CHAPTER - I

ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF HANDWEAVING IN KERALA

Handloom industry in India has an unbroken history which can be traced back to the most ancient times. Kautilya's Arthasasthra written in the second century B.C mentions that the cotton fibres of the western part of India were excellent. But the history of the cotton textile industry in India in the beginning of the christian era is almost unknown. However, historians consider India as the birthplace of cotton manufacture.

Handloom products in the country had attained a very high degree of perfection and reputation in the ancient Arabian and European countries. The importance of the handloom industry had been noted by many foreign travellers and historians. For instance, Renandot, Chao-Ju-Kua and Marco Polo had testified to the greatness of the Indian Cotton Industry in their writings. To quote Renandot, "in Calicut garments are made in so extraordinarily a manner that nowhere else are the like to be seen. They are for the most part round and
woven to the degree of fitness that they may be drawn through the ring of a middling size."¹ Indian textile goods were used with distinction in Egypt, Greece and Rome in the "heyday of their glory".² According to the information given by them India had supplied goods also to Persia, Turkey, Ethiopia and many other countries. Some cotton manufacturing centres in India had specialised in the production of certain varieties chiefly for export to foreign countries. The superior muslins of Dacca, the printed calicos of Coromandel, the celebrated handkerchiefs of Madras and the gold and silver embroidered silks and the cotton fibres of Ahmedabad formed the bulk of such varieties.

The history of the manufacture of cotton in India, before the 19th century is the history exclusively of handspinning and handweaving. The Indian spinners and weavers had reached a high degree of excellence in the delicacy of the fabrics manufactured by them. During the years 1896-97 to 1900-1901 the handlooms consumed annually about 220 million lbs. of yarn per annum.³ In 1901, the handlooms

². ibid.
produced 1116 million yards of cloth as compared with 824 million yards produced by Indian cotton mills. Since then the production of cloth by the handlooms has been smaller in varying degrees than that of mills. It was after 1909 that the quantity of yarn consumed by the mills exceeded that of the handlooms. After 1916-17 there was an actual decrease in the consumption of yarn by handlooms. The average annual consumption between the years 1916-17 and 1920-21 was about 200 million lbs. when the average annual consumption by mills went up to about 330 million lbs. But during the postwar period the handloom industry has again recovered the lost ground.

The prosperity of the cotton textile in India lured the British traders. They established a series of factories at Kutch, Ahmedabad, Surat, Broach, Calicut and Cochin and many other places. The establishment of factories at the time of the decline of the Mughal power was instrumental in maintaining the continuity of industrial life by giving employment to artisans.

4. ibid.
5. id.
6. id.
Since 1919, the movement for encouraging 'swadeshi' cloth had been slowly spreading and handwoven goods were receiving the patronage of the people. In fact, it had been recognized as the duty of every patriotic minded Indian to spin yarn regularly on either the 'Charja' or the 'Takli' for at least half an hour a day. The spirit of swadeshi had reclaimed many old handlooms and pressed them into active use and also had led to the establishment of new handlooms.

Weaving Castes

In the initial stages, the weaver used to cater to the demand of his immediate neighbourhood. But with the expansion of the market, the individual artisan had to meet the demand of his neighbouring villages and towns also. His resources were meagre, and therefore, several middlemen got into the trade who provided capital and acted as the link between the producer and the consumer. The institution of the middlemen, no doubt, accelerated the growth of the industry; but it was also instrumental in relegating the artisans from the position of entrepreneurs to that of wage earners. The artisans belonged to certain weaving castes who were dominating in the industry.

Cloth manufacture was the occupation of particular castes in India. But as the market for textile goods widened
weaving became an attractively profitable profession, and as a consequence people from other castes also took to this occupation. These castes while maintaining their identity and subject to their own caste guild system in respect of their social life became members of the craft-guild which regulated the industry. Each trade has its guild representing many castes and the business of the guild was carried on by chiefs called "Moothachetty" in the south and 'Gumasthas' in North India. Under this system the members of the guild were protected by collective action and regulated apprenticeship.

