CHAPTER - I

INTRODUCTION
1.1 ART OF WEAVING: HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE:

India has a rich cultural heritage and the art of weaving forms a part of it. Handloom weaving as an age-old household industry in India has spread throughout the length and breadth of the country. Handloom industry is an important cottage industry in India ranking next to agriculture in terms of size and employment potential. It provides employment to the largest number of persons in the country. About ten million people directly depend on handloom weaving for their livelihood. Weavers are spread all over India. There is no village or town without the existence of handloom artisans.

Hand spinning and weaving was developed in India thousands of years ago and is still continuing, though not in the same pattern but as one of the biggest cottage industries in India. History points out that hand-weaving was in existence in India since five thousand years. Lajapat Rai states, "The birthplace of cotton manufacture is India, where it probably flourished long before the dawn of authentic history. Its introduction into Europe took place at a comparatively late period. It is extremely probable that cotton was manufactured in India as early as linen in Egypt." (Lajapat Rai, 1967).
Herodotus, writing about 445 B.C. stated that cotton was the customary wear of the Indians of that period. From India the art of cotton manufacturing went to Arabia. The English word 'cotton' is a modification of the Arabian word 'Qutton'. In the 13th century, the art of cotton manufacture went to China and then to Japan. In the 10th century it travelled to Spain, being introduced by the Moors, and then to Italy in about 14th century. The Mohammedans introduced it into Africa even earlier. Thus it spread east and west, from its native seat in India across the breadth of the old continent to Japan east-ward and to the mouths of the Tagus and Senegal west-ward.

The Indian weavers in all ages had maintained almost incredible perfection in their fabrics of cotton. The Arabian travellers of 9th century wrote in their travelogues that "In this country India, weavers make garments of such extraordinary perfection, that nowhere else is their like to be seen, sewed and woven to such a degree of fineness". Especially Masulipatam, produce the finest and most beautiful cottons to be found in any part of the world. Quality of cotton cloths manufactured in India were of exquisite delicacy, unrivalled by any other nation (Lajapat Rai, 1967).
Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay writing about Indian handlooms in her book "The glory of Indian Handicrafts" has stated that Indian weavers have produced cotton fabrics of rare type and have given fancy names for these fabrics. Colours are very close to nature and are associated with seasons and rituals, as crimson colour is a good omen to be worn by bride or on auspicious occasions (Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, 1976).

The weavers of different places were specialised in the production of different types of quality products. Coimbatore and Madurai in Tamil Nadu, Maheshwari and Chanderi in Madhya Pradesh, Venkatagiri, Gadwal and Kothakota in Andhra Pradesh, Karalkuda in Kerala, Sholapur in Maharashtra, and Irkal in Karnataka are famous centres for cotton fabrics (Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, 1976).

In the days of the Roman empire, silk both raw and manufactured, was an important article of commerce throughout India and Persia. Persian monks brought silk worms and art of silk manufacture from China to Constantinople (Lajapat Rai, 1967). South India is famous for its high and
heavy quality silks. Tamil Nadu and Karnataka are noted areas for silks. Molkalmoru in Karnataka, Kanchipuram, Kollegal, Kumbakonum, Salem and Ari in Tamil Nadu are the famous centres for fine quality silk sarees. Silk enjoys a significant status because of the preference that has shown for its use at rituals.

The art-silk weaving in India is of relatively recent origin. Manufacture of synthetic fabrics was first started in 1880. The fabrics were introduced in the Indian market early in the 20th century.

Indian weavers and the weavers' excellence in weaving touched its glory during the Moghul period. During the pre-British period Indian weaves were reputed in the west for their beauty and durability, and thus had a good demand. The weavers enjoyed the freedom to produce cotton, to spin the thread, to weave the cloth and to sell the piece goods in the local markets as well as for export purpose.

