CHAPTER II

HANDLOOM INDUSTRY IN INDIA

2.1 INTRODUCTION

"The word Handloom derives its meaning from the process of operation by hand of a country-made wooden structure called loom."1

Since textiles were easily torn, burned or eaten by insects, the oldest surviving specimens probably dates back after the time when weaving was first practised. Whorls or weights for spinning have been found on Neolithic sites, indicating that thread was spun and therefore cloth was made.2 The four natural fibres i.e. wool, linen, cotton and silk were used in the weaving. Woolen textiles have been found in the early Bronze Age-sites in Switzerland and Scandinavia. In Egypt, plain linen textiles of about 5000 B.C. have been found. Cotton scraps have been discovered in India on sites of about 3000 B.C. and in Peru to around 2000 B.C. Silk may have been used in second millennium B.C. and was certainly woven by 1000 B.C.

2.2. HISTORY OF TEXTILES

2.2.1. ANCIENT

Yarns and cloths were dyed and printed from very early times. Specimens of dyed fabrics have been found in the Roman ruins of the second Century B.C.; tie-and-dye effects decorated the

silks of China in the Tiang dynasty (618-907AD); and there is evidence of production of printed textiles in India during the Fourth Century B.C. Textiles found in Egypt also indicated a highly developed weaving craft by the fourth Century A.D., with many tapestries made from linen and wool. Persian textiles of very ancient origin include materials ranging from simple fabrics to luxurious carpets and tapestries.\textsuperscript{3}

2.2.2. Middle Age

From the eight Century onwards, the Muslims spread the techniques of cultivating cotton and raising silkworms to Europe. The Byzantine Empire, Persia and later on, Italy, Spain and Flanders were great textile centres. As the textiles trade grew, carding, spinning and other processes developed from household occupations to specialized crafts. In many European towns, the members of each craft formed their own guild, or association; eventually, textiles production was controlled by the master craftsmen in the textile guilds.

The finest European fabrics were made from Spanish flax, English wool and Italian silk. By the end of fifteenth Century, the spinning wheel, which probably originated in Asia, was coming into wide use in Europe.

2.2.3. Early Modern Period

France, Germany, Spain, later on Holland, dominated the textile industry in Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth century. During these periods, crocheting and lace-making became popular and knitting was widely practiced. The first knitting machine was designed by William Lee, an English clergyman, in 1580's. Pressing, filling, napping and other finishing machines were developed. These machines were driven by cranks, treadmills, waterwheels or windmills.

In the eighteenth Century, a series of English inventions revolutionised spinning and weaving.

techniques, making England the leader of textile industry. The first important invention was John Kay's flying shuttle (1733), a device for moving the shuttle across the loom by a set of cords instead of by hand. It made weaving so much faster that a yarn shortage soon developed.4

Several inventions came about to improve the textile industry. James Hargreave's hand-operated spinning Jenny (1764), was able to spin a number of fine but weak yarns at the same time. The spinning frame (1769) by Richard Ackwright produced strong, coarse yarn. Samuel Crompton combined features of both Hargreave's and Ackwright's machines and came out with the spinning mule. It was perfected in 1779.

In the year 1785, Edmund Cartwright designed a crude power loom for weaving cloth mechanically. Other important eighteenth century advances were the invention of practical machines for carding fibres, the first use of chlorine for bleaching, the beginning of roller printing and the first use of steam-engines for driving textile machines.

The textile industry began to flourish in the United States in the late 1700's. Samuel Slater reproduced Ackwright's machinery in the United States in 1790 and in 1793 built the country's first successful cotton mill. In 1793 Eli Whitney invented the cotton gin for separating cotton fibre from cotton seeds.

2.2.4. MODERN PERIOD

In the early 1800's Joseph Jacquard, a French silk weaver, invented the first practical machine for weaving fabrics with intricate designs, such as brocade and damask. Lace making machines were developed by John Heath Coat and John Levers.

