CHAPTER-1

INTRODUCTION

Historical Background

Karnataka has a rich tradition of handicrafts. ‘Manasollasa’ written by Someswara III, gives a list of fine clothes made in Karnataka that were used by the members of the royal families. Iron and Steel making was known in Karnataka right from the ancient period. It was widely believed that “Wootz”, the word used for Indian steel in the ancient days and which had attained fame in different parts of the world and imported in large quantities, was derived from the Kannada word “Ukku” which means steel.

During the Satavahana rule over Karnataka, we have references to arts and crafts, which were organized into castes and guilds. Inscriptions refer to various classes of workers such as Kularikas (Potters), Odayantrikas (makers of hydraulic engines), Kolikas (Weavers), Vasakaras (Bamboo workers), Kasakaras (Braziers) etc. These crafts were organized into guilds.

During the Vijayanagar period we have frequent references to Kaikollas, who were weavers by profession. It was widely believed that the Kinhal toys origin can be traced to the Vijayanagar period and the rulers patronized them.
Karnataka's celebrated handicraft, Bidriware, was done in Bidar, right from the medieval period. The rulers of Bahamani Kingdom and later the Baridshahis of Bidar patronized this craft with great passion.

Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan also contributed greatly towards the handicrafts of Karnataka. It was Tipu, who popularized sericulture and silk industry in Karnataka. He also introduced the art of making sugar candy by inviting the Chinese experts to Srirangapattana. The origin of the famous wood inlay art of Mysore can be traced to his period.
Nature, Extent, Scope and Objectives of the Work

The industrial revolution that started in the second half of the 18th century in England had great repercussions on the handicrafts of India in the 19th century. Lot of debate has taken place on the concept of de-industrialization and the decline of traditional handicrafts in India. Several regional studies have been attempted to study the condition of handicrafts in different parts of India. Most of the works have focused on the decline of handicrafts in this period. Sarada Raju’s work on Madras presidency is an important work in this direction. Choksey has made a similar attempt on Bombay Karnataka region. These works strengthen the argument of de-industrialization and the drain of wealth put forth by nationalist economic writers like Dadabhai Naoroji, R.C. Dutt and Ranade. Though some scholars like Morris D. Morris have argued that the concept of “de industrialization” was a myth and there was a growth in Indian national income during 19th century, many refute it. Bipan Chandra comes out very strongly against Morris theory. Recently Tirthankar Roy has tried to show that Morris was not altogether wrong in his arguments.

Some scholars argue that the decline of handicrafts was not a uniform, cataclysmic, event as depicted by Nationalist historians and economists. Besides handicrafts did not decline, simultaneously all over the country and there were several regional variations. Moreover, it may not be correct to argue that all the handicrafts in India experienced
decline. It was quite possible that some of them did not face competition from the British products. The industrial revolution in Britain mainly took place in the textile sector. British textile goods entered Indian market in a bigger way in the 19th century and brought about a great decline in hand spinning and handloom weaving in India. But what happened in the textile sector cannot be generalized and applied to all the handicrafts of India. Even in textiles, there were segments, which resisted the foreign competition for a longer period than others.

The decline of handicrafts in 19th century did not happen simultaneously everywhere. Particularly in South India, where the internal communication was poor in the first half of the 19th century, many handicrafts, particularly in the interiors survived because of obvious reasons. It was only with the advent of railways and development of transportation in the second half of the 19th century had accelerated the decline of handicrafts. Besides the decline of handicrafts at different times in the 19th century were due to different reasons. Initially (first part of 19th century) the decline of princely order and nobility affected them and at the later stage (second half of 19th century), the competition from British products and famines ruined them. Government policies at different times in 19th century also influenced the handicrafts sector. Nationalist Historians blamed British Government for the decline of handicrafts. But there are instances when the British showed great interest in some handicrafts and attempted to revive them. They conducted several
international exhibitions, which provided platform for Indian handicrafts to become popular. In the last quarter of the 19th century during which the Indian handicrafts were in doldrums, the British Government started Industrial Art Schools, technical institutes and Indian art Journal and started thinking about adopting measures to save the traditional Indian handicrafts. The survival of some handicrafts at the close of the 19th century can be attributed to these measures. Therefore, it may not be altogether correct to project Britishers as villains, who destroyed the Indian handicrafts. Contrarily, we cannot definitely assert that the British industrial policy helped the Indian handicrafts. It can be shown that some handicrafts declined due to the deliberate or laissez faire policy of the state, while the others did not. On the other hand some handicrafts declined on their own, unmindful of state action. Some of the handicrafts survived, though there was lack of state patronage, because they were quite popular among people. In some cases the decline was gradual and in other cases it was rapid. In some cases the decline was visible and in other cases not. The same handicraft might have declined in one place, while in other places it has survived.