A tragic decline followed very soon at the hands of British. The British deliberately destroyed the Indian spinners
and craftsmen. The British steadily expanded their textile market in India and simultaneously the export of raw cotton from India to Britain increased. With the East India Company in power, a violent economic dislocation occurred in the professions of the weavers. The company’s chief aim was to increase its volume of trade. Since cotton fabrics were being exported to Europe from the beginning, the company wanted to make this business as large and as profitable as possible. The weavers’ freedom was restricted by contracts, under which they were required first to fulfill the demands of the company, before they worked for anybody else. Gradually, the company’s monopoly was established over the manufacture and procurement of cotton goods. To achieve its objectives, threats, force and punishment were used. The greatest economic injustice in the system was the company’s arbitrary fixation of prices. From the weaver it purchased cloth at the minimum possible price, leaving for the weaver the smallest margin of remuneration for his labour. The weaver having been forced to weave mostly for the company had no extra cloth to sell in the local market. Thus, the weaver’s labour quickly turned less remunerative than before. The crux of the tragic situation was that the prices given to the weavers for their cloths amounted to no more and in some instances less than the
cost of the materials and their labour was extracted from them without any repayment. An economic system such as this, imposed and enforced by the ruling power, brought about a sudden decline of the handloom weaving industry. When weaving became unremunerative, weaving occupation brought troubles, risks and oppression to the weavers. (P N. Chopra, B.N.Puri, M.N.Das 1974).

In 1915 when Mahatma Gandhi came on the Indian political scene, he went deep into the various facts of British exploitation and came to the conclusion that the cloth making industry should be reviewed and restored to its rightful place in economy. Thus it was Gandhi who made Indian handloom industry and its self-dependence as one of the major plans of India's independence struggle. The Charakha reappeared in every home. Khadi spinning and weaving became a unifying force. It was thus that the Khadi weaving emerged.

After attainment of India's independence, India's Five Year Plans have given an important place to the programmes for the welfare of the handloom weavers. Government of India and the State Government have formulated specific
programmes for promoting economic upliftment of the handloom weavers. Khadi and Village Industries Commission was established in 1957. Since then the Commission is looking after Khadi and other twenty-six village industries.

1.2 WEAVING: ITS CASTE ASSOCIATION

A close look into weaving occupation in India reveals a unique feature, that is, castewise specialization. Weaving occupation is mostly pursued by people of certain castes. Weavers are functional caste groups associated with the prescribed particular traditional occupation. It has been said that, in the early three thousand years, weaving was not based on a caste system. However, it is said that, in the later period, it gradually developed caste basis. (Akurti Venkateshwar Rao, 1973).

Weaving then came to be carried on as the principle occupation by certain castes only and became the traditional occupation of the weaver castes. Thus weaving occupation is mostly pursued by people of certain castes.
Many castes are known today by the name of the particular occupation that they follow. It is observed that the particular caste members prefer to do particular occupation. By knowing an individual's caste name one could with high probability know his occupation also. Association of caste with occupation is generally taken for granted. For some castes, their very name indicates this association e.g., Nekar, a subcaste among the Lingayats. For the other castes textual reference offers a clue to occupational association. The occupational basis of caste structure has been recognised by most of the researchers like Majumdar (1947), Dube (1955), Mayers (1956) and Mathur (1958).

Ghurye makes it explicit in his definition of caste by including traditional occupation as one of the criteria of defining caste. He states that "each caste has a traditional occupation" (1950). Srinivas identifies the traditional occupations of all the castes in his Rampura village. Bose found a greater stability of traditional occupations by caste in his West Bengal village (1959).

But Irawati Karve argued that each caste has a traditional occupation or even follows a certain occupation.
is only partly true, for several castes both in the same region and in different regions follow the same occupation and only few occupations are monopolised by certain castes. There are certain occupations which are not confined to a single caste, but on the other hand are open to only a limited number of castes (Karve Irawati, 1961)

Hindu society in India is highly caste structured. The understanding of caste in India is derived from, and is based on, scriptures and sacred texts. These studies present an admirable picture of the system. The varna system divides Hindu society into the four-fold classification that is the Brahmanas, the Kshatriyas, the Vaishyas and the Sudras. Though the four classes were not meant to be castes, in course of time, they gave rise to the caste system. Thus there are at present more than three thousand castes in India.

Each individual belongs to a caste in which he is born. Birth alone decides a man's social status. The social status ascribed by birth in a particular caste cannot be changed by personal achievements. Each individual as a
member of his caste-group is enjoined to observe his caste rules. As Dr. Dube puts it "each one of the many castes is a veritable sub-culture with special traditions, prerogatives, rituals, food habits and status". Tradition has given to each group a definite position and also definite function, which is, the major source of livelihood (Dube, 1955).