Later on in the nineteenth century came the mercerising process, the first synthetic dye, the first practical combing machine, and the first man made fibre rayon. In the twentieth century, many man-made fibres were developed. Alone or in blends, they made it possible to produce lightweight,

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durable fabrics with new textures that required less care than many fabrics made from natural
fibres. Nylon, the first synthetic fibre was announced in 1938. Other important synthetics were sare
(1940), polyester (1946) and spandex (1959).

A number of new types of fabrics were introduced after 1940, including bonded fabrics (1942),
stretch fabrics (1950s), laminated fabrics (1958) and fibre woven fabrics (1969). By the 1960s, the
American textile industry was composed of many large companies engaged in all aspects of textile
production. Competition from Asian countries with cheap labour became so demanding that in
1971 the United States established quotas on textile imports. In 1974, an international pact on the
textile and apparel trade came into effect, seeking to reduce trade restrictions without disrupting
any country's textile industry. The pact was renewed in 1977 but was revised to allow protective
actions under certain circumstances. By the 1980s', many countries were seeking to impose restric-
tions to protect their own textile from cheap imports.

2.3. HISTORY OF INDIAN TEXTILES

The Indian textiles were very popular in the South-East Asia and in the Islamic lands in the
earlier days. There is evidence of printed textiles in India during the fourth century B.C.5

In the Mughal period (16th-18th centuries) and perhaps earlier, the fine muslins produced at
Decca in Bengal were sometimes printed of living things, richly patterned fabrics were made in
Islamic lands.6

Archaeological findings of the Chalcolithic period at Mohenjodaro and Nevasi7 show that
technology of madder dyeing of cotton was known to the Indus Valley people and that silk had
made an entry among the range of fibres used in the Deccan by the second millennium B.C.

5 New Encyclopaedia Britannica, Vol. 18, Encyclopaedia Britannica Inc., Helen Hemingway Benton Publisher, 1973-
74 Chicago p. 171.
6 Ibid.
7 Bulletin No 17, Technological series No.12, Indian Central Cotton Committee Technological Laboratory, Oct., 1928,
A.N. Gulati, A.J. Turner, "A note on the early history of cotton" p.1,4,9. The find of cotton at Mohenjodaro has been
dated to the 3rd millennium B.C. and that the silk at Nevasi to the latter part of 2nd millennium B.C.
Information of a more definitive nature is available from about seventh to eight centuries A.D. Dr. Moti Chandra\(^8\) has provided the most comprehensive coverage to date of Indian textiles having exhaustively scanned major available texts in Sanskrit, Pali and Prakrit. While the various kinds of nomenclature in usage in earlier times point to the availability of a wide range of textiles, descriptive passages begin to have a recognizable meaning from about the time of the composition of the Harshacharitam by Bana\(^9\) (606-648 A.D.). Varnak literature such as Varnak Sammucchay\(^10\) a collection of works dated to between fifteenth to eighteenth century poems such as Marerun by Premanand\(^11\) dated to the last quarter of the seventeenth century provided ample informations about contemporary textiles.

The Indian textiles has certain basic features which have to be kept in mind. Although stitched clothing has existed since early times, the basic tradition has been that of unstitched garments. Unstitched garments lend themselves to a uniformity in pattern irrespective of the specific usage to which they may be put. The dilution of craft tradition in the past has, to a certain extent, been circumvented by the workings of the caste system. The creation of new design has been a function which has devolved on the artisan practising the craft. It is only on rare occasions that the privileged patron or customer has moulded taste. The role of the designer, has therefore been, in a sense, superflows in the Indian tradition of the decorative arts.

The traditional Indian textiles can be broadly placed within the three categories of wool, silk and cotton. There has been references to a fourth fibre obtained from some plant. This has been identified as jute (corchorus) or hemp (crotalaria juncea).