Therefore it is necessary to examine each handicraft individually and carefully, in a particular geographical region. Here micro studies become important, which can bring out several interesting facts about the topic of “decline of traditional Industries” in the 19th century India. As mentioned earlier Sarada Raju, N.K. Sinha, Choksey, Amiya Kumar-
Bagchi has attempted several regional studies, which has given new direction to the debate on “de-industrialization”. Regarding Karnataka some attempt in this regard was made by Dr. Sebastian Joseph and Dr D.C. Rajappa. The present work aims at the closer and integrated, micro level study of handicrafts in different parts of Karnataka during the 19th century. Generally the handicrafts showed the trend of decline during the 19th century in India. My intention is to see, whether this general tendency was found in Karnataka as well. Besides, I also wish to study the impact of this decline on the socio-economic conditions of the state. Some of the repercussions that were generally discussed include commercialization of agriculture, famines, development of communications, decline of Jajmani system, pressure of population on land, trade & commerce, rural indebtedness, etc. Since there was a close relationship between agriculture and handicrafts, particularly in the rural areas, it is very important to study the repercussions of decline of handicrafts on agriculture. An attempt was made in this direction in the present study.

I had chosen 19th century (1800-1900) as the period for my study. Though plenty of research has been conducted on Karnataka History, works on 19th century are few. Besides these works (except Hampi Kannada university volume on Karnataka History) lack an integrated approach and limit them to a particular geographical region of Karnataka. Thus Dr. D.C. Rajappa’s work on “Mysore Rajyadalli Vanijya Mattu Karakushala Kalegalu” deals with only the handicrafts in princely state of
Mysore. Shyam Bhat's work deals with only the economy of South Kanara. Choksey's work deals with only the economic life and handicrafts in Bombay Karnataka. Hettne concentrated only on the political economy of Princely state of Mysore. It was argued that different parts of Karnataka were under different political regimes in the 19th century and therefore it is better to study them individually.

While most of the North Western part of Karnataka and the present North Kanara belonged to the Bombay presidency, South Kanara and Bellary were under Madras presidency. North Eastern Karnataka was under the control of Nizam of Hyderabad. The old Mysore province was ruled by the Wodeyars from 1800-1831 and again from 1881 onwards. In between i.e., from (1831-1881) it was under the British commissioners rule, who were under the control of Madras presidency. Coorg was ruled by the local rajas till 1834, after which it was annexed by the British. But it cannot be denied that the whole of Karnataka was under British influence in 19th century either directly or indirectly. The Nizam of Hyderabad and princely state of Mysore has signed the treaty of subsidiary alliance with the British at the beginning of the period under study. Though British claimed that, it was a mere military treaty, it was not so practically. The British resident interfered in the day-to-day affairs of the Princely states. This had an adverse effect on trade, commerce, industry and economy of the princely states. Therefore the British colonial policies affected the princely states, as much as they did on British India. Though the princely
rulers were independent to make their own economic policies, they were not in a position to take any decision that would affect or annoy the British economic interests. Though some parts of Karnataka were under Bombay presidency and some others in Madras presidency both were subjected to the same colonial exploitation. Besides princely state of Mysore experienced direct British rule of about 50 years in 19th century (1831-1881). Even after rendition Mysore had to yield to the British economic interests as shown by Bjorn Hettne in his political economy of indirect rule. Therefore, we may not be far wrong, if we say that though administratively Karnataka was divided into different political units, in 19th century all of them were under British influence either directly or indirectly. Almost all parts of Karnataka suffered the British economic colonial exploitation. Therefore it is essential to study the different parts of Karnataka simultaneously to get a better idea of the economic history of the period under study. Besides the geographical contiguity make the effects of one region to be felt upon the other. Therefore in the present study an effort is made to study all the regions of Karnataka.

Some of the important works on Karnataka handicrafts have certain lacunae. For example Dr. D.C. Rajappa’s work on handicrafts in princely state of Mysore has chosen the period from 1800-1881. I.e. from the beginning of the 19th century, till the rendition of Mysore. His work stops at 1881. But it was from 1881 onwards that railway network started spreading rapidly in Mysore and elsewhere. This was coupled with the
development of feeder roads, thereby linking most of the villages with railways. This improvement in communications enabled the machine made goods to reach even the remote villages in the interior. As a result of it even the rural handicrafts started facing competition from the machine made products, which included both Indian and foreign. We all know that industrialization in India, using modern technology, particularly in textiles made its beginning in the last quarter of 19th century. Therefore the Indian handicrafts particularly those in the rural areas faced increasing competition in the final decades of the 19th century. Many handicrafts, which hitherto survived, faced a greater decline in the period from 1880-1900. Dr. D.C. Rajappa did not consider this period for study in his work. Therefore an attempt is made in this study to comment on the condition of handicrafts in Karnataka towards the end of the 19th century.

