with the Coral Mills Management. While preparing to grant some concessions, the management proved unyielding on the issue of a wage rise an attitude which served to further alienate it from the people of Thoothukudi.

⁵³⁴N. Somayajulu., *Nellai Mavatta SuthanthiraPoratta Varalaru (History of Freedom Movement in Tirunelveli District)*, Madras, 1976, pp. 81 – 82.

⁵³⁵R. Sinnakani., ed, *Gazetteers of India, Tamil Nadu State, Thoothukudi District*, Vol. I, Chennai, 2007, pp. 140 – 141.

⁵³⁶N. Rajendran., *National Movement in Tamil Nadu, 1905 – 1914*, Madras, 1994, p. 74.

⁵³⁷G.O. No. 1087, Judicial Dept, Dated, 8th August, 1908.

One day, the Harvey brothers while traveling along the Palayamkottai road were confronted by a jeering crowd which pelted them with stones, significantly not a single member of the crowd was a mill worker.⁵³⁸ Sensing the mood of the people, Thoothukudi's European residents became increasingly jittery and began spending their nights inside the premises of the British Indian Steam Navigation Company. Workers in cotton mills and factories in and around Thoothukudi as well as in other parts of Tamil Nadu now launched sympathy strikes.

Events of Swadeshi Movements

Early in 1908, a conjunction of events and tendencies growing agitation and combative character of the Swadeshi Movement in Thoothukudi, the successful functioning of Swadeshi Steam Navigation Company in direct competition with an important British concern; and the working class involvement in nationalist politics signified by the historic Coral Mill strike triggered a major confrontation between nationalists and the district administration.

G.T.H. Bracken was the Joint District Magistrate stationed at discontent ridden Thoothukudi then. On 27th February 1908, the day on which the workers of the Coral Mills began their landmark strike, Bracken wired to Wynch, the District Magistrate at Tirunelveli, to dispatch twenty constables from the reserve police force to Thoothukudi immediately. Next, he promulgated order under Section 144, Indian Penal Code prohibiting a public meeting scheduled to take place that evening. Wynch directed the District Superintendent of police to send thirty reserve police constables to Thoothukudi which arrived in the following morning. Wynch

⁵³⁸N. Rajendran., *op.cit*, p. 74.

himself proceeded to Thoothukudi on 20th February and found the town perfectly quiet.⁵³⁹

P.S.Shanmugasundaram Pillai, an ardent supporter of V.O.Chidhambaram, gave notice of two meetings, scheduled for 28th February one at the beach and the other in private premise. After prolonged discussions between Wynch, the Deputy Superintendent of police and V.O.Chidhambaram, official permission was granted for both the meetings, which then passed off in a perfectly orderly manner. After a careful assessment of the situation, Wynch and Bracken were convinced that the notice issued under section 144 of the IPC should be immediately withdrawn.⁵⁴⁰

In the first week of March, a series of stirring speeches by V.O.Chidhambaram, Subramaniya Siva and PadmanabhaIyengar electrified the people of Thoothukudi. On March 7th, nationalist leaders with strong support from the people resolved to take out a mammoth procession on 9th March, to celebrate the release of B.C.Pal from jail and to hoist the flag of Swaraj.

Wynch, the District Collector noted that there was a critical anti – European feeling in Thoothukudi especially against the British bureaucrats and the royal supporters. He felt that the Joint Magistrate was not capable of controlling the situation and wrote to the Governor for the new Joint Magistrate for Thoothukudi. He drafted extra police force to Thoothukudi and he himself arrived there on the

⁵³⁹NNPR, month of July, Madras, 1908, p. 482; News Paper, *The Nadegannadi*, Madras, Dated, 11th July, 1908.

⁵⁴⁰ Selected Document Series (UP), *Tirunelveli Riots*, Tamil Nadu Archives, 1982, p. 3.

afternoon of 8th March.⁵⁴¹ He prohibited the procession scheduled for 9th March. The Governor in Council in Madras viewed the Coral Cotton Textile Mills Strike seriously and directed Wynch to proceed against V.O.Chidhambaram under the Criminal Procedure Code.

The Governor in Council also empowered Wynch to take any action necessary to bring order in Thoothukudi. Emboldened by this support, Wynch on 8th March issued a 'show cause notice' to V.O.Chidhambaram, Padmanabha Iyengar and SubramaniyaSiva requiring them to appear before the District Magistrate at Tirunelveli, on 9th March. Centre of action now shifted from, Thoothukudi to Tirunelveli. The leaders appeared before the Collector as directed and got an adjournment for a month by an application in the High Court of Madras.

On 10th March 1908, the leaders returned to Thoothukudi to celebrate B.C.Pal's release as the procession scheduled earlier was prohibited by Wynch. After participating in a giant procession and demonstration at Thoothukudi on the afternoon of March 10th the three leaders again appeared before Wynch. On 12th March using the opportunity, Wynch remanded them to the district jail adjourning hearing until 1st April.