Wool, although like silk has been accorded a higher degree of ritual purity than cotton, in view of the Indian climatic conditions it is unlikely to have been much in evidence except during

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the winter months. The generic term for woolen blankets are called kambal. The highest development in wool as a garment can be found in the Kashmiri shawl. The word shawl, coined by the Europeans, is derived from Persian word shal. In Iran, the word was used as a generic term to denote a type of material viz. that of wool, rather than having a narrower connotation of a specific garment. The shal could be put to a variety of usages but in Kashmir it was usually worn as a male shoulder cloth.  

The Greek physician Clesias’s writing in the early fifth century B.C. mentions the popularity of brightly coloured Indian textiles among the Persians, an indication that Indian fabrics were made for export at this period. Strabo on authority of Megasthenes (circa 300 B.C.), recorded the Indian love of finery and ornament, and added, “their robes are worked in gold and ornamented with precious stones, and they also wear flowered garments of the finest muslin.”

2.3.1. ANCIENT

During the first century A.D., the Indian muslin became famous in Rome under such names as nebula, gangetika and venti textiles (woven winds). Silk was also an important export to Rome, both as yarn and finished cloth. Weaving tradition of the Pre-Islamic period which falls in the Ancient period has been Jamdani and interlocking technique. Both the techniques involve the simplest form of loom technology.

The jamdani technique is associated with the manufacture of Dacca, Varanasi and Tanda Muslins. Pattern work is done by extra weft on a two treadle loom. The warp threads are individually counted and lifted by the weaver, and each motif, even if repeated is separately worked by

15. Habib, Irfan, Indian History Congress, p. 917.

Symposium, Technology and Society, “Change in technology in Medieval India,” p.34, I.H.C. 1969, Presidential Address, Medieval Indian section, I Habib, “Technological changes and society” p. 7
passing the requisite number of spools of thread through the warp. The technique of jamdani itself forms a part of the broader based South-East Asian tradition. The Balinese sonket weaving which is still in practice on the island, has close parallels to the jamdani. The term jamdani is Islamic in origin but the technique points to a much older tradition.

The interlocking technique of ornamentation on the loom is also based on a simple counting and lifting of warp threads. However, the extra weft of jamdani is replaced here by the interlock mechanism whereby when two divergently coloured weft threads meet they are interlocked at the point of intersection. The threads of individual spools are brought back to position according to the pattern on every alternate lines of weave. The loom technology for the interlock weaving is extremely simple but the highest attainment in Indian weaving, the Kashmiri shawl, is effected through this weave. This technology had been used in the regions of Chanderi, Burhanpur, Paithan, Yeola and Poona.

In the South Indian tradition where the border of the sari is woven both in warp and weft in a contrast colour that of the ground portion, the interlock mechanism is used to bring together the ground portion with that of the border. Saris of Narayanpet, Uukel, Gadhval (A.P.) and Kanchipuram (T. Nadu) show evidence of such weaving.\(^{16}\)

\[2.3.2. \text{MEDIEVAL PERIOD}\]

The Indian textiles of the medieval period can be studied in some details from the Ajanta caves. Apart from the embroidery, at least four distinct techniques can be identified; ordinary tie-and-dye method, (bandhana); double tied-resist dying (ikat); brocading and fine muslin weaving.\(^{17}\)

The technique of double ikat described by A. Buhler and E. Fisher\(^ {18}\) was linked with Gujarat. It was in particular demand in Indonesia where symbolism in textiles has always played an impo-

\(^{16}\) Varadarajan, Lotika, "Saga of Indian Textiles", Indian Heritage, Edited by Vaanithi Muzumdar, Indian council of social welfare, Bombay, 1981. p. 94.


tant role. According to Indonesian belief any point of intersection between the vertical and the horizontal is blessed with a special power. Double ikat in which the pattern is made up by the alignment of threads which have tied-and-died in weft and warp fulfilled this acquirement to an admirable degree. Gujarat double ikat cotton was produced at Tenganan, Bali. It was known as gringseng.\textsuperscript{19}

Mashroo is a mixed fabric of silk warp and cotton weft are woven in a satin weave. Mary is Khorasan had been famous earlier for its mulham (mashroo)\textsuperscript{20} and it was possible that the fabric was introduced into Gujarat from the Islamic world.

