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IN THE 19TH CENTURY

SCALE OF MILES
0  50  100  150  200  250  300  350  400  450  500

COPYED FROM THE CENSUS REPORT OF THE MADRAS PRESIDENCY. 1871.
INTRODUCTION
INTRODUCTION

The nineteenth century was the age in which the handloom industry in Tamil Nadu was not in any way dependent on mill-made yarn or foreign tools or foreign chemical dyes. It was the age in which spinning, weaving and dyeing were carried on with country products and country tools, in hundreds of homes in numerous villages. Moreover, it was also the age in which all people, men, women and children of our land, were clothed in nothing but hand-spin and hand-woven cloth. And, finally, it was the age in which our Indian rulers and nobles took not a little pride and delight in patronizing handloom fabrics noted for their artistic skill and beauty.\(^1\) No wonder therefore that when the English established themselves in India they lost no time in making capital out of these beautiful art industries. So far as Madras was concerned, bales and bales of our finest handlooms, palempores, chintzes and muslins were exported by them to various parts of England and Europe.

Handlooms, of course, found much greater favour among Europeans. It is said that the demand for the Indian handlooms was so great that in 1700 a law was

\[\text{\textsuperscript{1} Report of Indian Industrial Commission, (1916-18), (Madras, 1918), pp. 6, 165.}\]
passed in England by which all manufactures of India, were forbidden in Great Britain. This law, however, proved of little or no avail against the importation of cheap and attractive Indian piece-goods of that time.  

In fact, the whole of the eighteenth, and even the first half of the nineteenth century must be regarded as a period of boom for the Madras handloom industry. There is some evidence to show that encouragement was given to this industry by the East India Company. They formed weavers' colonies in or near their settlements and advanced money to the leading merchants of Madras, Cuddalore, Conjeevaram, Madurai, Salem and several other handloom centres for the manufacture of various kinds of cloths. They allowed remissions in times of famine and distress. Under these conditions, no wonder, the industry grew to great proportions.  

The Industrial Revolution came in Europe and the position of the handloom industry changed completely. Machine replaced man. Chemical dyes replaced vegetable dyes. Raw materials became the primary needs of Western countries and Western industrialists and not the finished


goods. With these raw materials and machinery they began to turn out cheap goods in increasing quantities. Vested interests now clamoured for Eastern markets. Above all, the subtle, powerful and insidious influence of Western taste and fashion began to invade and undermine all ideas of Eastern taste and fashion among Indians. The rulers thus imposed their manufactures on the ruled. Under all this stress and strain, our handloom industry began to decline rapidly. Import of mill-made goods now became the order of the day. English as well as Indian patronage was more and more withdrawn from the handloom industry and with the result the industry was adversely affected. 4 Even a Government Order 5 of the Madras Government in the second decade of this century says that the foreign goods were the source of threat to the handloom weavers and they could not successfully compete with them, due to want of funds and support. They could not even find out markets to sell their goods.

The gradual languishing of the industry was noticed with great concern by many a thoughtful observers, political leaders and well-wishers of our country. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, lovers of

4. Ibid.
5. G.O., No.2211, Development Department, 13 December, 1929.
Indian Art like Edward Balfour, E.B. Havell, Edgar Thurston and Alfred Chatterton sounded a note of warning saying that unless something was done to revive the handloom industry, it would soon sicken and die. And soon the cry for revival of not only handloom industry but also other indigenous industries was echoed by Indian industrialists and Indian politicians. So, the alien Government was thereby compelled to look into this matter. What were the steps taken by the Government to improve the condition of the weavers and put the industry to occupy the noble niche that it formerly occupied in the cultural heritage of Tamil Nadu is the aim of this work.

**SCOPE:**

The present study is focused on the Handloom Industry in Tamil Nadu in the Nineteenth Century. The area, I call 'Tamil Nadu' consists of the ten Tamil-speaking districts of the Madras Presidency in British India. It accords closely with the state of Tamil Nadu in contemporary India. Madras was and has been the capital of both the Madras Presidency and of Tamil Nadu. The study covers the various aspects of the handloom


industry such as the raw materials, weaving communities who took this industry as a full-time occupation as well as part-time and it also analyses the various kinds of cloths manufactured in different weaving centres in Tamil Nadu, English East India Company's encouragement to this industry and its decline after 1850. It also flashes out the Madras Government's attempts to revive the industry at the close of the nineteenth century. The study also mainly brings forth the general condition of the weavers in the nineteenth century Tamil Nadu.

