CHAPTER V
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The preceding chapters could best be seen as an attempt to understand the history of the handloom industry working within colonial economy. This work concerns itself with an important but rather neglected area, i.e., the handloom industry's transition in coastal Andhra region, which was characterised by rapid overcoming of the constraints of the mill and powerloom competition and its eventual expansion particularly during the Gandhian phase of Indian struggle for freedom.

The starting point of this study is the controversy over the "de-industrialization" theory. Initially by Morris D.Morris, put forward the hypothesis that in the nineteenth century India, at a macro level the fall in the price of cloth had resulted in an increased demand for cloth in two ways: (i.) An increase in the demand for cloth had resulted in an resultant increase in the price- as cloth is price elastic, (ii.) Shifts also occurred in the demand curve, owing to dynamic factors like increase in population and change in taste.

In response, to Morris concentrating on the early years of the nineteenth century various studies tried to show that if the overall number of looms operated is taken as an indicator, employment and production should be seen as constant. But textile production as it emerged in the twentieth century was nevertheless very different from what it used to be before, the Indian exports dried up and cheap imports flooded the country. Consequently the handloom weaving sector which took shape after 1813 saw itself
confined increasingly to the production of coarse varieties of cotton cloth, a process which Konrad Specker called "vertical displacement". The Morrision view of a sustained rise in population backed up by rising incomes, leading to either a downward movement along the demand curve for textiles is incorrect in case of coastal Andhra and in particular delta Andhra, as seen in our study for the twentieth century.

In the present century there happens to have come about a stability in the handloom industry and much of Morris' own theorization seems to be a projection of this phenomenon of the nineteenth century. Commenting on the fortunes of the handloom industry, is noticed by D.R. Gadgil remarks, that "at a certain stage" between the declining handicrafts and the pressure of modern industry, "a point of equilibrium was reached in the competition between the two industries" and "this point was (only) reached towards the end of the last century."¹

A.K. Bagchi, among other modern scholars, examining the reasons behind the revival of handlooms in the twentieth century, is of the opinion, that it was mainly due to the lag in the development of the weaving departments in the Indian mill factories, the application of fly shuttle to the handlooms and not the least the Swadeshi movement under the leadership of Gandhi.

While drawing on this broad theoretical basis and following up the continued debates on this subject this study re-searched on two neglected issues. First, it focused on a region, i.e., the Andhra districts of the Madras Presidency, and second, on the handloom industry which had hitherto not been explored in detail. It sought to locate the Andhra handloom weaver within the framework of

the 1905 Swadeshi, the later nationalist politics, and the Gandhian ideology. The fate of the handloom sector of the coastal Andhra region was sought to be analysed in terms of social, cultural and economic factors. This study therefore, was based not merely on archival sources but also on the evidence available in the Telugu and Hindi writings.

It was also necessary to explore the ways in which the relations between the capitalist world's relations shaped the level of technology, the producer, income and political conflict. John Richards, following Wallerstein's thesis argued that the world system had major repercussions on India in the eighteenth century which would mean that Gandhism occurred not in the first flush of indigenous resistance but only after nearly two centuries of the world systems' penetration and domination. Sumit Sarkar also makes a subtle distinction between primary and secondary resistance to imperial rule. Indigenous populations primarily intent on protecting their ongoing or recently lost life ways undertook primary resistance in the earliest phases of British domination. The secondary phase occurred later when the indigenous society has changed and when the leadership and its goals are different.

The introductory chapter put forth the main hypothesis related to the question of industrialisation in coastal Andhra regions. The rapid and radical economic changes occurring in India, the interaction of nationalist politics, the expansion of Indian capitalists and the needs of two major World Wars, impinged in many significant ways upon the handloom industry of Andhra. As discussed in the first chapter on the all India level itself there has

2On this view of John Richards, see, Richard G. Fox, "Gandhian socialism and Hindu Nationalism: Cultural domination in the world system", in Sugata Bose (ed.), South Asia and World Capitalism, New Delhi, 1990, pp. 244-59.
been a debate whether there was a decline in handloom production in the twentieth century.

Clear evidence was put forward to prove that in coastal Andhra, there was development in production and in the sales value of the handloom production. Though the all India figures for cotton mill industry showed wide fluctuations, Andhra maintained a steady pace without any drastic fluctuations. One would expect that the adverse variables, i.e., a neglected small scale industry, growth of small holdings and a dominant mill industry would suggest an increasingly harsh market environment for the handloom weaver in the twentieth century. Their economic conditions would be unlikely to have improved in the face of these conditions. Our evidence on a micro level study belies this expectation.