From the twelfth century onwards Indian dyed cotton were exported in bulk to Egypt, and many such pieces have been recovered from the sites of old urban rubbish dumps, especially Al Fustat (Misr; Qadimah), the exceptionally dry climate accounting for their preservation.\textsuperscript{21}

The most highly developed tradition in India was that achieved in the range of cotton fabrics and in the pre-industrial period. Indian cottons circulated widely in Africa and Asia long before the European market opened.

Bengal woven muslins were extremely popular because of their diaphorous quality.\textsuperscript{22} The two other important regions of cotton manufacturers were Gujarat and the coastal regions of Eastern Deccan stretching from Balasore to Negapatam. Balasore served as the outlet for coastal Orissa and woven items tended to predominate here. The remaining region was known for its checked material, called guingham by Europeans, plekat by Indonesians, and San Thame by the Japanese.\textsuperscript{23}

When the Persians and Europeans entered into this field this ware became to be known as kulamkari (Persian), pintado (Portuguese), sits (Dutch) and more ambiguously, Chintz by the English. The Gujarat craft region also manufactured sarassa. However, with the exception of items made at

\textsuperscript{19} Mehta, R.N.; Journal of Indian Textile History, VI, 1961, p. 66

\textsuperscript{20} Larm, C.J.; Cotton in Medieval Textiles of the Near East, Paris, 1937, p. 121.

\textsuperscript{21} Encyclopaedia Britannica, Vol. 21, Encyclopaedia Britannica Inc., William Benton Publisher, Chicago, p. 917.

\textsuperscript{22} Aubin, Jean, Marc Lupo- Indicum "Leroyenre d' Ormeaoue debut au XVI siecle" I, 1973, p. 159.

\textsuperscript{23} Actual sketches of San Thame may be found at the Tokyo National Museum, Tokyo, Japan, in the work entitled "Korosen Mochiwa-ta Tamono Kirehou" (Sample Book of Textiles Brought by Vessels of the Red Haired People).
Sironj and Burhanpur, the Gujarat items tended to rely more on block printing and were generally of a coarse variety. The items in which Gujarat enjoyed an advantage over the east coast were bandhari or plangi and monochrome, blue-black cloths dyed in indigo or bhayo (a clay which yielded black dye) for which there was steady demand in the Arabian sea. When the latter variety began to be copied on the east coast, they were called Cambay cloths by the Europeans.

From the sixteenth century onwards, Indian pattern and designs were much influenced by Persia. One of the oldest traditional techniques of textile decoration and one that has been widely practiced in India is bandhana. Portions of a silk or cotton cloth are tied tightly with wax thread before the whole cloth is dipped in a dye vat; the threads are afterwards untied, the parts protected being left unclored.

The technique of ikat or double-resist dying, in which warp and weft are dyed separately by the tie-and-dye process before weaving, was practised in Orissa and Deccan as well as in Gujarat. At Patan (Gujarat), ikat done on silks are called patolas and are used especially as marriage saris. They were exported to South-East Asia from twelfth century onwards.

Brocade weaving was mostly done in Varanasi, Ahmedabad and the Deccan. The brocades were woven silks in which part of the pattern is distinct from or supplementary to the wefts. Those woven in pure silk is called amrus, those with golden or silver thread in addition to silk, kimkhab (Anglo-Indian kineob).