As in the rest of India, the art of handweaving was pursued only by certain castes and communities who built for themselves a social structure and culture of their own. In Kerala, the predominant weaving caste was Chaliyans (still continues to be so) who migrated from other parts of India. There are different versions about the settlement of Chaliyans and the origin of hand weaving. The weavers of Travancore claim that weaving was begun by the original ancestor of Chaliyans the 'Chaliya Rishi'. The 'Pattaryas'

8. ibid.
of Kottar and Eranial in the erstwhile Travancore-Cochin State and the Chaliyans in other parts of Kerala State are instances of the caste-guilds which grew around the handloom weaving industry.\textsuperscript{10} During the reign of Shri Visakham Thirunal of Travancore in the latter part of the 19th century, several weaver families were brought from Thirunelveli and were settled in Neyyattinkara and Balaramapuram.\textsuperscript{11}

This accounts for the fairly high concentration of the industry in those places. One version on settlement of Chaliyans in Malabar coast is that they were invited by one of the 'Zamorins.'\textsuperscript{12} This argument is substantiated by the prevailing system of inheritance called 'Marumakkathayam' which they might have adopted after a long and close acquaintance with the people of Malabar coast.\textsuperscript{13} In the former Cochin State the main castes involved in handweaving were 'Kaikolars' and 'Devangas' who were settled in Chittur, Kuttampally and Chennamangalam.\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{11} id.
\textsuperscript{12} Malabar District Gazetteer, 1951, p.544.
\textsuperscript{13} Census of Kerala, Village Survey Monographs 1961, p.106.
\textsuperscript{14} Census of Cochin, 1901, p.196.
But in the former Travancore State about 300 years ago, the then 'Maharaja' invited six weaving families, Sourashtra by caste for weaving silk garments for the royal family and also for its close associates or in short the elites of the society.\textsuperscript{15} They originally settled in Balaramapuram and Neyyattinkara and were given land free of tax and other privileges.\textsuperscript{16}

The prosperity of these weavers under these circumstances attracted large number of weavers from other castes who were under poverty and unemployment. Thus weaving community increased in population, while the demand for the silk garments was facing a setback for many reasons. The gold and silver threads, for example, used in silk weaving were made locally. But as the prices were comparatively higher, it could not stand the stiff competition from the imported threads from France and Surat.\textsuperscript{17} This was the direct impact of colonial penetration of French East India Company into the cotton textile market of India which directly affected the local silk industry.

Therefore, these weavers had to resort to cotton weaving. Fortunately enough, this industry flourished and

\textsuperscript{15} Census of Travancore, 1931, p.442.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., p.443.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., p.443.
it could with the increased demand of handloom products from ordinary people as well as from the elite class. The fact that handloom weaving was a profitable occupation invited the attention of peoples other than Sourashtra-Chaliya castes. Even the Muslims, Nairs and Ezhavas who had learnt the techniques of weaving from Sourashtra-Chaliya castes entered the field of handloom weaving. Due to increased demand for handloom fabrics both inside and outside Travancore, these newcomers installed new looms to meet the production requirements.

The caste guild system seems to have been in vogue for many decades in various parts of the present Kerala State. It is evident if we come across the vestiges of the old caste guild traditions not only in Balaramapuram and Neyyattinkara but also in several isolated villages near Calicut, Badagara, Palghat, Cannanore etc., in the Malabar area. This caste guild system had declined due to so many historical reasons. With the evolution of higher social standards and the impact of western social habits and practices, our economic standards also underwent rapid changes. Almost at the same pace as this change and perhaps with much greater force, were ushered in social reforms of a far

19. ibid., p.442.
reaching character, symbolic as they were of the aspirations of a resurgent nation. Thus India's fight for independence was not merely a fight for freedom but a grim and perseverant fight to free itself from the shackles of its age-old social and economic obsessions, of its own taboos and inhibitions. In this gradual process of emergence from political and socio-economic slavery the nation broke through the barriers of caste, community and creed which till then crowded them into patterns of irrational living and to join in the collective national endeavour to gain economic freedom.