The background of the industry is given in the introductory chapter. In the first chapter, the raw materials like cotton, silk and wool, used for weaving supported by the Tamil literature and epics are elaborately dealt with. It deals with the existence and functioning of the industry in the ancient, medieval and modern period upto the eighteenth century. It also throws light on the encouragement given to this industry by the Mughal Emperors and European trading companies.

The Second chapter traces the origin of the weaving communities and their guilds which functioned at various levels at different times. The objectives of the formation of guilds are also discussed.
The third chapter portrays the varieties of handloom cloths that were manufactured in all the weaving centres of Tamil Nadu in the nineteenth century.

The fourth chapter explains the methods of production. The spinning, winding, warping, sizing, weaving and dyeing with vegetable dyestuffs are discussed here. It also makes note on painting and printing on the cloth and the use of the gold and silver threads in the cloths.

The fifth chapter is devoted to explain the cloth merchants, weavers, and Company’s Investment. Establishment of weaving colonies and the export and import of piece-goods done by the Company and the decline of the industry are highlighted here.

The sixth chapter narrates the establishment of cotton mills in Tamil Nadu and the causes for the complete decline of the industry and the remedial measures taken by the Madras Government.

The seventh chapter is a study of the socio-economic, education, health and working conditions of the weavers. The impact of the importation of the mill-made goods and the famines on the weavers are shown in this chapter.

The last one is the concluding chapter.
SOURCES:

PRIMARY: The study is mainly based on primary sources. Most of the research was carried out in the Tamil Nadu Archives, Madras. The work is extensively supported by written materials like biographies, contemporary research projects, political literature, newspapers and journals. The files and reports compiled by the colonial administration provide us with a lot of material on the cotton cultivation and export, indigo plantation and weaving colonies. The administrative files are stuffed with letters, petitions, statement of evidence in courts as well as the appraisals of officials themselves.

For this study, the documents from the Board of Revenue are also consulted. Boards proceedings from 1786 to 1900 give evidences about the loom tax and Devasthanam taxes collected by the Government.

The Government Orders, the official records and reports constitute the most important source of this work. For the present work, all the public, commercial and revenue records are consulted.

Among the official reports, the Report of the House of Commons' Select Committee on the Affairs of
the East India Company, in 1830 and 1831 are very important which provide us with a valuable information about finance and trade of the East India Company.

The next important primary source consulted for this study is the Fourth Report from the House of Commons' Select Committee, 1853, which gives us copious information on Moturpha tax and its effects on the people of the Madras Presidency. The Report from the Select Committee of House of Commons, 1873, is very helpful to understand about the raw materials and manufactured goods and the import and export duties levied by the British Government etc.

Presidency also contain information on caste, community and their organisation.

Among the official publications, District Manuals and Gazetteers of the Presidency are also very important. Hence it is to be noted that the greater part of the material has been obtained from official records and reports.

SECONDARY SOURCES:

For the proper study of the handloom industry, the importance of the travellers' account cannot be exaggerated. The accounts of travellers consulted for this work are: Buchanan's Journey from Madras through the Countries of Mysore, Canara and Malabar (London, 1807); Elijah Hoole's Personal Narrative of a Mission to the South of India (London, 1829); and Abbe Dubois's Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies (Oxford, 2nd ed., 1899). Besides, D.M. Amalsad's, _Handloom Weaving in the Madras Presidency_, (Madras, 1924), presents details on spinning and other processes of the industry.

The other important secondary sources such as B.S. Baliga's _Compendium on History of Handloom Industry in Madras_, (Madras, 1960) which provides information on the condition of the weavers in the nineteenth century
and A. Sarada Raju's *Economic conditions in the Madras Presidency, (1800-1850).* (Madras, 1940) presents various general informations about the industry.

A number of secondary source books have been consulted. The list of secondary source books has been included in the Bibliography. With these available sources, an attempt has been made in the following pages to study the Handloom Industry in Tamil Nadu in the nineteenth century.