2.3.3. MODERN PERIOD

Between the seventeenth and eighteenth century silk and cotton textiles were exported in large qualities from India to Europe mainly through the agencies of the Dutch, English and French East-India Companies. After the Europeans entered the sphere of trade certain designs were added to the range of pattern by having items made to specifications on the basis of samples sent out from the home country. Because of the availability of cotton, quilting has been developed since earlier times and quilted items were more widely used than woolen ones. The Europeans were entranced
with Bengal and Gujarat quilts and exported them till the first half of seventeenth century. The Portuguese had the most cultivated taste in quilts, called colchas, and finest samples clearly tapped the Moghul karkhana tradition of Agra and Lahore.

The traditional trade contract between India and Africa lay essentially along the east coast. Some Indian textiles found their way across the Sahara caravan route via Timbuctoo to West Africa. Because of the development of the slave trade, there was a significant increase in the demand generated for Indian Textiles vended on the West African coast in the slave trade (sometimes referred as Guinea cloths). They were of rough quality’s crudely dye-patterned or equally roughly woven. With the decline of the slave trade, there was diminishing demand for Guinea cloths. In the nineteenth century, Javanese batik began to became increasingly popular in West Africa and ultimately displaced Indian cotton in two spheres.

Specific range in product designs was an attribute of European taste and when the European domestic market began to open up, specific form in designs began to be prescribed for various items of drapery as also of clothing. In the process of copying or adaptation, the Indian weavers often infused an exotic spirit into the designs that actually increased their appeal in Europe. The importance of the trade is testified by the member of Indian textile terms assimilated into the English language; chintz, palampore, pajama, seersucker, dungaree, shawl and so on.24

With the establishment of mill-made textiles in the 19th century, the handloom industry began to show a downfall. There were 194 mills, 5 million spindles and 40,000 looms in the country by the end of nineteenth century. The Swadeshi movement lead by Mahatma Gandhi had given a great impetus and some protection to the textile industry during the period of First World War (1914 to 1919) and this change in policy led to some increase in the production of cotton piece cloths. The Second World War (1939 to 1945) created a favourable conditions for further develop-

ment of the industry and with the coming of independence there was a tremendous revival of the
craft which had suffered such a crippling decline.25

2.4. GOVERNMENT ASSISTANCE IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF HANDLOOM.

After the Independence, many places of the country that were famous for their handloom
products began to continue to produce again. However with the rapid expansion of powerloom in
the decentralised sector, handloom weavers have been passing through a period of increasing dis-
tress.

The government established the National Co-operative Development and Warehousing Board
in 1956, under the Agricultural Produce Development and Warehousing Corporation Act 1956.
The Board was converted to National Co-operative Development Corporation(NCDC) under the
NCDC Act 1962. The NCDC has sponsored various scheme for development of handloom co-
operatives by strengthening the share capital base, creation of pre and post loom processing facili-
ties, construction renovation of show room, godowns and establishment of handloom worksheds.

In June 1962, the Handicrafts and Handloom Export Corporation of India Ltd. was estab-
lished as a wholly owned subsidiary of State Trading Corporation of India Ltd. (STC) under the
administrative control of Ministry of Textiles, Government of India. Its main objective was export
promotion and trade development of handicrafts, handloom fabrics and made ups besides ready
made garments.

Even with these reforms, the handloom sector did not show a better picture. So in December
1973 under the Chairmanship of B. Sivaraman, a High Powered Study team conducted an inquiry

The office of the Development Commissioner for Handlooms (New Delhi) was set up in
1976 as a nodal agency for the development of handloom industry. The office is headed by Devel-
opment Commissioner for Handlooms, assisted by 4 Joint Development Commissioners and 2

Development Commissioners. The office formulated several schemes to provide assistance to the handloom weavers in the co-operative and outside the co-operative fold. It has subordinate offices functioning under the 23 Weavers Service. Centres spread all over the country and 3 Indian Institute of Handloom Technology situated at Varanasi, Guwahati and Salem. In the year 1976, the Government introduced the Janata cloth Scheme for the production of controlled cloth in the handloom sector. The scheme was introduced with the twin objectives of providing sustained employment to the unemployed and under-employed handloom weavers and at the same time making available cloth at a price affordable by the poorer sections.