The steadily increasing population trends and the consequent increased pressure on land left millions of people without effective means of livelihood. This resulted in a scramble for occupations which were till then the closed preserve of caste guilds. Such infiltration occurred in almost all types of crafts, arts and village industries and handloom weaving was no exception. Since then the handloom industry ceased to be one of the cosmopolitan avocations of certain castes. We now find handloom weavers in all castes and communities, the Nairs, the Ezhavas, the Muslims and the Christians. Their role is that of the primary worker and wage earner rather than that of a cog in the wheel of the caste guilds of yore.
Decline of Handspinning

It is said that almost every household used to make cloth in order to be self-sufficient in cloth requirements. The industry was mainly confined to the cottage, and cloth manufacture was a family occupation. Spinning and weaving and other processes were done only by hand. Even the best fabrics were made with the help of rudimentary tools by people in their own homes. The textile industry had reached such high pitch of excellence and it is difficult to visualise that such fabrics could have been manufactured in leisure moments as a part-time occupation. Therefore it appears reasonable to conclude that handloom weaving was a full-time occupation. Only spinning must have been a part-time occupation to many men and women. This did not imply that all the weavers were full-time workers. The best artisans must have been full-time workers who spent their whole life on this industry and earned their living from it.

In the 19th century society was controlled by British colonialists and landlords where feudal social relations and caste-guild systems predominated. During that period production and distribution were confined to the villages. Commodity production and circulation had not started on a massive scale. But that enclosed petty commodity
production system had gradually and totally changed after the advent of colonial capital. Europe's crazy rush for our textile and handicraft products increased the competition which ultimately led to structural economic changes in the production system. Production for distant markets, accumulation of super profits and emergence of new indigenous capitalist classes were the net results of mercantile capital.

Their motivation for super profits induced them to seek new ways for reducing the cost of production of articles. In the 19th century, the yarn, the basic raw material of cotton fabrics was spun locally. The specific feature of the production system was that the majority of the weavers in rural areas were peasants who considered weaving as a part-time occupation for additional income in slack season. Spinning of yarn was the major occupation of women and children. The lower grades of yarn were spun by the wives of ordinary peasants while the higher grade yarn was frequently the sad privilege of widows from the upper castes because only the sensitive fingers of women who had not done any rough work were capable of turning out this miracle of skill and patience.\(^\text{19}\) The spinning wheel and handloom were

\(^{19}\) Pavlov V.I : Historical Premises for India's Transition to Capitalism, Nanka Publishing House, Mosco, 1978, p.121.
universally in use and majority of the rural population were busy earning from these sources. It was an industry particularly suited to Indian village life. There were no mills and factories and each woman bought the cotton from the village market and sold her yarn to the village weaver who supplied merchants and traders with cloth. Vast quantities of piecegoods thus manufactured were imported by the Arabs, the Dutch and the Portuguese. European nations competed each other for this lucrative trade with India. Cotton spinning and weaving were the national industries of India down to the commencement of 20th century.

During and after 1850s yarn import to India was increasing tremendously. The imported yarn was cheaper than the handspun yarn. In addition to this, a large number of indigenous mills were started in many parts of India. Consequently cheap imported yarn and indigenous mill yarns diminished the scope for handspinning. It is estimated in 1886 that the cost of the mill made yarn was about one-fourth of the handspun yarn.\(^{20}\) Moreover, the construction of railways and development of transport facilities helped the smooth supply of mill yarns to the weaving centres. Thus, since

---

the weaver found that the consumption of mill made yarn was economical, handspinners of Travancore and Malabar had no choice, but to close down. Between 1891 and 1901 nearly 9000 handspinners left the job and had become either sellers of cotton yarn or workers, operators etc., in spinning mills.  

The counts spun in Indian mills and handspinning varied from 4s to 30s.* For producing super quality fabrics more than 60s is needed and it was supplied by East India Company. So it led to the monopolisation of supply of higher count yarn by East India Company invariably pledging the independence of handloom industry.