Each caste is assigned particular occupation. Status is 'ascribed' and a man born in a particular caste automatically inherits the status and occupation of his parents. Caste has important economic functions. The division of labour and specialisation of skills by various caste groups characterise the traditional economy of village India. Whether all its members practise it or not, each caste is linked to some occupation. There are some occupations which could not be taken over by persons other than those belonging to a particular caste. There are some occupations which are not confined to a single caste but are open to only limited number of castes (Atal Yogesh, 1968).

Weaving is an occupation which is not confined to a single caste, but is open only to a limited number of castes.
Chaliyan - A caste of cotton weavers found in Malbar.

Devang, Sali - A caste of weavers found in Karnataka

Jotaha Momins - A caste of Muslim weavers found in North India.

Jugi - A caste of Silk Weavers in Assam.

Kaikolan - A Tamil Caste of weavers.

Katoni, Nath - A caste of weavers in Assam.

Pamkkan - A caste of weavers in Madras.

Sarak - A caste of weavers in Eastern India.

Seniyan - A caste of weavers of Southern India.

Great changes have been occurring in the traditional societies due to technological advancement and industrial development. Handloom weavers of India faced the challenge, in the middle of 19th century when, the British industry was in need of cheaper raw materials from India and ready market for its finished goods. In the Indian market the weavers faced acute competition, and thus a large stratum of weavers were ruined economically during British rule.
In the later years of the 19th century, after India's independence, handloom weavers faced another problem, wherein handloom weavers had to compete with organised industry. They had to face competition in marketing their goods as, the products of the organised industry were relatively better in quality, finish and appearance, and were cheap. The poor weaver did not possess the required power to hold stocks for longer period. Thus in the early decades of the 20th century, weaver became almost an orphan. This led to pauperisation of the weaver artisans.

Inspite of ruination of craftsmen as a result of British rule, technological advancement and industrial developments, the handloom weavers could survive in the Indian society only due to reasons such as -

1. The hereditary occupation of the castes is responsible for the preservation and development of the art of weaving through generations. The hereditary craftsmen cling to their occupation inspite of diversity and are reluctant to abandon their occupation because of the inheritance of property. That is, looms which are the wealth of the weavers are inherited from father by his
son. Even in cases where the son is engaged in other occupation, to make use of this inherited property, and the leisure time, he also continues the traditional weaving occupation of the family.

2. Weavers who are working under Master-weavers as wage weavers cling to their occupation because they could not go in for other occupation due to lack of education, training and skills for other occupations.

3. The poorer classes, especially the villagers prefer the particular type of fabrics, whose demand could be met through the local handloom weavers. The demand for each type is too small to make its manufacture in a factory on a large scale. Thus these handloom weavers could survive.

4. Government of India and State Governments have formulated specific programmes for the reconstruction and development of handloom weaving industry.

The development programmes undertaken by the Government, though have provided opportunities for the weavers
for their self-improvement, have at the same time, tended to aggravate the problem. These developmental programmes have brought both benefits and disadvantages to the weavers. Traditional handloom weaving industry is showing slow change. Weavers who were working under master weavers as wage labourers are very keen to own the loom and thus they have become members of the Corporation Sector. Even in Khadi Sector, weavers population is increasing as they could get more remuneration for their work. This has adversely affected the handloom weaving as handloom weavers are experiencing a crisis as they are not getting the wage weavers to weave on their loom. Though more and more weavers are joining Khadi Sector and Corporation Sector, marketing of these products has become a major problem. Negligible portion of the production is marketed, as only fabrics of particular variety are produced by those sectors which do not fulfil the local demand.

Thus the unique characteristics of the handloom weaving industry are undergoing structural and functional changes as a result of various forces. In such a changed situation, life being stressful and competitive, they are facing difficulties in adjustment, accumulation of stock, low
wages and lack of employment. All these factors bring about a decline in the weavers income and standard of living. The present research study aims at a first hand socio-economic study of the weavers with the holistic perspective.

