CHAPTER-III
PRESENT STATUS OF HANDLOOM INDUSTRY IN GENERAL
AND SILK HANDLOOM INDUSTRY IN PARTICULAR

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3.1 Handloom sector in India

Several changes impacted handloom weaving and trade in the seventeenth century, the most important ones being the entry of the Dutch, Portuguese and English into textile commerce\(^1\).

It is evident that the Indian cotton textile industry is as old as the Vedic age. Cotton clothes were largely exported to other countries. The yarn was handspun and the cloth hand woven and this super skill of weavers has been handed down from generation to generation\(^2\).

With the establishment of British rule in India along with its attendant demonstration effect started the doomsday of the industry. A deliberate policy was adopted by the British administration to throttle the Indian industry to make way for the marketing of the British manufactured products. With the introduction of spinning jenny in England, hand spinning which provided occupation to a large number of people was completely replaced by the increased use of mill yarn. At the outset, large quantities of mill yarn were imported and subsequently indigenous mill yarn was made available to handlooms and this struck a mortal blow to the independence of the industry. This together with the introduction of powerlooms reduced the cost of production considerably and the impact was far reaching that not only did the exports of cotton textiles from India dwindled from the middle of the 19th century but also the import of cotton fabrics in India gained momentum. The export of cotton piece goods which amounted to Rs.165 lakhs in 1816-17 declined to Rs.8 lakhs by 1830-31, where as during the same period import of cotton yarn and piece goods went up from Rs.3 lakhs to Rs.60 Lakhs\(^3\).

However, in spite of such adversities, the handloom industry managed to survive largely because of the strong preference of Indian women to saris and khans [bodice cloth] manufactured by handlooms. Even men’s attire – dothies and upper cloth – produced by the handlooms were in good demand and hence the mechanical spinning mills and handloom industry remained complementary to each other for some more time. But with the establishment of the first textile mill in Bombay in 1851, handloom industries started facing competition from indigenous textile mills too.

The textile mills which had till then supplemented the efforts of handloom industry by supplying yarn now started supplanting handloom industry by denying yarn as more yarn is consumed within the mills itself.

Since 1851 textile mills started expanding by leaps and bounds in the country. By 1879 there were 56 mills with 1.43 million spindles and 13000 looms in the country. The rate of expansion was further accelerated since the beginning of the 20th century and by 1913-14 there were 150 mills with 6.62 million spindles and 96,688 looms in the country. They offered unfair competition to the handloom industry.

The attention of the government towards this matter was drawn for the first time in 1928 by The Royal Commission on Agriculture.

The commission felt the need for the development of village industries on co-operative lines which was so essential for their survival in the face of increasing competition from the organized industry. However, no step was taken in this regard till 1934 at that time the government of India announced a
decision to subsidize state governments by paying a sum of Rs.5 lakhs\(^9\). Still the grievances of the industry remained unabated and in 1941 the government of India appointed a Fact Finding Committee. The committee recommended the formation of an All India Handloom Board to look after the raw material, marketing and administration of grants in aid. An All India Handloom Board was constituted in 1945 which functioned till 1947\(^{10}\). Meanwhile to ensure yarn supply a scheme was evolved according to which the entire production of yarn by mills in India [free yarn as it was called after consumption in their own weaving sheds] was pooled together and distributed to various states for supply to consumers, the principal consumers being handlooms, powerlooms and miscellaneous textile sectors. Even then the supply of yarn was found inadequate. In 1948, the government set up a handloom standing committee and a handloom development fund of Rs.10 lakhs\(^{11}\) was also placed at the disposal of the committee. The handloom industry functioned fairly satisfactorily during the II World War and till 1951, owing mainly to the government regulation to maintain yarn supply to handloom sector and active demand for cloth within the country and outside.

To improve the handloom sector some items are reserved exclusively for handlooms. These items are – piece dyed dhotis, lungies and piece or yarn-dyed coloured cotton sarees and the rest eight items were reserved for both handlooms and small power loom units\(^{12}\).

Prior to 1950, handloom industry was in the hands of private people comprising independent weavers and master weavers. It was recognized during first five year plan to bring handloom weavers into co-operative sector to render sufficient assistance to them. Despite organized efforts it was not possible to bring all weavers within the co-operative fold. Realizing this

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\(^9\) Ibid., P.6.
\(^{11}\) Report of the working group on handlooms, 1965. op.cit, P. 6..
situation some state governments had established specific corporations to look after the needs of the weavers outside the co-operatives. Shri B. Sivaraman, Chairman of the high powered study team constituted in 1973 recommended to set up ‘intensive projects’ for development of handloom weavers outside the co-operative sector.