It is to be noted here that Karnataka has a rich collection of traditional handicrafts at the beginning of the 19th century. Besides many handicrafts were distributed widely all over the state and we may not be far wrong, if we say that every village in Karnataka had handicrafts, in the 19th century. While some have specialized in having a unique handicraft of their own, others have handicrafts of general nature such as carpentry, iron works, pottery etc. It is not possible to study each and every handicraft in all the places of Karnataka. Therefore some of the most popular handicrafts were chosen for study, during the period under consideration.
19th century economic debate has taken many interesting twists, after Morris D. Morris initiated it. Scholars like Bipan Chandra, Irfan Habib and Barun De have come out strongly against Morris theory. But recently Tirthankar Roy has tried to show that Morris was not altogether wrong in his arguments. It is hoped that the present study on Karnataka handicrafts may shed new light on the debate.
Methodology

The sources are mainly archival. Primary sources for the research were collected by visiting archives at different places. The Karnataka state archives at Bangalore have a rich collection of primary sources pertaining to 19th century. But the main lacuna in this archive is that it lacks primary sources pertaining to early 19th century Karnataka economic history. This shortcoming was done away with the records maintained in the Madras archives. The archives located in the Mysore palace complex also contains some useful records particularly about agriculture, land revenue, irrigation etc. I had also visited the National Archives at Delhi and collected important primary sources for my research.

Among the primary sources the industries & commerce department files maintained at the Karnataka state archives proved very useful. Besides the Mysore administrative reports, which were published annually and later quinquineally in the closing decades of the 19th century provides useful information on various aspects of economic History.

The foreign department files in the National archives at Delhi yielded important primary sources for my research.

In addition to primary sources, some important secondary sources were also utilized for the research work. The Indian Council for Historical Research library (Bangalore), Mythic society library, Nehru Memorial Museum library (New Delhi), National Archives library (New Delhi), Mysore University library (Manasagangothri), Karnataka University library
(Dharwad), Hampi Kannada University library (Kamalapura, Vidyaranya) have a rich collection of secondary sources, pertaining to the period under study. I had visited all the above-mentioned libraries and made a thorough study of the various secondary sources available, related to my topic. This enabled me to see the primary sources with wider angle and to use them appropriately in my research work. Wherever I felt necessary, I had also quoted from secondary sources in my research work.

Regarding the early decades of the 19th century, I had used the archival papers available in the Madras archives. Sri M.H. Gopal has edited the papers pertaining to Mysore’s economic history available in Madras archives, which formed a useful guide to my research work.

Francis Buchanan’s volumes titled “A journey from Madras through the countries of Mysore, Canara, and Malabar”, provides useful details about handicrafts in the early 19th century. His careful observations and detailed reports were utilized to project the condition of Karnataka handicrafts at the beginning of the 19th century. Buchanan’s volumes are worth their weight in gold. In their absence, it would have been very difficult to focus on Karnataka’s economic history in the early 19th century.

Choksey’s work on Bombay Karnataka is an important secondary source providing interesting details about the economic life of the region.

Shyam Rao’s “Modern Mysore” and Venkata Subba Sastri’s work on Mark Cubbon throws light on the economic history of Mysore in the first half of the 19th century.
Bjorn Hettne's work, "Political economy of indirect rule" tries to project how the British controlled Mysore's economy indirectly and reduced the princely rulers into mere puppets in the game of colonial exploitation. Mysore in attempting to become a model state failed to encourage its own industries and handicrafts.

The various Gazetteers published during 19th & 20th centuries also provide useful information about handicrafts.

The Gazetteer about princely state of Mysore edited by B.L. Rice, first published in 1876 and then revised in 1897 provides important details about various handicrafts, and thus became an important secondary source, pertaining to the last quarter of the 19th century. Similarly the Imperial Gazetteer of India published in the early years of the 20th century gives us an idea of the condition of handicrafts at the close of the 19th century. In 1920s Hayavadana Rao edited a Gazetteer on princely state of Mysore which gives important details about Mysore's economic history.