In Travancore, a spinning mill was opened by an Englishman which could supply yarn to the weavers of Travancore. (See the excerpts of a brief statement submitted by the mill management to the Travancore State Government in 1901.  

22. ibid., p.403.  
*s denotes counts. Counts represent the quality of yarn.
23. ibid., p.402.
since then. Its capacity has been gradually increased and extended from time to time; when starting it contained only 11,112 spindles of which 9,744 were 'rings' whereas at present there are 24,192 ring spindles and 1368 mule spindles; providing work and means of livelihood for upwards of 750 people, men, women and children, besides the European staff. The bulk of the raw material is obtained from Bombay and cotton grown to the south and east of Quilon is often used as well."

The counts spun vary from 4s to 30s and as the counts varied in business so did the outturn in quantity and quality. The yarn market extended from Bombay on the West through the coast of India to Rangoon and also to Penang. The capacity of that mill was sufficient to meet the demands of the Travancore State except in the finest counts.

The total number of persons subsisting by occupations in connection with cotton was 28,807 in 1901 against 36,692 in 1891. Of them 27,456 were turned as cotton

24. ibid., p.403.
25. id.
26. id.
27. ibid., p.402.
weavers by hand and the rest were either sellers of cotton yarn and thread, or managers, operatives, workers etc., in spinning mills. The decline of about 8000 persons engaged in weaving and other allied activities showed that the home product was here as elsewhere losing ground before the foreign piecegoods.

The paucity of women workers could be due to the fact that the handloom was falling into disfavour and was no longer profitable to work with. There was also the influence of Manchester products (elsewhere seen in the wide use of machine made products). The indigenous 'Kattimundu' (a thick smooth cotton cloth fringed within a foot of either end with stout cotton threads) and the 'Neriathu' (a black bordered finer fibre of cotton) once the fashion with the high and middle classes and the luxury of the poor were becoming rarities. "The Universal complaint" in the 1891 Census Report observed: "among the Patnuls and Chaliyans all over the land is that their bread is taken out of their mouths by the machine made cloths of Europe."

Most of the weaving units were operated as cottage industries and as such, the weavers owned looms and worked

28. id.
independently. They also had investments in landed property.\textsuperscript{30}

Every item of work such as preparation of warp, weft, sizing, colouring, beaming (all are preparatory processes) and weaving was undertaken by the members of the community in the 'Theruvu' (Street). Looms used were primitive type and involved more labour. Most of the weavers treated weaving as an occupation in slack season.

**Production System**

A review of the past gives insights into the origin, development and organisation of the industry and reveals how its present shape has been obtained. It is a history of slow evolution of the production system and production relations from independent weavers through the emergence of the middlemen, the Commission Agency System, the master weavers, cottage workshop system, the handloom factories and finally to the establishment of co-operative societies including the fostering institutions like Kerala State Handloom Co-operative Society and Kerala State Handloom Development Corporation. A brief sketch of these stages in the evolutionary production system is given below.

\textsuperscript{30} Barker S.G : "Report of the Industrial Survey of Travancore, 1919", p.188.
1. **Independent Cottage Weaver**

Independent cottage weaver carried on production with the help of his family and sold his product locally to a dealer or directly to consumers by hawking or in shandies. He was found in centres where:

a) the industry was unorganised;
b) the self-sufficiency of the villages was not much affected by the means of communication;
c) there was not enough work in the locality to attract middlemen and capitalists; and
d) weaving was the secondary means of livelihood of agriculturists.

This system was in vogue in the 19th century. It had declined due to many reasons. The weaver who sometimes owned looms in most cases had been indebted to 'Chetty' merchants who were the wealthiest members of Chaliyans.31 In each 'Theruvu' there was a 'Moothachetty' (Chieftain) assisted by an Elayachetty and a council to look after the affairs of the community.32 The installation ceremony of the 'Moothachetty' consisting of a feast to all Chaliyans

---


was an expensive function. This ceremony ceased to exist by 1950s mainly due to the overall decline of the industry.