The Twenty–point Economic programme announced by the then Prime Minister, Smt. Indira Gandhi\textsuperscript{13}, assigned importance for development of handloom industry. Accordingly, the government had launched ‘Intensive handloom development projects’ and ‘export oriented handloom production projects’. State governments established ‘Handloom Development Corporations’ to look after the administration of production and marketing activities of ‘intensive handloom development projects’.

The Government of India after its independence in 1947 has set up a number of committees and study groups from time to time, to study the problems of handloom industry and to improve the conditions of weavers. It has taken various protective and promotional measures for development of handloom industry.

As a result of all these efforts handloom industry occupies place of prominence in the textile industry of India and handloom textiles of the world. Out of 4.60 million handlooms in the world, 3.90 million handlooms are in India which constitute 84.78\% of the handlooms in the world\textsuperscript{14}. The production of handloom fabrics has gone upto 4,238 million sq.mtrs upto December 2004 (Provisional) from 500 million sq. meters in the early fifties. The sector accounts for 13.12\% of the total cloth produced in the country\textsuperscript{15}.

\textsuperscript{15} http://texmin.nic.in/annualrep/AR04-05-05.pdf.
3.2 Handlooms in Karnataka

The handloom sector in Karnataka is known for its heritage and the tradition of excellent craftsmanship. As per the 1995-96 census in the state, there were 76,605 handlooms and over 189,934 weavers engaged in this activity. However, this number has come down steadily over the years and as in 2002 there remained only 56,680 looms and in 2005 there were only 48,178\(^{16}\) looms of these about 44000 looms are covered by the state institutions like Karnataka Handloom Development Corporation, Cauvery Handlooms and Woollen Federation (wolfed).

In Bangalore Rural District there were 1000 registered handlooms and 8 Registered Societies in 2007-08\(^{17}\).

The handloom industry has a socio-economic significance in the state as it concerns a large number of weavers from the weaker sections of the society especially in rural areas. Due support needs to be provided to sustain and promote this industry which is heavily employment oriented.

Karnataka is one of the states with a large concentration of handlooms. The state is a major producer of handloom fabrics in the country and is known for the production of wide range of cotton, polyester and silk fabrics such as dhotis, dress material, terry-towels, bed sheets, lungies and saris in finer counts in cotton, besides, traditional silk and printed silk sarees, janatha cloth and blankets for rural and urban poor.

3.3 THE SILK INDUSTRY

History and Introduction

Silk refers to the thread and cloth made from the fibre produced by the silkworms. It is the continuous filament extruded by the silkworm at

\(^{16}\) http://www.textiles.kar.nic.in/annrep_200405.htm

the end of its larva period. The fiber used for commercial manufacturing are mainly produced by the mulberry silk worm of the orient, Bombyx-mori."

"Silk, the queen of fabrics" is admired by the people the world over and silk products are always in great demand. The word 'SILK' spells luxury and elegance. The touch of silk on finger tip evokes the thread of history of a simmering fabric undisputed as a 'queen of textiles'. Mankind has always loved silk.

Silk is the only truly mythical fiber. No other fabric is surrounded by so much of romance, mystery and adventure. This is due in a large degree to the silk routes of antiquity which were the first examples in the history of humanity in intercultural penetration. In every respect silk is the most perfect natural fiber. Thus, fascination for silk as clothing material can be said to be universal. In the history of clothing industry, silk has had and will continue to have a unique place seldom challenged by other material.

Manufacturing of silk fabrics can be classified into two parts. First part is sericulture, which involves four important operations viz, mulberry cultivation like any other garden crop, silk worm egg production, silkworm rearing and disposal of cocoons. The second part includes reeling, twisting, dyeing, weaving and printing.

3.4 Meaning of Silk

Chemically speaking, silk is made of proteins secreted in the fluid state by a caterpillar, popularly known as 'silkworm'. These silkworms feed on the selected food plants and spin cocoons as a 'protective shell' to perpetuate the life. Silkworm has four stages in its life cycle viz., egg, caterpillar, pupa and

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19 Ibid.
20 Ibid.
moth. Man interferes with this life cycle at the cocoon stage to obtain the silk, a continuous filament of commercial importance, used in weaving of the dream fabric. Exquisite qualities like the natural sheen, inherent affinity for dyes and vibrant colours, high absorbance, light weight, resilience and excellent drape etc. have made silk, the irresistible and inevitable companion of the eve, all over the world.