1.3 REVIEW OF STUDIES IN HANDLOOM WEAVING INDUSTRY:

A review of the literature on handloom weaving industry shows that quite a few researchers have studied handloom weaving industry in our country. However, since all these studies are undertaken by non-anthropologists and are part studies, their emphasis has been on economic aspect of the handloom weaving industry, and thus they provide very little information about the total social-economic life of the weaver community as a whole. Yet these studies throw some light on the weaver group as a whole.

Gadgil, D.R. (1945) reports about handloom weaving industry of Poona in his survey of Poona city, wherein he talks about the history of the Poona handloom industry. Weavers of Poona, he states, had migrated from Paithan, Yeola, Sholapur and Narayan Peth, during the Nizams rule. Silk weaving
emerged there in the beginning of the nineteenth century during Peshwa rule. Further the handloom weaving industry there, is divided into two distinct branches, cotton and silk. Weavers of Poona, belonged to both the Hindu and Muslim communities. Among the Hindu, Padamasali formed the bulk of the weaving population.

Kakade's socio-economic survey of weaving communities in Sholapur is aimed at understanding the exact nature and extent of the problems faced by the industry and suggesting appropriate solutions to improve the industry. He traces the past history of the handloom weaving industry in Sholapur, one of the biggest centres of handloom weaving in India, and evaluates the future trends.

The survey indicates that while Padamasalis formed the major weaver caste, other weaving castes found are Swaku-lasali, Togata, Kuruvinshetti, Jyandra, Khetri, and Momins. The main findings of this study point that as a result of the competition of the mills and powerlooms, their hereditary occupation of handloom weaving is hit hard. As a consequence, the population is labouring under many disabilities such
as illiteracy, dire poverty, indebtedness, malnutrition, unsatisfactory housing and unhealthy habits. To him poverty is due to ignorance. The entire female population is illiterate. As for male, the proportion varied with the economic classes and a large number of school age children did not attend schools. Education is not a part of their family mores. Children are made to earn because more income is desired and often at times greatly needed (Kakade, R.G. 1947).

Angadi, V.B. (1978) has studied Handloom and Powerloom industry of Bijapur district of Karnataka State. He reports that female workers are more in number than male workers. Majority of female workers are engaged only in preparatory processes but in Guledgudda and Ilkal taluka of Bijapur district female workers have taken up weaving. He also reports that the wage workers who are working for master-weavers, and cooperatives are found in debt. He opines that powerlooms and automatic looms are not a suitable substitute where in particular type of fabrics are woven. Only shuttle looms are ideal for weaving particular type of fabric.
Mensinkal S.S. and Ashok Mitra (1959), Akurti Venkateshwar Rao (1973), Lajapat Rai (1967) and many other researchers who have studied handloom weaving industry, have dealt with the historical account of the handloom industry of a particular place and they talk about the causes of the decline of the weaving industry, difficulties that weavers face in view of the changed circumstances and steps to be taken to improve the conditions of handloom weaving industry.

Apart from these surveys, undertaken by various authors, there are many other studies that make a situational analysis of handloom weaving industry. Papers have been published in the journals viz., "Khadi Gramodyoga" and "Kurukshetra". Article published in Kurukshetra entitled "Handloom industry in coastal Andhra" by G.Subramanyam, B.Ramakrishna Rao, K.Ramamohan Rao and B.Mohan Venkatakraman points out that the handloom industry in Andhra Pradesh is experiencing a series of crisis, like shortage of yarn, accumulation of stocks and low wages. The study also points out that to preserve the weaving industry there is a need on the part of the government to take proper steps to encourage the youth towards this traditional activity which not only
protects the rich heritage of Indian culture but also helps to solve the employment problems (Kurukshetra, March, 1987).

Nagarajan N.V. in his article "Khadi. Then and Now" published in the journal "Khadi Gramodyoga" states "India's handloom weaving industry and the people's excellence in spinning touches its glory during the Moghal period. People weave variety of cotton clothing, silks, linen and often embroidered them with gold and silver threads. But the British deliberately destroyed the Indian spinners and craftsmen. The British steadily expanded their textile market in India and simultaneously the export of new cotton from India to Britain increased. It was Mahatma Gandhi who popularised Indian textiles and Khadi gained vast popularity among the masses during the independence movement. Later in 1957 the Government of India established a statutory body called Khadi and Village Industries Commission. The production, sales and employment in Khadi have been increasing appreciably in recent years" (Khadi Gramodyoga, March, 1987).

