INTRODUCTION

The present work has been born out of my curiosity to know the historical growth of the traditional industries of the district Murshidabad, most of which were on cottage scale but brought their everlasting fame. All these industries were on the verge of ruination at the advent of India's independence. During the plan periods many improvements have taken place but the industries of Murshidabad district did not show any marked buoyancy. The present study aims at finding out not only the historical growth of the cottage industries of Murshidabad district which was once industrialised but now one of the backward districts of West Bengal but also to evaluate the development prospects of the industries.

The cottage industries covered by the present study are the handloom industry which consists of the silk, the cotton textile (handloom) and the woollen-blanket weaving industries and some of the handicrafts industry consisting of the bidi industry, the conch shell, the bell-metal and the ivory industries. Both the registered and the unregistered units of the industries have been covered by the present study.

Most of the industries of Murshidabad district are run on the cottage industry basis. So the term 'cottage industry' is best appropriated to the above handloom and handicrafts industries. In this connection it may be pertinent to mention the organisation of cottage industry and the Indian Tariff Board's account on the Woollen Textile Industry (1935) seems to be apposite.
"The term 'cottage industry' is commonly applied to the handloom industry as a whole. It seems desirable to explain the organisation of the industry in greater detail. A true cottage industry implies production by a worker working in his own cottage with the help of his family, with his own appliances and with sufficient capital or credit to buy his own raw material, sell his output and generally to undertake the risk of his own business. Under the pressure of the economic conditions of today this form of cottage industry is tending to become less common. Throughout India there is an increasing tendency for the weavers to be financed from the beginning to the end in all their operations by the local banias or mahajans, though the degree of dependency of the weavers naturally varies greatly excepting the Kulu and Kumaon Valleys where almost every family of the hill tribes whether settled or still nomadic possesses its own looms, spins its own yarn and probably grows its own wool. In many places the functions of supplying capital and raw material, marketing of finished products in fact the general risks of the undertaking, have passed in the hands of these middlemen, and here the status of the cottage worker has been reduced from independence to that of a wage earner, though working in his own cottage and perhaps still owning his appliances" (Namblar, 1961).

In Murshidabad district (West Bengal also) in most cases (in case of both handloom and handicrafts industries) the weavers and the artisans are dependent on the mahajans for capitals, raw materials and marketing of finished products and their status has been reduced to that of wage earners. So these industries are cottage industries par excellence.

In 1961 Census operations these industries were defined as the household industries. A household industry was defined as an industry conducted by the
head of the household at home or within the village in rural areas and only
at home at urban areas. The industry to be classified as a household one, was
tobe run on the scale of a registered factory. Another criterion of the
household industry is that the members outside the family will not participate.

In case of the most of the industries covered under the present
study both the members of the family and outside the family participate. So
the term 'cottage industry' is best suited for the present purpose.

The industries covered under the present study are traditional
cottage industries. During the post-independence period very few modern
industries have been established in Murshidabad district. Hence, there has
not been any in situ competition with modern industries. Most of the tradi­tional
cottage industries of the district under the present study are following
the primitive techniques. Excepting the silk, the cotton textile (handloom)
and the bidi industries, all the industries are declining, but they are not
declining at the same time and at the same rate. During the post-independence
plan and economic development period Government policies to revitalize these
traditional industries of the Murshidabad district have affected the industries
variously. The main objectives of the current planning in the small scale and
cottage industries are the growth of the cottage industries in the rural areas
and small towns, organisation of the artisans on the co-operative lines and the
improvement of the productivity of the workers through the positive forms of
assistance. Intensive efforts are being made for industrializing backward areas.

Other aspects of the industries covered under the present study are
while some industries continue to decline or stagnate in employment and produc­tion, some have phenomenal growth and others have rapid growth, varying through
Some aspects of the industries may have grown but the overall growth of the growing industries depended very much on external factors rather than local or regional factors.

The other aspects which the present study aims at finding out are that the spatial pattern of the cottage industries show more concentrated location rather than even distribution. Such pattern has been evolved by geographic association rather than functional integration. Cottage industries have provided complementary occupation to the agricultural labourers and marginal farmers although there are some traditional specialisation. Some of the cottage industries are basic in nature primarily produced for export, while others are non-basic, i.e., meant for local consumption. The basic industries have very weak multiplier effect on the total economy as market and trading of the products are handled by non-producer middlemen and mercantile establishment.

One of the main difficulties of the present study is the lack of data. No attempt has so far been made to study the different stages of growth and decay of these cottage industries, the economic history of these industries is largely unrecorded. As the district is very backward there is no systematic record of data in the office of the Directorate of cottage and small scale industry, Muzaffarpur. In most cases data for periods earlier than 1965-66 are not available. After repeated requests for data and many efforts it was informed by the Joint Director of Industries (Handloom) that data relating to the year 1947-48 to 1960-61 could not be available. In case of handicrafts specially the conch shell, the bell-metal and the ivory industries there is no

* Vide letter No. 5435/HL/2N-45/73-74, dated Calcutta, the 22nd February, 1974.
recorded data at all. Data of these industries and some of the data for handloom industry have been collected from field investigations. Other sources of data are Survey of State Statistical Bureau, Government of West Bengal 1954; Survey of Industries, Statistical Cell, Directorate of Industries, Calcutta, 1961 and 1963; Ministry of Industrial Development, Small Industries Institute, 1972, Report on Industrial Development Potentialities in Murshidabad (West Bengal), Government of India; Survey Wing, Directorate of Cottage and Small Scale Industries, 1971, Statistics on Industrial Potential, District Murshidabad, Government of West Bengal; District Census Handbooks, Murshidabad, 1951 and 1961; Paschim Banglar Tant Shilpa (in Bengali, meaning West Bengal's weaving industry), Government of West Bengal, Calcutta. Beside this, informations had also been supplied by Directorate of Handloom and Textiles, Government of West Bengal, Calcutta. On the basis of these data an attempt has been made to evaluate the growth and development prospects of the cottage industries as mentioned above of Murshidabad district.

The study has been divided into five chapters. In the first chapter an introduction of the district in terms of economic position of Murshidabad district in West Bengal has been dealt with.

In the second and the third chapters handloom and handicrafts industries have been described. These chapters deal with the historical background of the industries, police stationwise distribution of the industrial units, raw materials, process of manufacture, trend of the industries in terms of the annual consumption of raw materials, in terms of production and employment, marketing and finance, problems faced by the industries and prospects of these industries.
In the fourth chapter of the present study problems and prospects of these industries have been mainly discussed and lastly the conclusion is given in chapter five.