3.5 Importance of Silk

Silk is a high value but low volume product accounting for only 0.2% of world's total textile production. Silk production is regarded as an important tool for economic development of a country as it is a labour intensive and high income generating industry that churns out value added products of economic importance. The developing countries rely on it for employment generation, especially in rural sector and also as a means to earn the foreign exchange.

3.6 Geographical location of Silk

Geographically, Asia is the main producer of silk in the world and produces over 90% of the total global output. Though there are over 40 countries on the world map of silk, bulk of it is produced in China and India, followed by Japan, Brazil and Korea\(^{21}\). China is the leading supplier of silk to the world with an annual production of 81,880 Million tones (MT) (2000). Out of which the Mulberry raw silk product is 78,080 MT.

India is the second largest producer of silk with 17,550 MT (2001-02) and also the largest consumer of silk in the world. It has a strong tradition and culture bound domestic market of silk. In India, mulberry silk is produced mainly in the states of Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Jammu & Kashmir and West Bengal, while the non-mulberry silks are produced in Jharkhand, Chattisgarh, Orissa and north-eastern states\(^{22}\).

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\(^{21}\) www.zanzibartribalart.com/lifecycleofsilkworm.htm

\(^{22}\) www.orissa.gov.in/textiles/sericulture_whatissilk.htm
3.7 SILK - TYPES

There are four major types of silk of commercial importance, obtained from different species of silkworms which in turn feed on a number of food plants. These are: Mulberry, Tasar, Muga, and Eri.

Except mulberry, other varieties of silks are generally termed as non-mulberry silks. India has the unique distinction of producing all these commercial varieties of silk.

Mulberry

The bulk of the commercial silk produced in the world comes from this variety and often silk generally refers to mulberry silk. Mulberry silk comes from the silkworm, *Bombyx mori* L. which solely feeds on the leaves of mulberry plant. These silkworms are completely domesticated and reared indoors. In India, the major mulberry silk producing states are Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu and Jammu & Kashmir which together account for 92% of country's total mulberry raw silk production.

Tasar

Tasar (Tussah) is copperish colour, coarse silk mainly used for furnishings and interiors. It is less lustrous than mulberry silk, but has its own feel and appeal. Tasar silk is generated by the silkworm, *Antheraea mylitta* which mainly thrive on the food plants Asan and Arjun. The rearings are conducted in nature on the trees in the open. In India, tasar silk is mainly produced in the states of Jharkhand, Chattisgarh and Orissa, besides Maharashtra, West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh. Tasar culture is the main stay for many a tribal community in India.

Eri

Also known as Endi or Errandi, Eri is a multivoltine silk spun from open-ended cocoons, unlike other varieties of silk. Eri silk is the product of the
domesticated silkworm, *Philosamia ricini* that feeds mainly on castor leaves. Ericulture is a household activity practiced mainly for protein rich pupae, a delicacy for the tribal people. Resultantly, the eri cocoons are open-mouthed and are spun. The silk is used indigenously for preparation of *chaddars* (wraps) for own use by these tribals. In India, this culture is practiced mainly in the north-eastern states and Assam. It is also found in Bihar, West Bengal and Orissa.

**Muga**

This golden yellow colour silk is prerogative of India and the pride of Assam state. It is obtained from semi-domesticated multivoltine silkworm, *Antheraea assamensis*. These silkworms feed on the aromatic leaves of Som and Soalu plants and are reared on trees similar to that of tasar. Muga culture is specific to the state of Assam and an integral part of the tradition and culture of that state.

**Historical Background**

Silk has a fascinating history. It was discovered in China more than 4000 years ago. Around 2640 B.C, it is said, the legendary emperor Huang-Ti asked his bride, His-Ling-Shih (lei-Tsu) to study the little worms that were destroying the groves of mulberry trees in the imperial gardens. The young empress gathered some of the cocoons in her hand and took them into the palace to see what they were made of. She called for a bowl of hot water and dropped the cocoons in the steaming water. To her amazement a magical cobweb like tangle separated itself from the cocoons. She picked up the gauzy mass and found that one slender thread was unwinding itself almost without end of the cocoon. Thus, His-ling-Shih discovered silk she was so pleased with the soft, fine thread that she wove a ceremonial robe for the emperor out of the cocoon thread. Soon robes brightly dyed silk were
worn by all in the court on important ceremonies. But the common people of China were not permitted to use silk until about 1150 B.C\textsuperscript{23}.