Rajuldevi in her paper entitled "Plight of Handlooms" in Kurukshetra (Jan. 1983) and Panditrao Y.A. in his article...
published in Khadigramodyog (Oct. 1987) entitled "Institutional credit for cottage and village industries" deal with the coope-
rat he efforts that are being made among the weavers and the help rendered by the Khadi and Village Industries Commis-

There are a number of studies pertaining to Indian village life, which have been monographically oriented. In these studies all castes of the particular village are studied and various aspects of the caste system are reported in them. The nature of these studies are general in nature and they do not deal particularly with the weavers as such, and thus give very little information about weavers. In these studies, as pointed out below, weavers are studied as one caste community among the many castes.

Dube S.C. in his study of 'Indian Village', (1959) reports about 'Sale'(weaver) artisan caste of samipur. He points out that in good old days these weavers had definite arrangement with agriculturists. They supplied a certain length of cloth every year and in return they received some
grains at each harvest. But pointing out the change he says, "They no longer work, on this basis but, buy the yarn from yarn dealers, weave the cloth and sell it for cash in the market" (Dube S.C. 1959).

Durganand Sinha (1969) studied a village near Allahabad. The study points out that there are number of families of 'Jolhas' who are good weavers mainly concerned with weaving handloom sarees. There are also Muslim weavers. Weavers of this village felt that conditions were better and life was easier in olden days. Life was generally not considered as good as it used to be.

Y. Subbhashima Subramanyam in her study of a village Devapuram in Andhra Pradesh (1975) points out that with the introduction of powerlooms and free availability of mill cloth the weavers there, were forced to give up weaving. Padmasale of Devapuram who were traditionally weavers, no longer practise their profession. Not a single member follows his traditional calling or Kula-Vruti, for earning a livelihood. They have taken to other avenues of employment, some are agriculturists and a few others are engaged in petty business.
Jyotirmoyee Sarma (1960) in his village study conducted in West Bengal near Calcutta points out that, weaving is the hereditary occupation of the 'Tantis' (weaver) and almost all the Tanti homes have one or two looms where cotton Sarees and Dhoties are produced. Weavers of this area take their products for sale every Tuesday to Howrah which is famous weekly market in Bengal.

She further notes that weaving is not a profitable occupation today due to high cost of cotton yarn as well as high cost of living. Majority of the weavers take orders from master-weavers who supply the yarn and the designs to be woven. The weavers either work for daily wage or receive a part of the price of the cloth. The study also shows that some of the Tanti families have taken up office jobs.

Most of the studies on the weaver community are thus focussed on the economic aspect of weaving as a caste occupation, the crisis faced by the weaving industry in face of varied reasons and the change in the occupation of weavers. A detailed study of the different aspects of their social life is not conducted by any.
1.4 OBJECTIVES:

The study aims at understanding the weavers' community life in general, and to know the inter-linkages if any, between the various weaver castes, and to understand the growth and development of their handloom weaving industry. Thus the main objectives of the present research study are as follows.-

1. To examine the socio-economic and religious parameters of weaver castes and to have a holistic perspective of their realities of life.

2. To understand the structural pattern and development of handloom-weaving, as well as, to make an objective assessment of the problems encountered by the weavers.

Thus an attempt is made to trace their past history, their social cultural activities, their life-cycle rituals, and their religious activities, and their economic activities.

The present study of weaver castes is confined only to the Hubli city of Dharwad district in the State of
Karnataka. Hubli is historically demarcated for weaving industry in Karnataka. Inspite of living in a town place, these weavers have maintained their quite separate and distinctive social structure and mode of life. There are some localities in Hubli wherein we find the concentration of weaver families.

Hubli city has been choosen as area of present study due to a number of considerations -

1. There are no published researches on weavers of Hubli, which is historically demarcated for weaving industry. Inspite of Hubli being a town place some of its localities remain tradition bound in most aspects of its life.