In Andhra it was observed that there was an increase in miscellaneous textiles reflecting the increased demand for stitched clothing. The net result therefore, being an increase in the overall share of textile employment in the total manufacturing sector of coastal Andhra. The impetus that the handloom sector of Andhra received was due to several factors. The two World Wars raging outside the country occupied the attention of the mill owners increasingly. Their progress was impeded by many factors such as prolonged labour troubles, mills failing at Bombay and other places and no advances taken for introducing new machinery. Also, though competition was rampant between the mills and the handloom sector, the Indian mills never resented the khadi propaganda. This was because it created an anti-foreign cloth atmosphere enabling the mills to sell their comparatively coarse count cloth. Indian mill cloth could not stand foreign competition
by itself so, *khadi* became an invaluable ally, especially after the First World War.

N.G. Ranga's accounts of the expanding handloom industry during the late twenties, which Thirthankar Roy calls "Urbanization" and Gujjula Rajiah's study on the structure of manufacturing force in the coastal Andhra districts statistically prove the hypotheses that this industry never lost its foothold from the Indian economy and when compared to the south and central Andhra the coast was more economically progressive in its weaving patterns. Here the weavers survived not by making the same product but by diversifying into different kinds of looms. Also, over a period of time, i.e., by 1900, permanent markets and town capitalists replaced carrier trade and the result was a separation of trade and production within the village. The country was now a location of production alone, dependent for sale of its product on the town which emerged as concentrations of production, as well as trade and processing. Another impetus to the handloom industry was the tremendous impact that Gandhi had upon the weavers about the immediate necessity of reviving village industries and crafts.

The third chapter elaborately explores the linkages between *Swadeshi*, Gandhian ideology and the impact of the changing economic conditions on the handloom weaver. *Swadeshi*, as envisaged by Gandhi to become a major weapon in his anti colonial strategies had both political and economic dimensions. The genesis of *Swadeshi*, its definition, growth and economic aspect before 1905, was reviewed in detail to specifically understand its transformed role under Gandhian initiative after the 1920s.

For a careful analysis of facts and assessment of Gandhi as an economist it was necessary to ascertain the impact of earlier
economic thinkers on his mind. The period between 1857 and 1919 provided the background to the Gandhian economic thought and the origin of many of his well known economic ideas like Swadeshi, prohibition, village development, etc. This period was a fascinating one, with new ideas and anticipation of ever fresh possibilities - the period of the separatist upheaval, the Theosophical movement, the socialist and anarchist propaganda and the onset of new discoveries - all bringing about a dissolution of a number of theories which were hitherto regarded as the immutable laws of nature.

It was in this world of widening horizons that Gandhi found himself during the formative period of his life in the 1880's. There were decisive changes in Gandhi's political outlook during 1905-06. It was as a result of these changes that nationalist feelings and aspirations became the focal point of Gandhi's political outlook and he evolved his own theory of Indian nationalism. He keenly observed the nationalist movements of China, Persia and Egypt. He was particularly influenced by Mazzini's "duties of man". What appealed to Gandhi most was that according to Mazzini's teaching "every man must learn how to rule himself. Swaraj means self rule. Later on, Gandhi's experiments reflected these thoughts concretely. His movement for the rejuvenation of Indian villages and her dying handicrafts and the principle of ahimsa symbolised vegetarianism and the revival of the spinning wheel respectively.

The positive constructive core of Swadeshi for Gandhi meant employment of the masses through a deliberate regulation of consumption and production techniques in the national interest. According to Gandhi, khadi provided everyone with a chance to contribute to his own self welfare and survival and reduced dependency on others. What was important about khadi was not its
specific activity but its functional or metaphorical value. Which meant that, Gandhi’s use of spinning introduced some measure of autonomy and reduced dependency.

Thus one observes that Gandhi’s decentralised economy aims at nothing less than freeing the countryside from the domination of urban industry, urban finance and urban political control. Though it developed slowly in various stages, the constructive programme on khadi by Gandhi was indeed Gandhi’s stroke of genius. Also an attempt throughout has been made to study the Swadeshi movement of Gandhi and his working in two phases; one the ideological phase and the other the practical and economical one. His mass appeal that was created can be understood if this working of Swadeshi is understood in this unique pattern under the guidance of the Gandhian ideology.