The following year 1977 saw the establishment of North-Eastern Handicrafts and Handloom Development Corporation (NEHDC), Shillong for the promotion and development of handicrafts and handlooms in the North-East regions comprising of Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura and Arunachal Pradesh. The corporation ensures to promote sales through sales emporiums, exhibitions etc. all over the country as well as outside the country. The corporation has established 5 emporiums at Guwahati, Shillong, Madras, Delhi and Bangalore under the name "Purbashree".

The central Government announced the Textile Policy of India in 1981. The Policy had laid down guidelines for the handloom, powerloom and others. The year might have seen the establishment of Handloom Export Promotion Council (HEPC), Madras, with the principal objectives of finding methods and means of boosting export of Indian handloom products abroad. Its activities include conducting market studies in different parts of the world, creating awareness of the products, maintaining and keeping the standard of the products, to set up handloom exhibitions abroad and to help the exporters in matters of shipping, freight, rates, credit problems and foreign exchange.

The following year 1982, saw the establishment of National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) by Reserve Bank of India on twelfth July 1982 for the development and welfare of the rural areas and its related activities like small scale industries, cottage industries.
handicrafts and village industries. The role of financial assistance provided by the RBI has been passed onto NABARD from December 1983 onwards. They undertook to provide refinance assistance for modernisation, acquisition of looms construction of workshed and installation of new looms. Under the scheme refinance assistance is provided to state co-operative banks, regional rural banks and the state governments for the development of handloom.

The year 1983 itself saw the setting up of the National Handloom Development Corporation Ltd. (NHDC) by the Government to serve the State Handloom Agencies and Apex bodies to ensure regular availability of essential raw material inputs for use in the handloom sector. The Corporation gives services in the area of yarn supply, dyes and chemicals, marketing and developmental activities which include exhibition on appropriate technology, national level seminars, workshops, promotional publicity etc. NHDC has also established marketing complexes at Jaipur, Cochin, Calcutta and Quilon where showrooms of different states were lodged under one roof.

One of the leading research institute Silkand Art Silk Mills’ Research Association (SASMIRA) which was established in 1950 started turning towards research and developments in the field of handlooms in the year 1984. From this year onwards various research associations like ATIRA, IIMA etc. started their research work towards handloom.

In 1985, New Textile Policy saw the allotment of the Handloom Sector to preserve the distinct and unique role of handlooms. The policy clearly mentions the development of the co-operative culture, improving productivity and modernisation, meeting raw material need, protection of handloom by reserving articles for this exclusive production, improve its competitiveness, promote marketing of handloom products and strengthen data base by undertaking a census of handlooms. It also laid down schemes to be introduced to improve the working condition of weavers and production of controlled cloth to be transferred to handloom sector.

A National Level Co-operative Society under the name of All India Handloom Fabrics Marketing Co-operative Society Ltd., Delhi was set up under the Multi Unit Co-operatives Societies Act 1942. The Fabrics Society has set up 31 retail outlets popularly known as “Handloom Houses”
in important cities of the country for marketing the goods procured from primary co-operative societies. The society also set up sales units at Kuala Lumpur, Singapore, and Mauritius and export promotion offices at New York and Hamburg. In 1985, the society tied up with a joint venture company M/S Sumitomo Corporation of Japan and M/S Sheeno Apparel Inc., Japan for opening 100% export oriented garment factory in the free trade zone of Madras.

In 1988 the Government of India constituted a committee to review the progress of implementation of the Textile Policy of 1985. In terms of reference, the Committee was expected to assess how far the protection of the handloom has been effective. The Committee submitted its report in January, 1990 stating that the objectives of 1985's policy has not been fulfilled. On its part, it recommended a new deal for the weavers.