CHAPTER-7

CONCLUSIONS

I have discussed in detail the conditions of handicrafts in Karnataka during the 19th century. Most of the handicrafts showed a tendency to decline in the period under study. The decline was not restricted to any particular period, but appears to be a continuous phenomenon throughout the 19th century. In the first half of the 19th century, the decline was mainly due to loss of patronage enjoyed by the handicrafts. This was mainly due to the establishment of British rule by displacing the native rule of the former princely states, which patronized the traditional handicrafts.

In some cases, the princely states were weakened both politically and economically to such an extent that they were incapable of continuing patronage to the traditional handicrafts. This happened in the case of Bidriware and wood carving.

The role of British in bringing about the decline of traditional industries is clearly visible in the case of salt manufacturing. They made salt making the monopoly of state and imposed licensing. Though they did not enforce this policy strictly in the first half of the 19th century, they did so in the second half. This they did to protect the revenue from salt, which was an important source of income for them, since salt was almost universally consumed. This has destroyed the livelihood of thousands of Uppers, particularly in the Bellary district.
Regarding cotton textile handloom weaving, a much more complex picture emerges. Initially the British textiles competed with the finer and medium count textiles of Karnataka and ruined them. British fiscal policies helped them in doing so. But the coarser cotton textile segment survived till the last quarter of the 19th century, particularly in the interior and rural areas. The rapid development of railway network from 1880 onwards exposed this segment to competition from mill sector and brought about its decline. The removal of duties on all varieties of cotton textiles during Ripon’s period made Karnataka Handloom textiles, highly vulnerable in the closing decades of the 19th century. The existence of segmented markets is clearly visible in the cotton textile handloom sector. We also notice the survival of certain branded products such as Ilkal sarees, Gulegdud Khans and Molakalmuru sarees, because of their unique texture and design. It is inferred that the ruination of finer and medium count segments in handlooms is caused mainly by competition from Britain and that of coarser counts, due to Indian mills.

We have clear evidence to show the decline of hand spinning in Karnataka. Here also there existed finer and medium count segment, along with coarse count segment as in the case of cotton handloom textiles. British policy of abolishing sayar on imported fine and medium count yarn ruined the local yarn in that segment in the first half of the 19th century. Besides the machine spun yarn has an advantage of better quality and high productivity. The coarser count segment of handspinning
was ruined not by British mill competition, but by Indian mill competition in the closing decades of the 19th century.

The competition from the mill sector also destroyed the art of making paper with hand at Challakere, Yedatore and Ganjam.

Silk industry did not face the competition like that of cotton handloom textiles. But the colonial policy of encouraging raw silk production for export to Britain to make luxurious silk textiles for the consumption of British citizens, made them to take several steps to prevent its decline. This policy is in line with promoting commercialization of agriculture. But the silk industry faced depression in the middle of the 19th century, due to the attack of disease on silkworm eggs. It further declined, in the aftermath of the great famine of 1876-78. Thus silk represents a peculiar case of decline despite the best efforts of British to revive it. Only at the end of the 19th century due to the efforts of J.N. Tata, who established Tata silk farm at Bangalore, the silk industry gradually reverted to its former glory. British concentrated on producing large quantity of raw silk and taking it to Britain in accordance with their colonial policy. They did not give much attention towards silk weaving. Despite their apathy, silk handloom survived and was in a better condition than cotton textile handloom, mainly due to absence of competition from imported silk textiles. Besides the specialized articles that it produced, catering to the taste of the local populace such as Molakalmuru and Ilkal silk sarees helped in its survival.
Woolen blanket manufacturing or *Kumbli* making faced competition from the mill made rugs. But this competition was not so severe, when compared to that faced by cotton textile handloom weaving sector, particularly in the finer and medium count segments. *Kumbli* making survived without any serious problems, till the closing decades of the 19th century. But we see the beginning of competition from mill sector at the fag end of the 19th century. The same conclusion holds good for woolen carpet weaving. Hence we can say that competition from Britain and Indian mill industry was not so intense in the wool hand loom weaving, when compared to cotton handloom weaving.