3.8 Silk in the world

Silk is something royal, rich, heavenly, exotic, erotic and sensual. The word brings to imagination all these ideas and more. The qualities of silk have no parallel. Other fabrics pale in comparison to the soft, smooth and fluid silk.

This century has witnessed the invention of many a manmade fibres and artificial silks, but there is nothing which can be compared to the exquisite beauty of the original silk. Silk is a natural fiber, which does not moisture. It is cool in summer and warm in winter. But silk has the quality of absorbing dyes, thus making it possible for weavers to experiment with different kinds of shades, designs and finishes for silk fabrics\textsuperscript{24}.

By first century B.C. trade relations were established up to southern Europe. The Chinese immigrants started sericulture in Korea in about 1200 B.C. From there it spread to Japan during 3\textsuperscript{rd} century B.C. The industry progressed in Japan till 1868 - The Mejji Restoration. During the later part of 19\textsuperscript{th} century, Japan seriously developed the industry by introducing improved techniques and research in sericulture.

The main silk producing countries of the world, which account for nearly 85\% of the total production, are China, India. North America, Middle East and Brazil are some of the other countries where considerable quantity of silk is produced. Silk also plays an important role as a foreign exchange earner. For a period of about seven decades, preceding World War II, silk used to head


\footnote{24} http://www.handlooms.com/hsilks3.aspx

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the list of Japan's exportable items accounting for 30% to 50% of its aggregate foreign exchange earnings\textsuperscript{25}.

At present over 25 countries in Asia, Africa and South Africa are envisaging or actually engaged in sericulture activities. This is largely due to the low level of their economy and suitability of sericulture family labour and lowly paid in rural areas. In addition favourable weather conditions, less investment with quick profit and the high market demands all these have contributed greatly to the expansion of sericulture. During 1997, the world mulberry raw silk production was 80,521 tonnes. China tops in respect of mulberry raw silk production followed by India\textsuperscript{26}.

3.9 Silk in India

Sericulture in India is as old as the ancient Indian culture while its precise origin cannot be clearly said. In the view of some western historians, silk industry was brought to India from China through the famous 'Silk Road 'via Khotan in 40 B.C. But Indian scholars believe that sericulture was practiced in the foot- hills of sub Himalayas even before that period. They believe that the silk culture originated somewhere in the areas between Ganga and Brahmaputra.

Moreover, reference to silk used in India were made in famous Indian epics Ramayana and Mahabharata. It appears in Mahabharata as one of the greatest luxury items brought in the court of pandavas after 'conquest' of the world. In Mauryan period [4\textsuperscript{th} to 2\textsuperscript{nd} century B.C ] there was a trade of silk in China. "Semi transparent silks and muslins cotton of extreme thinness, which are clearly depicted in sculpture, were in much demand in the Roman Empire".

\textsuperscript{25} http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Silk
\textsuperscript{26} Shivappa.H.V.op.cit., P.2.
“India has a natural advantage in sericulture. It enjoys a distinction of being the only country producing all the four commercially exploited varieties of silk, viz mulberry, Tasar, Muga and Eri. The golden muga silk, tropical tasar silk are unique to India. The states of Kashmir and Karnataka are known for their mulberry silk. It has a labour intensive agricultural pattern with traditional strengths since the time of Tippu Sultan. It has capabilities along the entire value chain from cultivation of the raw material till the Production of the finished products which has obtained for the country 5% share of world silk trade and export earnings of about 641 million U.S dollars."²⁷

“India ranked second in the world in the year 2003 as a producer of silk accounting for about 13% of the total world raw silk production.”²⁸

Silk weaving in India is as old as cotton weaving and occupies an important place in the economy of the country. There are about 3.8 million handlooms employing 10 million people directly and indirectly in India. Handlooms provide livelihood for a large rural population.²⁹

During the first world war period, however, the industry revived briefly but it soon suffered a set back due to competition from cash crops, ravages of disease, unregulated imports of raw silks, lack of government support. Indian silk had competition from China and Japan in the world market. The Second World War again worked as a boon for Indian silk industry. Due to non-supply of silk from China and Japan, the allies had to depend only on India the only other silk producing country to meet their silk requirements particularly to manufacture parachutes during this period; the industry had a steady progress in Karnataka, Tamilnadu, West Bengal and Jammu and Kashmir. Thus as it is clear the industry had a glorious time during this period. Silk produced in

²⁸ Ibid.
Karnataka, West Bengal and Jammu and Kashmir had a very good demand for the manufacture of military parachutes.

For Indians, particularly ladies, silk is life line – the elixir. Silk is always woven interwoven with way of life and culture of a region. Though India is producing all the varieties of silk i.e dress materials, scarves / stoles, readymade garments etc, the silk sarees are unique. The saree is almost synonymous with the word silk.