2. History of Hubli city shows that it has already had a large number of handloom weavers. Since, decades handloom weaving industry is highly concentrated in this area. Throughout its known history, Hubli has always been regarded as an important centre of trade. The early British traders had stationed their agents at Hubli to collect cloth manufactured by weavers in Hubli and in the neighbouring villages.
3. Hubli is well known for the production of famous 'Tope-Tene' Irakal type sarees.

1.5 METHODOLOGY:

A socio-economic research in an urban area requires a substantial effort to collect primary data. In anthropological research the favourite population unit of anthropologists has tended to be "the community". In small communities, it is common anthropological practice to include all the people of a research community in numerical analysis to make a complete census of households. Information is based on hundred percent sample. But that is very difficult in urban setting. Even in relatively small communities it is difficult to obtain a total enumeration of families.

In Hubli though the weaver families were very few in number, due to their wide dispersion in location, it was inevitable to restrict the field area to manageable number on account of practical difficulty in discovering the presence of a weaving establishment in a place. It was obviously
impossible to enter every house in Hubli city, in order to enquire about whether it contained a loom. But since some of the locations of the city namely, Anandanagar, Asar Oni, Bogarpet, Bengeri, Channpet, Devangpet, Nekarnagar and Sadashiv-nagar had concentrated weavers' families, total samples were drawn from these localities. A household engaged in handloom weaving activity has been considered as a sample unit for the purpose of the survey. The total number of such units from the eight localities of Hubli city constitute the universe.

The problem of visiting and interviewing weavers was not an easy one. I initially turned to weaver families who were known to me who became the first families to be studied in detail about the technical and other aspects of the handloom weaving. They in turn placed me in contact with other weaver families. I also approached Chairmen of various caste organisations, to study about the social background of their castes and to get the information on inter-caste and intra-caste social interactions. Further it helped me in finalization of the interview schedules.
The interview schedule was prepared to collect general demographic information such as age, sex, marital status, education, occupation, income, type of house, ownership of house and so on. This was supplemented by field notes on specific aspects of their life like birth, marriage and death practices, religious beliefs, economic activities. I myself took the interview schedule to the respondents' families and recorded the information by explaining the objective and scope of the enquiry and the meaning of the questions. While eliciting information, local dialect, that is, Kannada dialect was used. Every day field diary was maintained in which notes on discussions, conversations and my personal observations were noted.

There was an initial resistance on the part of the people to freely answer my questions. People at first suspected me as a Government official and entry was not so easy for me into their houses. There had been times when attempts to establish rapport were refused. Generally people used to be busy with their own work. For me it was a significant interview, but it might not have appeared in the same light
to a respondent. However, it required tact and patience. I explained to them about the nature of my research and convinced them that the information would be directed towards academic ends. Letters from caste chairmen, requesting their caste members to cooperate with me giving correct information, proved of considerable help in winning the confidence of the respondents and in obtaining necessary information.

Respondents varied in their cordiality and in their interest in the interview. Some were rather cool to the idea of being interviewed, some others were quite interested. Sometimes respondents welcomed me by offering tea. Some times they would ask me whether I was a government official making enquiries about socio-economic conditions; which would give them cooperation loom. Inspite of a little difficulty in establishing initial rapport, the field work went through with ease.

Data on weavers was also collected from secondary sources like books, government records, from official documents like Census reports, Gazetteers. In addition to these, relevant maps and photographs are also presented.
Being an anthropologist, an extensive material which has been collected during the fieldwork has been tabulated manually by means of the basic 'Pencil-and-Paper' 'bar-and-gate' counting. Interview schedules used for field work were not designed with the intention of mechanical processing, as it involved difficulties of accurate recording which cannot be checked.

In accordance with the table required, the variables have been taken on one sheet, then sorted out. During the course of tabulation every possible precaution has been taken to present data systematically. Where the classification was difficult or where cross tables were required, symbols such as triangle, a square or a circle for different kinds were used with different colours which reduced the mistakes in tabulating the material. Thus the required tables were made and these form the basic tables utilized in this study.

Data analysis has been made in terms of education of respondents, including factors in school enrolment, and dropout in school, their perception, and aspiration regarding education for their children, caste differences in income,
occupational aspirations, mobility, caste differences in religious beliefs, religious practices and life-cycle rituals. Besides caste, age, education and occupation of the respondents also are used for identifying and isolating the variables and their relationships.