Though native sugar making in Karnataka started facing competition from Chinese sugar right from the initial decades of the 19th century, it suffered heavily during the second half of the 19th century, due to inefficient technology and high cost of manufacturing. The native population showed contempt towards mill made sugar because of the use of blood and charcoal in its purification. Therefore the mill made sugar was remelted and sold under false pretensions, by the so called native refiners in the bazaars. As a result of it sugar from Java, Mauritius, Germany and other sugar producing countries entered Karnataka market in a big way during the closing decades of the 19th century. Though Mysore sugarcane was known for its quality, technological obsolescence gave a deathblow to the native sugar refining industry. The British made considerable efforts to establish sugar manufacturing on modern lines.
Native Iron and steel making in Karnataka declined because of the inefficient manufacturing techniques, which turned out steel of inferior quality. Besides the charcoal, which was used as fuel in smelting iron, became costly due to the policy of reserving forests. The British steel and iron, was now made of a better quality due to technological innovations caused by industrial revolution. It was also cheaper because of high productivity. The development of railway network after the 1880s enabled British iron and steel to reach the interiors of Karnataka and brought about the decline of this famous handicraft of Kamataka.

Woodcarving is one handicraft that was not threatened by British competition in the 19th century Karnataka. Therefore it largely remained unaffected during the period under study. Though sandalwood carving practiced by Gudigars declined towards the end of the 19th century, it was due to reduced demand for handicrafts in general and lack of patronage. It is true that wood carvers faced problems of procuring raw material, price discrimination and in marketing their end products, but competition, as we see in the case of other handicrafts was absent. The British tried to revive sandalwood carving by making arrangements to exhibit the articles of Gudigars at several international exhibitions. They even thought of starting an industrial school to revive this handicraft.

Thus we can definitely conclude that the decline of handicrafts is not a single, uniform and cataclysmic process assumed in popular Nationalist literature. Nor can we blame the British entirely, for the decline
of each and every handicraft. Though most of the handicrafts experienced
decline during 19th century, many of them did not become extinct.
Somehow they held the breath, get revived later and succeeded in
surviving to the present day. This shows the great resilience exhibited by
the Karnataka handicrafts, which survived, the most difficult times of the
19th century. The Swadeshi movement at the beginning of 20th century,
came as a great saviour to them. We had seen how some of the
handicrafts (Silk and Sandal wood carving) declined despite the absence
of competition from Britain and the efforts made by British to revive them.
Some handicrafts declined due to the destructive economic colonial policy
(ex: salt making, cotton handloom weaving, spinning). Some of the
handicrafts showed decline from the beginning of the 19th century, which
lasted till the end of century (cotton handloom textiles), while decline
started in blanket weaving towards the closing decades of the 19th
century. In the case of silk industry the most difficult times were between
1860-1890 and afterwards it started to recoup. While Chennapatna and
Gokak toys remained unaffected throughout the 19th century, native hand
papermaking has almost become extinct in the period under study.

British economic interests affected handloom weaving and hand
spinning in the fine and medium count segments. It was the competition
from British textile mills that ruined these segments, but on the other hand
Indian mill industry and not that of British, affected the coarser count hand
spinning and handloom weaving in Karnataka. It was not the competition
from British sugar mills, but those from Mauritius, West Indies, Germany and Java that gave a serious competition to the native sugar making in Karnataka. On the other hand the British did their best to establish sugar industry on modern lines in Karnataka. Contrarily the British tried to suppress the development of iron & steel industry on modern lines in the 19th century.

Therefore the micro study of the Handicrafts in Karnataka has brought to light the diversity in the process of the decline of handicrafts. The handicrafts declined due to various reasons such as technological obsolescence, change in taste, reduced demand for handicrafts in general, degeneration caused by improper imitation of western designs, lack of innovation, conservativeness on the part of craftsmen, British fiscal policies, decline of native states and princely order, competition from mill sector (both Indian and foreign), etc.

In certain cases we also see the improvement in the condition of traditional industries. Thus wood inlay art and silk industry, which were in doldrums during the middle of the 19th century (1850-1880), recouped and were found flourishing at the end of 19th century.

While most of the urban handlooms declined by 1860s, those in the interior and rural areas weaving coarse cloth survived till the last decade of the 19th century.

The decline of handicrafts reduced the means of people who were depending on it and they shifted to agriculture. This has led to increase of
pressure on land and gave stimulus to commercialization of agriculture. Commercialization of agriculture reduced the area under food crops and encouraged export of food grains in pursuit of higher prices. This in turn led to the discontinuation of traditional storage of food grains and in the event of crop failure became highly vulnerable to famines. British failed to provide trade relief to the craftsmen and this made the effects of famines more intense and more frequent during the later half of the 19th century. Communication network spread rapidly, particularly the railways to provide famine relief. The existence of communications also facilitated an increase in trade and commerce and commercialization of agriculture. This in turn further contributed to the decline of handicrafts. The decline of weaving in Belgaum, Sira and MIDAGESI and that of paper industry is mainly due to the development of communications which brought the mill made products into direct competition with the handicrafts. Thus a vicious circle has been set-in, where the effects of decline of handicrafts, contributed further to their decline.