Census data was collected from the census reports available in the Mythic society, Bangalore. These reports give details about the number of persons employed in different handicrafts. The regular census of 1881, 1891 & 1901 helps us to draw some useful conclusions. Though doubts were expressed about the accuracy of the census data, still they gave a fair idea about the economic conditions towards the close of the 19th century.
In trying to trace the path of economic change in the 19th century the historian has to negotiate two sets of hurdles. On the one hand there are hardly any data on actual output or the distribution of income. On the other, the comparative plenty of certain statistics may tempt him/her, to overlook the unreliability of official statistics during this period. The flow of official data begins around 1800, but the machinery for collecting statistics was imperfect and figures were sometimes tailored to make a case. Population statistics were no exception to this general tendency. Therefore statistics were used only to get a general idea in the present research work. I had therefore avoided relying too much on statistics to prove something or the other. Even trade statistics have lot of anomalies and imperfections. It was impossible to express in figures the precise extent of internal trade in 19th century. The statistics were based upon the registration returns, which were collected in different provinces. Owing to changes in the system of registration, it is not safe to institute general comparison between different years. Similarly inter-provincial trade statistics were based on railway returns and the traffic passing through certain registration centers only. Therefore a lot of care and restraint is exercised while utilizing the trade statistics in the research work.

Regarding journals, the “Indian art journal” published under the patronage of British Indian government to give publicity to the declining handicrafts, was extensively used. This journal was available at the National archives New Delhi and provides invaluable information about
the sorry state of some of the handicrafts of Karnataka such as the "Kumblies of Chitradurga", "wood carving in Sagar" etc. Apart from "Indian art journal", current historical journals published by Mythic society (Quarterly journal of Mythic Society), ICHR and University of Mysore were also utilized in the research work. Besides articles in standard Newspapers like “The Hindu”, “The Deccan Herald”, “Prajavani” and “Vijaya Karnataka” on handicrafts were utilized to get a fair idea about the present condition of the handicrafts which have got several centuries of history. Since the people belonging to a particular community practiced most of the handicrafts, I had conducted personal interview with the members of those community. Since the period chosen was 19th century they were not able to throw much light on the condition of handicrafts in that time. Nevertheless some useful information about the antiquity of handicrafts and details of manufacturing came to light from it. I also had personal discussion with some of the scholars and historians about the subject, which has enabled me to conduct my research work in proper direction.

Some of the handicrafts were distributed widely throughout Karnataka in the 19th century, and others were highly localized in certain geographical region. A very good example for the former is textile manufacturing with handlooms and that for the latter is the Bidriware. Therefore as explained earlier, it is better to adopt on integrated approach
to study the condition of handicrafts by considering the entire Karnataka as a single economic unit. This approach is adopted in the present work.

Most of the research work in recent times adopts interdisciplinary studies. This has become essential since it enables us to have a broad outlook of the subject chosen for research. The historian uses the economic tools, Statistics, Psychology, geographical setup, Political Science, Literature, Folklore etc., for his research work to have a deeper understanding of the past. In the present work, I had strived my best to make it interdisciplinary. I had quoted from Kannada Novels, used statistics and economic tools, etc to enrich the quality of the work.
Chapter Frame Work

As mentioned earlier, there were numerous handicrafts in Karnataka in the 19th century, and it is impossible to study all of them. After providing a brief introduction about handicrafts in the first chapter, I had selected 10 popular handicrafts and discussed about their condition during 19th century in detail in the second chapter. The general trend observed during the study was that by and large most of the handicrafts declined during the course of the 19th century. This decline has its repercussions on other sectors of the economy. Therefore the decline has to be studied in relation to the areas like “trade and commerce”, “communication”, “agriculture” and “famines”. Hence after studying the handicrafts, these chapters were taken up for study. Many handicrafts such as spinning, cotton textile weaving, silk and sugar making are agro-based and the close association between rural handicrafts and agriculture and the increased pressure of population on land due to decline of handicrafts has made the study of “Agriculture” the natural choice for the third chapter. The hopeless condition of Indian agriculture, high land revenue demand, over assessments, lack of irrigation and commercialization of agriculture has led to famines. This was discussed in the fourth chapter.

Trade and commerce was closely associated with the decline of handicrafts. It is the flooding of cheap machine made goods that has led to the decline of handicrafts. This aspect has been discussed in the fifth
chapter, which includes the repercussions of both internal and external trade.

The development of communications is very essential to facilitate trade and commerce. Therefore in the sixth chapter "communications" this is extensively dealt with. Besides an attempt is made to show how the development of communications was correlated with the decline of handicrafts.

Finally in the concluding chapter, I had listed out the various inferences drawn by studying the topic of the decline of traditional handicrafts in Karnataka in the 19th Century.