The Friday morning of 13th March dawned in the district as a day of riots caused by the people infuriated by the detention of their leaders. In Thoothukudi, no untoward incidents had happened save that of the closure of shops till the evening. But, around 5 o' clock in the evening a 3000 strong crowd gathered at Mosque Pettai in violation of the Section 144 Prohibitory Order issued earlier by the new Joint

⁵⁴¹Ibid, pp. 97 – 98.

Magistrate Robert William d' m Escaurt Ashe. Seeking to disperse the peaceful gathering, Ashe entered with a cavalry force, which was stronger by the crowd. The police then charged with their bayonets.

This further infuriated the crowd, which became increasingly violent. Ashe regrouped his men, who fired about thirty rounds into the crowd. Several persons were wounded in the firing. Thirty ring leaders were arrested under non-bailable sections of the Criminal Procedure Code. Wynch paid rich tributes to Ashe's handling the situation. Ashe's role in the repression of March 1908 uprising in Thoothukudi would contribute to his assassination by Indian revolutionaries three years later.⁵⁴²

The arrest of V.O.Chidhambaram and the consequent repressive acts were aimed not only at restoring law and order in a politically conscious region of Tamil Nadu, but also designed to remove the threat to British commercial interests and political hegemony posed by the Swadeshi movement in this part of the State.⁵⁴³

Tirunelveli 'Sedition' Trial

In Tirunelveli district, top Swadeshi leaders, including V.O.Chidhambaram and Subramaniya Siva, were charged with Sedition under Section 124 A and 153 A of the Indian Penal Code. PadmanabhaIyengar was spared as the Advocate – General expressed doubts as to whether there were strong enough

⁵⁴² N. Rajendran., *op.cit*, p. 78.

⁵⁴³ NNPR, month of May, 1908, Madras, p. 392; News Paper, *The Jananukulan*, Tanjore, Dated, 13th, May, 1908.

grounds for his prosecution. Collector Wynch decided against protesting PadmanabhaIyengar.⁵⁴⁴ On the request of the Collector, the prosecuting Inspector of police, Tirunelveli and the Public Prosecutor, Tirunelveli were replaced on the grounds that the former was not good enough and the latter was one of the former Directors of Swadeshi Steam Navigation Company.⁵⁴⁵

The Government duly sent E.P.Powell, a Government pleader from Madras to represent the Crown in the Tirunelveli cases and appointed Arthur Francis Pinhey, the Madurai Session Judge, as Additional Sessions Judge, Tirunelveli.⁵⁴⁶ The Collector, Wynch also requested the Madras Government to send an Additional Magistrate to help him expedite the Tirunelveli cases.⁵⁴⁷ The name of Azizuddin was proposed, but Governor Lawley ruled out this choice, nothing that “we can certainly be accused of selecting a Muhammadian to twist the tail of the Hindu and I see no particular advantage in sending a native to Tirunelveli just now”.⁵⁴⁸ Subsequently, E.H.Wallace was made the Additional District Magistrate, Tirunelveli and it was he who committed the case to the Sessions Court.⁵⁴⁹

Despite observing the legal procedures without having any loop holes in favour of the leaders, the High Court was moved by the leaders earlier for bail as

⁵⁴⁴N. Somayajulu., *op.cit*, pp. 81 – 82.

⁵⁴⁵ NNPR, month of July, Madras, 1908, pp. 481 – 482; News Paper, *The India*, Madras, Dated, 11th July, 1908.

⁵⁴⁶ NNPR, month July, Madras, 1908, pp. 455 – 458; News Paper, *The Hindu*, Madras, Dated, 7th July, 1908; News Paper, *The Hindu*, Madras, Dated, 8th July, 1908; News Paper, *The Indian Patriot*, Madras, Dated, 8th July, 1908; News Paper, *The Hindu*, Madras, Dated, 9th July, 1908.

⁵⁴⁷ NNPR, month July, Madras, 1908, p. 467; News Paper, *The Dravida Dipam*, Madras, Dated, 8th July, 1908.

⁵⁴⁸ Sedition Case in Tirunelveli in 1908, Governor’s Remarks, p. 51.