Attempts have been made in the earlier chapters to discuss whether handlooms were to be looked upon as a consumer good or as an ideology during the period under study. It was demonstrated that khadi as an ideology was a panacea to all the evils existing in the upper strata of society. The businessmen for example, found Gandhi giving them a justification and rationale for their merchant capital. Whereas to the middle or lower middle class the use of khaddar was an immediate and viable economic proposition. This could be seen increasingly among the people of Andhra where the agriculturists of the ceded districts preferred to clothe themselves in rough coarse garments which was easily available to them as it was made of the cotton grown in their fields and the northern Circars were largely influenced by Gandhian ideology of khaddar wearing. By bringing out a comparison between the cow and khaddar and agriculture and khaddar, he sought to give the whole movement a rural touch.
However on a broader level the *charkha* movement could be seen more as a "desire to starve the foreign exporter than as an zeal for natural regeneration." What is significant to note is the intricate details of the ways in which Gandhi was able to forge political linkages on a local and regional level. In the earlier years of Gandhian ideology Non Co-operation had undoubtedly been a success in Andhra, but Gandhi's specific programme of *khaddar* and harijan upliftment etc. had gained only mediocre response. In the later years the new arbitration centres and new schools flourished best in the Andhra deltas which were stirred up for essentially local reasons for being also patronised by the local rich merchants. The local magnates joined the Congress because it was seen as an independent source of power.

The educated were also dissatisfied with the British paramountacy, European hegemony and their inability in finding suitable jobs. The lower strata, though many were unemployed, threw their lot with the Civil Disobedience movement, risking their jobs in the bargain. The partly educated from schools coming from the lower middle class took an active role in being linkages between the rural artisan (who did not know the disposal aspects of *khadi* and yarn banks) and the towns.

A very significant role in the national movement was played by the industrialists like Birla' and Tata. The association of the Birla's with the movement, lasting for thirty two years had developed into a deep religious commitment towards Gandhian ideals. G.D. Birla was successful in persuading other businessmen to at least show their appreciation of the *Swadeshi* movement by financing it secretly. The details discussed in the third chapter

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attempted to prove the point that, though handspun yarn turned out by the mill worker in his spare time was of poor quality, worked at primitive means (pure khaddar being more expensive), the mill labourer still whole heartedly supported the movement. As such it could be seen that the it was the sentiment that counted more than the subsidiary income that it added.

The fourth chapter analysed the specific policies of the colonial state on handloom industry, technology and other related aspects. The inter-war convinced the raj that some sort of guided industrialization was needed to be given to the handloom industry, being the most flourishing of all the other cottage industries of India. Several attempts were made by the Government to form Co-operative societies and to revive it. This was done partly due to the insistence of public opinion during the early Swadeshi movement of 1905, partly due to the serious political conditions created by the world wars and the economic depression and partly due to the increasing competition of the mill industry which threatened to eliminate the handloom sector.

However what is observed is that even by the mid-thirties the percentage of weavers in the Co-operative societies was small. Even where a Co-operative resulted in perceptible rise in earnings the prospects were not attractive enough for a small producer for whom security of employment was what mattered. Again, in certain societies as mentioned earlier members were either very poor or unskilled to take any responsibility of the production aspects or to adapt to new technology. As a consequence, the interference of large producers and traders was inevitable. Those of whom who came forward to take the responsibility of the production and supply side were the middle men whose private interests collided with the well being of the weavers' Society.
The Co-operative movement run on Government initiative hence differed from the *khaddar* revolution that the All India Spinners' Association and All India Village Industries' Association, brought about. The AISA took personal interest in its workers and their way of living. They paved a way for a better life for example, the slow disappearance of drink followed by more thrift habits of life. Thus it is significant to observe that the *charkha* and the propaganda, received socially beneficial results in addition to the immediate economic one. Increasingly, it was noticed that the social horizon of the weavers had also been widened. They had a greater consciousness of what was going on now in non-local Indian society and how external war and economic depression affected them and what part they were playing in encouraging this "livery of freedom".

An added impetus was given in the late thirties when Andhra resounded with the themes of *Swadeshi*, picketing and boycott not only in formal pamphlets but also on local vernacular pamphlets, papers, *jatras*, dramas and patriotic songs. The Telugu press though lacking in originality and blindly aping the English press in the earlier years of its inception quickly adapted itself to highlighting Andhra's inherent culture and successfully drew the fount of pride from the formerly unresponsive masses. The research programme undertaken by Gandhi towards *samagra seva* in agriculture, *khadi* work, basic education, *harijan* relief, cow protection and other village industrial crafts on a barter exchange, all was in the hope of a balanced view of making it a self sufficient unit.