In India, there are a number of silk weaving centres spread all over the country, known for their district and typical style and products. Some of the famous silk centres in India are Dharmavaram, Pochampalli, Venkatagiri (Andhra Pradesh), Bhagalpur (Bihar), Surat, Cambay (Gujarat), Srinagar (Jammu and Kashmir), Bangalore, Anekal, Doddaballapur, Ilkal, Molakalmuru, Melekote, Kollegal (Karnataka), Kanchipuram, Arni, Salem, Kumbhakonam, Tanjavur (Tamil nadu), Varanasi (Uttar Pradesh), Bishnupur, Murshidabad, Birbhum (West Bengal). The Indian silk weaving industry produces wide range of fabrics for home consumption and also for export. It produces different kinds of sarees, angavastras, dupion, dhotis, tiecloth and piece goods in handloom sector. India is a store house of indigenous silk moths, the cocoons of which are suitable for weaving.

"Silk industry is the single largest foreign exchange earner for India, accounting for about 8% of GDP, 20% of the industrial production and over 30% of export earnings."

3.10 Silk in Karnataka

Karnataka state is considered as the “Silk Bowl” of the country. It occupies the first place in India and third place in the world in respect of mulberry raw silk production. The Karnataka raw silk production of 9236

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tonnes during 1997-98, has maintained its prominent position in the country, employing 20,53,155 people directly or indirectly in the industry\textsuperscript{31}.

Sericulture in Karnataka dates back to nearly two centuries, that is to the regime of Tippu Sultan who initiated and bestowed royal favours upon the silk industry in the princely state of Mysore. He sent his men to Bengal for acquiring expertise in silk industry and to bring mulberry plant and silk worm eggs to establish the industry in his state. He took personal interest in improving this industry in Ramanagaram and Srirangapatna. After his death in war at Srirangapatna the Wodeyar Dynasty, Kings of Mysore encouraged this industry. Bharath Ratna Sir.M. Vishweshwaraiah, when he was the Diwan of princely state of Mysore, recognized the importance of silk industry in the economic development of the state\textsuperscript{32}.

When silk was introduced at the end of the 18\textsuperscript{th} century in the princely Mysore state, it already had cotton weaving centres. Silk weaving was first developed in Mysore, Betagiri, Doddaballapur, Molkalmur and Bangalore. Now Bangalore, Doddaballapur and Molakalmur are the main silk weaving centres in Karnataka. Apart from these main centres, weaving on handloom is carried out within 100 miles radius of Bangalore in different villages of Bangalore, Mysore, Mandya, Tumkur, Chitradurga, and Kolar districts.

Handloom industry is also one of the ancient and important industries in India and also in Karnataka. There are about 76,605 handlooms which are engaged in handloom industry in Karnataka State out of them 13641 looms are engaged in silk weaving in Karnataka\textsuperscript{33}.

\textsuperscript{31} Shivappa.H.V. op.cit., P.2.
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid.
There are about 1,89,934 weavers directly or indirectly engaged in weaving activity in Karnataka state of whom about 23,310 weavers are involved in silk weaving\(^{34}\).

In Karnataka, weaving of silk fabric is the household industry particularly in Bangalore, Doddaballapur, Kollegal and Molkalmur. Karnataka is known for its varieties of silk that could compete with the best French or Japanese silk. The soft and slimmering Bangalore and Kollegal silks in glowing colours, the spun silk from Channapatna are ideal for shirting and suitings\(^{35}\).

There are three sectors of silk handloom weaving in Karnataka state viz, Government sector (Karnataka Handloom Development Corporation [KHDC]), co-operative sector and private sector.

Sustained efforts made by the state government have enhanced silk production in Karnataka. The raw-silk production has increased from 2878 tons in 1980-81 to 8700 tons by 2001-02. The implementation of Karnataka sericulture project -I and II assisted by World Bank has helped the growth of silk industry in Karnataka. Presently, in the state about 1.12 lakh hectares are under mulberry cultivation and 2.5 lakh families are engaged in silkworm rearing and 16000 families in silk reeling. Karnataka is the leading state in production of raw silk with 65% of country’s production. The growth of sericulture in the state is encouraging and the sector provides direct employment to around 15 lakh people from the most vulnerable sections of the society and that too, in the rural area, especially to women.

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\(^{34}\) Ibid

\(^{35}\) Shivappa.H.V. op.cit., P.5.
SILK HANDLOOMS