⁵⁴⁹ NNPR, month of July, Madras, 1908, p. 467; News Paper, *The Swadesamitran*, Madras, Dated, 7th July, 7th, 1908; News Paper, *The Swadesamitran*, Madras, Dated, 7th and 8th July, 1908.

the Collector refused the same sensing that the High Court order would be favourable to the leaders. The Government wrote to the Collector to prepare for the eventuality. Wynch in his reply requested the Madras government to sanction prosecution pointing out that the prestige of the Government was at stake. Wynch wrote: -

*The Government now had a splendid opportunity which may never occur again of punishing these really dangerous political criminals. Let these men get out of jail again with a light sentence or no sentence at all and within the next five years we shall have not only riots in Tirunelveli and Thoothukudi but all over South India, including Madras city.*⁵⁵⁰

When the Madras High Court ordered the release of V.O.Chidhambaram and Subramaniya Siva on bail, the Government, therefore, countered by issuing an order for Court order by releasing the prisoners but, immediately re-arrested them. Two cases were filed against V.O.Chidhambaram the first case was for making seditious speech on 9th March 1908. The following extract from his speech was considered 'Seditious' by the Government.⁵⁵¹ "It was foolish to expect that an administration conducted by foreigners would be calculated to benefit natives. So long as the Government was vested in the hands of the English, the country much necessarily suffer. India (was) getting poorer every year (there

⁵⁵⁰Sedition Case in Tirunelveli in 1908, Governor's Remarks, p. 47.

⁵⁵¹NNPR, month of November, Madras, 1908, p. 770; News Paper, *The Hindu*, Madras, Dated, 4th November, 1908.

were) three ways to restore her to her original riches, viz., Swadeshism, Boycott and Industry.⁵⁵²

In the second case V.O.Chidhambaram was charged with abetting the sedition of Subramaniya Siva in his seditious activities. Siva faced four charges of sedition. The defence lawyers for V.O.Chidhambaram were N.K.RamasamyIyer, Sadagobachari and Narasimhachari and for Siva Paul Peter Pillai and A.S.Cowdell. The number of witness marshalled in Tirunelveli for the seditious trails reached astonishing heights.

A total of 927 witnesses were detained for the sedition case in which V.O.Chidhambaram and Subramaniya Siva were implicated together with the number of ‘riot’ cases relating to March 13th 1908 events. This was the highest number of witnesses ever before involved in a case in the Madras Presidency.⁵⁵³ No fewer than 327 persons were eventually cited as witnesses in the “sedition” trials alone although in the end only 97 of them were actually examined. The trials were also expensive in terms of judicial time. The sedition case alone occupied Additional Session Judge A.F.Pinhey for twenty five days.⁵⁵⁴

The composition and number of the Assessors involved in Tirunelveli ‘Sedition Case’ was never to be revealed. When Sri Henry Cotton raised a question in the British Parliament regarding a difference of opinion among the Assessors in the

⁵⁵²NNPR, month of July, Madras, 1908, pp. 467 – 468; News Paper, *The Swadesamitran*, Madras, Dated, 9th July, 1908.

⁵⁵³ NNPR, month of August, Madras, 1908, p. 574; News Paper, *The Bharatha Bandhu*, Madras, Dated, 12th August, 1908.

⁵⁵⁴ NNPR, month of July, 1908, Madras, p. 456; News Paper, *The Indian Patriot*, Madras, Dated, 8th July, 1908.

Tirunelveli trials, the Madras Government was asked to clarify this point. Although the latter admitted that European assessors were empanelled in the case tried at Tirunelveli, nothing else was ever mentioned about them, either in the explanation sent to the Under Secretary for India or in the judgments delivered in the Sessions Court.⁵⁵⁵

Finally, on 7th March, 1908, V.O.Chidhambaram and Siva were found guilty of the charges against them. Judge Pinhey sentenced Siva to 10 years transportation while V.O.Chidhambaram received the maximum punishment of transportation for life.⁵⁵⁶ In the second case also V.O.Chidhambaram was punished with transportation for life, to run concurrently with the first one.⁵⁵⁷ Soon after the sentences were passed, the collector Wynch remarked, “I think the people are stunned at the heavy sentences. They begin to realize at last that the offence of preaching sedition is a grave one... I don’t think anyone will dare to works against British again”.⁵⁵⁸

V.O. Chidambaram Pillai in Prison

However, appeal to the Madras High Court brought some reduction in the sentences. On 4th November 1908, a Bench consisting of Chief Justice Charles

⁵⁵⁵ NNPR, month of July, 1908, Madras, pp. 455 – 456; News Paper, *The Hindu*, Madras, 7th July, 1908; News Paper, *The Hindu*, Madras, 8th July, 1908.

⁵⁵⁶ NNPR, month of July, Madras, 1908, pp. 482 - 483; News Paper, *The Swadesamitran*, Madras, Dated, 13th July, 1908; News Paper, *The Swadesamitran*, Madras, Dated, 14th July, 1908.

⁵⁵⁷ NNPR, month of July, Madras, 1908, p. 519; *The Swadesamitran*, Madras, Dated, 29th 1908; News Paper, *The Amrita Bazaar Patrika*, Madras, Dated, 28th 1908.

⁵⁵⁸ Sedition Case in Tirunelveli in 1908, D.O.Lr.from Wynch to the Chief Secretary, Madras, Dated, 10th May, 1908.