Independent weaving system was also in vogue in respect of products which had a ready local market. The weaver invested his small savings or borrowed for the capital requirements in the business. He purchased the yarn from local yarn merchants or travelling yarn dealers in shandies. The members of his family assisted him in winding, warping, sizing and occasionally in weaving too. When the cloth was ready, he took it to the nearest market every evening or to shandies every week for sale. In some places he himself hawked it in streets. Thus he was thoroughly independent of any outside agency and the difference between the cost of yarn and the price he was able to realise for the cloth represented the wage of all the members of his family and of his own labour.

The economic position of this class of weavers was theoretically ideal. He was his own employer. But his position in fact was anything but enviable. But, often his earnings were miserably low when the amount of labour involved was taken into consideration. His market was narrow and limited; his period of employment was irregular and uncertain; the fluctuations in the prices of yarn
and cloth were too great for his slender means and the demand was unsteady. In times of scarcity, especially in slack season, their economic conditions would deteriorate, reducing them to utter poverty, unemployment and debt.

As he ceased to be self-dependent and indebted to the chetty merchants or cloth dealers who advanced him loans, he could seldom retain his former independence. This was but the beginning of slavery. The extent of the credit facilities available and their effects on the economic condition of the weaver is an interesting point for further investigation. But generally speaking, the absence of financial institutions which would give easy credit and assist the weavers to tide over their temporary difficulties and the constant and rapid fluctuations of yarn and cloth market often drove him to bankruptcy and wage serfdom.

The profit of the weaver depends upon the difference between the price of yarn and the market price of fabrics. The main problem which confronted the weavers was procurement of yarn at a reasonable price. Frequent price fluctuations of yarn and the exorbitant price charged by the middlemen put the weaver into a miserable
condition. Moreover yarn of more than 40s was imported extensively from metropolitan markets, since the indigenous mills were producing yarns of less than 40s. In Balaramapuram there were hundreds of weavers. But there were only seven large merchants to distribute nearly 5000 bundles of all counts and it was estimated that between 40 and 50 thousand rupees worth of cotton was used annually at this centre alone in 1919. Thus the weavers who lost their independent position began to slave for master-craftmen and contracting middlemen.

2. Emergence of Middlemen

Due to the unprecedented demand for their products, the weavers had to invest more for installing looms. Correspondingly, increased activity of the looms brought about large overhead expenses for the maintenance of the looms and for purchasing of yarn and other dyeing chemicals. For all these capital needs, weavers began to depend heavily on available source of credit. This was the objective condition for the emergence of middlemen.

35. Arasaratnam S., op.cit., p.263.
Formerly, there were not many intermediaries between the producer and the consumer. But with the expansion of the market, a large number of merchants came up to the scene, who had trade relations with East India Company. To cope with the unforeseen boom, weavers needed more capital which was beyond their capacity. A class of middlemen sprang up named 'Chettis' who provided capital and acted as the link between the producer and consumer.\(^{36}\)

These merchant class advanced cash to the weavers to buy yarn and other necessaries. It served to sustain the weaver and his family in slack season. Once the weaver received the advance, he should sell his cloth only to that merchant. This advance was crucial in many ways. It was a guarantee for the purchase of the goods on the basis of a fixed price.

Further more, the influx of cheap Manchester and Japanese mill cloths along with powerloom products, worst hit the independent weavers. Consequently they were compelled to undersell the handloom fabrics. After 1850, import of foreign yarn and mill made cloth had increased

---

\(^{36}\) Venkitaraman K.S., op.cit., p.12.
The development of railways and transport facilities accelerated the infiltration of these goods into the rural as well as the urban markets. Conversely, the large number of textile shops opened for selling these mill cloths caused the shrinkage of handloom markets which made the position of weavers vulnerable.

3. The Commission Agency System

Where master weavers or cloth dealers through middlemen (analogous to clothiers in the English Woollen industry) employ weavers in their own homes, advance raw materials, pay wages, receive back the finished products and sell them, the system is called Commission Agency System. This system is common now in the weaving centres of Kerala. It prevails in places where:

a) the weavers are financially too weak to undertake the responsibility of production and risks of fluctuations of price;

b) weavers are attached to employers by reason of their indebtedness and are obliged to work for them alone at least so long as the debt remains unpaid.