All this had its toll by the late forties. In its last phase of handloom organisation the movement gained a fresh lease of life. The primary and ultimate impact on the whole weaver community
was when the weaver was made the central figure of all development planning for the construction of an independent India. The improvement in technology, introduction of new implements, an adequate living wage scheme, financial relief centres, yarn banks and grant for the cultivation of cotton tremendously boosted the morale and economic position of the Andhra weaver. Speaking of the role of the AISA it was criticised that Gandhi's disciples took to fanatic self sufficiency in providing cloth and this was taken to an extreme degree. The weaver did not need the cloth but the spinning wages that bought him his daily meal. On the other hand factory mill weaving failed because they did not tackle the weavers as a person but only as a machine in the handloom Co-operative society. It was not expensive to produce the *khadi* cloth. But it was expensive to buy it, compared to the mill cloth. Therefore the rural poor adapted to Gandhian techniques of spinning and weaving but ultimately bought mill cloth as it was cheaper in price.

Thus, to sum up, the economic transition that wrought was a complex interplay of economic as well as political forces at large. The depression reinforced the idea that *Khadi* should be made to find its market as much as possible near its place of production. It was realized that the one effective way of cheapening consumption as well as the cost of production was to decentralise both and reduce all the intermediate chargers between production and consumption. The Second World War witnessed a great fillip given to the over all shortage that the handloom sector faced. The introduction of a controlled distribution of yarn to the actual weaver and the rapid spread of the Co-operative movement added to the *Swadeshi* movement and brought the Andhra weavers
in a better position, the trend not being to get out of the clutches of the master craftsmen and the intermediate *dallals* and *sowcars*.

This overall shortage for cloth could be done away with if according to Gandhian ideology two conditions were scrupulously followed. First, the Central and Provincial Governments should adopt the policy of encouraging spinning and weaving in every village and province and on an all India basis weavers should put forth extra efforts to popularise *khadi*. Second, when the Government of India adopts this policy of promoting the cause of handloom sector the control over cloth would automatically go. Meanwhile, cloth should be decontrolled in the interests of the poor.

The specific role of the British government in economic activity in India with particular reference to Andhra was questioned. It is concluded that the attitude of the British Government in India was to actively participate in almost all spheres of economic life. However, the absence of encouragement to indigenous industrialisation and diversification from the relatively narrow economic base provided by concentration on export commodities was a feature, commonly alleged to have been characteristic of colonial economies. Knowing well the intricate working of the colonial rule, one can safely conclude that under external and internal pressures alone did the imperial Government take a stand in promoting economic growth and it was not as an altruistic or philanthropic gesture with the well being of Indians at heart. Thus one learns that the British colonial domination showed contradictory consequences of ruining as well as preserving the lower forms of industry.

Therefore to conclude, by the end of this study, i.e., by the 1950's mainly three aims were realized. First, an organised
system of services had percolated to the artisans with banking, cheaper working capital and marketing of cloth which now became far more institutionalised. Second, with Andhra handlooms being financed by Central banks and having a rapidly growing export sector, this industry standardised and adapted to time saving implements and technology. Third, the handloom market and the institution per se came to be protected by means of reservation in mainly the coloured cloths and borders, mixed and coarse cloths by a subsidiary on certain cloths by different excise duties on mills and handloom as explored in the earlier chapter.

In this study the attempt has been to explore the complex interconnections between Gandhian ideology, the national movement, the weaver community and the Indian capitalist class all responding to the policies of the colonial Government. In this exploration there has been an inevitable and necessary emphasis on Gandhi's role. This raises some fundamental questions regarding the charisma and historical role of the individual. "Charisma' as defined by Max Weber is, "a certain quality of an individual personality by which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman or at least exceptional powers or qualities".4

Nevertheless, what this investigation has shown is that Gandhian ideology and his charisma' struck resonant chords in various elements of the Andhra handloom economy, solely because of the socio-economic conditions. That is, the cult of Swadeshi manifesting itself in the economic, social and cultural planes shaped the lives of Andhra weaver not as a consequence of an individual's power to make history but due to the result of the

conjecture of larger impersonal historical forces. This study therefore suggested, that assumptions associated with cloth in Indian context could be analysed at more than one level. In the modern period Gandhi's *Swadeshi* ideology of cloth spinning fulfilled more than one function in the political economy of the country.