Arnold White and Justice Miller reduced V.O.Chidhambaram's concurrent sentences of transportation for life to six years transportation again to run concurrently.⁵⁵⁹

While upholding the conviction of Siva, the High Court reduced his sentence to six years transportation. As their attempt to get their sentences further reduced by petitioning to Privy Council failed, V.O.Chidhambaram and Siva endured rigorous imprisonment.⁵⁶⁰ While brutality towards prisoners was common in British India, political prisoners attracted more brutal and inhuman treatment.⁵⁶¹

V.O.Chidhambaram who was soon transferred from Palayamkottai Jail to Coimbatore Central Prison, suffered much at the hands of his jailors, in particular, a warder nicknamed Konaiyan. Konaiyan first assigned V.O.Chidhambaram to a jute cleaning machine.⁵⁶² On his complaint about his bleeding hands in the work, the jailor substituted V.O.Chidhambaram for an Ox to pull the oil press in the hot sun.⁵⁶³ V.O.Chidhambaram's fellow prisoners came to his rescue and prevented him from working continuously in these sub human conditions.⁵⁶⁴

V.O.Chidhambaram and Siva were released only on 24th December 1912. It was decided to place them at once under surveillance by positing a sub-inspector and a head constable to watch all their movements. When

⁵⁵⁹ NNPR, month of November, Madras, 1908, p. 817; News Paper, *The India*, Pondicherry, Dated, 7th November, 1908.

⁵⁶⁰ NNPR, month of July, Madras, 1908, pp. 541 – 542; News Paper, *The Bharata Bandhu*, Madras, Dated, 11th July, 1908; Report received from Superintendent of Police, Calicut, Dated, 3rd August, 1908.

⁵⁶¹ NNPR, month of May, 1908, Madras, pp. 369 -370; News Paper, *The Hindu Nesan*, Madras, Dated, 21st May, 1908; News Paper, *The Yadartavachani*, Kumbakonam, Dated, 12th September, 1908.

⁵⁶² NNPR, month of May, Madras, 1908, pp. 338 – 339; News Paper, *The Swadesamitran*, Madras, Dated, 13th May, 1908.

⁵⁶³ NNPR, month of July, Madras, 1908, p. 468; News Paper, *The Sasilekha*, Madras, Dated, 10th July 1908.

⁵⁶⁴ Saroja Sundararajan., *Madras Presidency in Pre – Gandhian Era – A Historical Perspective – 1884 – 1915*, Pondichery, 1997, pp. 412 – 420.

V.O.Chidhambaram came out of Cannanore Jail, there was none except his bosom friend Ganapathi Pillai of Cannanore and Subramaniya Siva, who was also just out of jail, to receive him.⁵⁶⁵

This was in painful contrast to the sea of people that gathered to see him off to jail in 1908.⁵⁶⁶ Needless to say that his well – wishers refrained from welcoming him not because they loved V.O.Chidhambaram less, but because they feared more about the consequences of such an act in the prevailing climate. In the case of Siva, it was not proposed to impose any restriction as the Government was certain that with his health so seriously impaired, he might not give any trouble.⁵⁶⁷

Many papers throughout India expressed the happiness at the release of V.O.Chidhambaram and Siva whose case next to BalgangatherTilak created a profound sensation throughout the country.⁵⁶⁸ They showered praises on Pentland the new Governor of Madras who ordered their release and castigated Lawley, his predecessor for his failure to do so notwithstanding the repeated appeals from the wives of the victims for the release of their husbands on grounds of health. The two great sacrificing patriots V.O.Chidhambaram and Siva died in penury. But, they had their rewards too.⁵⁶⁹

Conclusion

⁵⁶⁵ NNPR, month of November, Madras, 1908. P. 860; News Paper, *The India*, Pondicherry, Dated, 28th November, 1908.

⁵⁶⁶ NNPR, month of August, Madras, 1908, pp. 565 – 566; News Paper, *The Nayabhimani*, Karaikal, Dated, 10th August, 1908.

⁵⁶⁷ NNPR, month of May, Madras, 1908, pp. 338 – 339; News Paper, *The Swadesamitran*, Madras, Dated, 13th May, 1908.

⁵⁶⁸ NNPR, month of August, Madras, 1908, p. 574; News Paper, *The Bharathi*, Bangalore, Dated, 18th August, 1908; Hyndman, Translation letter from London Times, London, Dated, 17th August, 1908.

⁵⁶⁹ NNPR, month of December, Madras, 1908, p. 894; News Paper, *The India*, Pondicherry, Dated, 5th December, 1908.

Thus, cotton related trade and industries were impacted on social, economical and political level in and around Thoothukudi. However the cotton society uplifted the socio-economic life by participation in cotton manufacture. At the same time cotton also politically participated in Swadeshi Movements as in “Thoothukudi Coral Mill Strikes”.