37. For the detailed study on the impact of import of foreign yarn and piecegoods, see, Gandhi M.P: "How to compete with Foreign cloth. A study of the position of Handspinning, Handweaving and Cotton mills in the economics of cloth production in India, 1936."
c) the weavers cannot have access to the consumers by reason of distance of market; and

d) the demand for cloth being seasonal and limited. This necessitated the locking up of capital for a long time which the poor weaver cannot afford.

Most weavers under this system are those who are deeply involved in debt. It is well known that the weavers are obliged to remain idle for a good part of the year because of insufficient employment. The sowcar and cloth merchant are the only persons who are ready to advance them loans without any valuable security and they stipulate that they should work for them at a fixed rate of wages (which are usually less than the competitive wages). But this low rate of remuneration has no corresponding advantage; there is no guarantee of work throughout the year. The worker thus indentured has no more employment than the independent weaver. He is overworked for a very low wage and is burdened with apparently generous advance of money. Loans are usually advanced against looms as they are the only property the weaver has. But the significance of such loans as distinguished from ordinary loans is that the worker is bound to work for the merchant who advances the loan and there is no free market for his labour.
In some cases where the moneylender is also the cloth dealer as well as the merchant and deals directly with weavers, he gives them yarn and advances them wages. The weavers get it wound, warped, sized and woven into cloth which they return to the merchant. Sometimes yarn advances are treated as loans and bear interest. Cash advances are also made which carry interest and a running account is maintained by the sowcar. The merchant fixes from time to time the rate of wages and the amount of work to be given. He regularly purchases yarn and other raw materials and undertakes the responsibility of finding the market for the manufactures.

In some places the merchant instead of dealing directly with weavers finance the middlemen contractors. The middlemen undertake to supply the merchant with stated quantity of cloths. Sometimes the middlemen receive the yarn from the merchant which they distribute to the weavers. And sometimes the middlemen must purchase the yarn and get it converted into cloth and deliver it to the merchant. Each middleman has his groups of weavers who live in villages and who for some reason or other are obliged to work for him alone. To them the yarn is finer and fixed wages are paid on delivery of the finished cloth.

In this system of production so many relations existed. The merchant finances the industry; the contractor organises the production and brings together the producer and the capitalists; and the weaver gives his labour. There are two distinct contracts; one between the merchant and the middlemen and the other between the middlemen and the weaver. The dependence of the weaver on the middlemen and the dependence of the middlemen on the merchant vary in degree in different places. The worst feature is that there is always the tendency to exploit the weavers. They are remunerated at a rate far lower than the rate at which the contractors are paid by the merchant. The absolute dependence of the weavers on these middlemen for work is the root cause of the evil. Here labour is unfree-wage slavery.

In all these cases arranging the mechanical equipment of the loom and other accessories for the production is the weaver's responsibility. He owns the looms and all other equipments connected with weaving. Neither the merchant nor the middlemen takes any interest to know whether the loom is suited to the work or whether it is efficient. The weaver being very poor and leading almost a hand-to-mouth existence and growing under debt, cannot
have up-to-date cottage appliances. The plant in use for the preparatory processes, in some cases, the loom itself is most primitive and crude. It is sad that neither the merchant nor the contracting middleman is willing to finance the weavers for the purpose of equipping their looms with improved sleys and harnesses.

3. **Master Weavers and the Cottage Workshop System**

The decline in the demand for the handloom products and influx of foreign piecegoods made an ideal situation which prepared the soil to flourish for a class of capitalists viz., master weavers. Overall indebtedness forced the ordinary weavers to work under master weavers. They began to supply yarn to indebted weavers and advance them wages. The weaver and his family members got it woven into cloths and returned to the master. Sometimes yarn advances are treated as loans and bear interest. The master weaver fixes the wage rates for different quality of cloths which are always detrimental to original producers.

The master weavers organised the cottage workshops. Here the master weaver is also a merchant and he invests the capital required for the industry. He purchases the yarn required for, sets up looms, employs weavers in his
home. These weavers are not indebted to master. They are at liberty to determine as to who could produce higher quality cloth with good texture and design. In fact, the miserable conditions of the weavers compell them to work under him because, 'half a loaf is better then nothing' became the norm. There were no regular hours of work and no guarantee of employment.

In some places, the merchants instead of dealing directly with weavers, finance the middlemen-contractors. These merchants were from Tirunelvelly, Madurai and Coimbatore who had trade links with metropolitan markets. These middlemen receive the yarn from the merchants and distribute to weavers. These middlemen are getting good income by way of commission. The worst feature of this system was that there is always a tendency to exploit the weavers.

4. The Handloom Factories

Handloom factories are chiefly found in Kozhikode and Cannanore districts. The beginning of the handloom factory can be traced to efforts of the Basel Evangelical

Mission in 1851. They started two factories in Kozhikode and Cannanore for the uplift of the christian converts under the name of Common Wealth Trust (Pvt.) Limited. This factory recorded a rapid growth since the super quality products had an increased demand in European countries. It is very interesting to see that handloom factories can be seen nowhere in India except in Malabar coast and in Canara district of erstwhile Madras Presidency.

Native persons employed in these factories learnt the managerial techniques and started new factories in Malabar coast. Correspondingly merchant chettis installed improved flyshuttle looms and employed weavers. Thus the handloom factories flourished in Malabar district.

British East India Company encouraged the weavers to improve the looms and quality of the fabrics according to the changes in demand in European countries. But during this period, looms and weaving techniques used in Travancore were primitive. In 1921, there were 56 handloom factories employing 968 flyshuttle looms and 78 ordinary looms in Malabar district. But in the Travancore State

41. Ibid., p.47. 
42. Census of Madras, 1921, p.196.
there were only 3 factories employing 95 persons in 1911. After 1930, indigenous cotton mills were started in Malabar district. Prominent capitalists among them are Samuel Aaron and Alagappa Chettiar who invested huge capital, installed hundreds of powerlooms and started production on a large scale. These capitalists had the monopoly of the supply of yarn and were the main purchasers of handloom products. They manipulated the price of the yarn supplied to the small factories with corrupted government officials flouting the government regulations. The working condition was very pathetic and wage rates were extremely low. After 1940, Malabar witnessed strong trade union movement associated with peasant uprising which was led by K.A. Keraleeyan and P. Krishna Pillai.

In this context, it is worth mentioning that the first trade union in handloom industry was 'Chirakkal Taluk Neythu Thozhilali Union' organised by P. Krishna Pillai who successfully led many strikes after 1944. After World War II yarn shortage was acute. Yarns produced

43. Census of Travancore, 1911, p.121.
45. ibid.
46. ibid., p.114.
in indigenous mills were supplied to powerloom sector and cotton mills. Consequently, increased cost of production, acute yarn shortage and market sluggishness after Second World War, pulled down the factories on to the verge of ruin. Furthermore, cut-throat competition from unscrupulous mill owners and powerloom sector, forced the handloom factories to undersell their fabrics at a low price. Consequently majority of the looms were forced to remain idle.

The real advantage of the factory organisation lies in the scale of production introducing labour saving devices and labour specialisation. Also, they are in a lucrative position to make such fabrics in great demand and exploring the possibilities of the market for new manufactures. Moreover, employing technical experts and departmentalising production and distribution enhanced the efficiency of factories. The travelling agents, commission agents, effective advertisement, participation in exhibitions and attractive showrooms form the main ingredients of their marketing policy.

However, there were some shortcomings in this system. The workers had to come to factory punctually and work regularly. This caused much hardship to the caste
weavers who were never accustomed to the factory discipline. Therefore, factories failed to attract skilled artisans who could produce better quality fabrics with good texture and design. 47

5. Co-operative Societies

Weavers are organised on a co-operative basis for production and sale. This is a recent phase of development which seems to be full of promise for the future. It is discussed elaborately in Chapter - 5.

47. Venkitaraman K.S., op.cit., p.70.