INdIAN TEXTILE INDUSTRY AND ITS MIDDLE EASTERN MARKET; INDIAN IMPORTS FROM THE ARAB WORLD

A new dimension was imparted to trade between India and the Arab world with the change in the complexion of East-West trade as a consequence of triumph of the Industrial Revolution in Britain by the beginning of the 19th century. Britain now began to seek market for its products, with cotton textiles in the van. Since the Suez Canal was yet many decades away, Bombay became a redistributive centre for British manufactures. By 1804 the exports of Bombay had risen to Rs. 170,92,879 whereas the imports stood at Rs. 1,19,60067 only.¹

During 1804-5 there was considerable import increase to Bombay of Surat cotton amounting to Rs.23,4961 in 1805 alone. But in 1804 there was decrease in cotton import to Bombay from Surat owing to ill-managed operations of the cotton committee which ultimately led to its dissolution.² But Surat’s import of cotton increased to Rs. 9 lakhs during the same period, roughly to 4 times compared to its cotton export.

¹. Report on External and Internal Commerce of the Bombay Presidency, Vol. 3 of 1804
². Ibid
a figure much higher than its supply. However, the Bombay export increased to Rs. 1591782. Out of this Rs. 8 lakhs was in treasure which was sent to Surat as a partial payment of cotton purchased in Gujarat.\(^1\) What were the cotton goods that found market in the Middle Eastern countries is brought out from the East India Company’s inventory of goods. These goods were “dotties”, fine piecegoods, “bowchas” and “assloof”.\(^2\)

Cotton was also exported to China. The quantity of cotton export to China during the year 1804-5 amounted to Rs. 36 lakhs in which the proportion of Gujarat cotton exported to China was very small. During 1804 the quantity exported to China was 50,000 Candies. There was bumper cotton harvest in 1804. The Bombay merchants alone had bought cotton of Rs. 45 lakhs.\(^3\) Available information suggests cost of cotton a candy rose to Rs. 90 with labour of Bombay ports and freight charges inclusive.\(^4\)

There are varying indications to believe that the magnitude of Indian textile export to the Arab world would have been on diminishing around 1807 not because of the flow

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2. Ibid
4. Ibid
of the industrial manufacture of England alone to the Middle Eastern market but also because of the manufacture of cloths in some of the Middle Eastern cities such as Damascus, a city of immense capital and a centre of commerce of extraordinary importance. It was the importer of large quantity of fine cloth of India and Persia; simultaneously Damascus manufactured a large quantity of cloth itself. The magnitude of its cloth manufacture comes from the idea that there were several streets of warehouses from one end to the other. The number of manufactures of silk and cotton stuffs at Damascus alone were estimated at 4,000. However linen was not manufactured nor flax grown there.¹

Merchant capital seems to have grown quite large. Two of the leading capitalist merchants of Damascus namely Schatti and Mehemed Sua’s capital is estimated at 5 million francs each.²

From 22 September 1816 to 30 April 1818 the total exports of cotton from Bombay Presidency was Rs. 20100. Out of this total the export to Turkey was Rs. 2300 and the export to England Rs. 17800.³ This would mean there was drastic fall

¹ Ah Bey, Travels, op. cit, Vol. II, pp 267-273
² Secret and Political Department Diary, No 307 of 1818
³ Ibid
in cotton exports. But these exports only were made through the Red Sea.

We have details of other textile items which were exported to the Red Sea from Bombay or vice-versa. The first of these items is broad cloth which was imported to Bombay from the Red Sea to the amount of Rs. 3790 between 22 September 1816 to the 30 April 1818. But the Turkish export of broad cloth from Bombay to the Red Sea exceeded the import to Bombay by Rs. 5264. Turkish import of piecegoods from the Red Sea to Bombay was Rs. 499 whereas the Turkish export of piecegoods from Bombay to the Red Sea amounted to Rs. 39,391. Including English export of piecegoods was of worth Rs. 16,116 from Bombay to the Red Sea the total export rose to Rs. 55,507. Similarly the Turkish export of raw silk from Bombay to the Red Sea was Rs. 4971 whereas the export of raw silk by the English amounted to Rs. 51,562. The total export of raw silk by the Turkish ships and the English ones from Bombay to the Red Sea was Rs. 41,71 whereas the export of raw silk by the English amounted to Rs. 51,562. The total export of raw silk by the Turkish ships and the English ones from Bombay to the Red Sea amounted to Rs. 56,233. During the same period of 22 September 1816 to 30 April 1818 the Turkish export of shawls from Bombay to the Red Sea was Rs. 1,34,019

whereas the English export was worth Rs. 11000, making the total to Rs. 145019. But the Turkish export of piecegoods from Surat to the Red Sea was fairly high – a figure much higher than the export of piecegoods from Bombay. It was worth Rs. 3,84,009. The Turkish export of coloured silk from Surat to the Red Sea was however quite negligible and amounted to Rs. 368 only. However the Indian cotton goods continued to be exported from Bombay to the Red Sea ports even during 2nd decade of the 19th century which suggests the Middle Eastern markets had even till now the taste for the Indian cotton cloth.

We have examples of three consignors who shipped their piecegoods to the Red Sea ports in June 1820 from Bombay in the *Brig Ghorab Bombay Merchant*. The detail of these goods are as under:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Consignor</th>
<th>Description of goods</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
<th>Amount(Rs)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prajee</td>
<td>Cambay Piecegoods</td>
<td>2 Bales</td>
<td>6025</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Surat Piecegoods</td>
<td>1 Bale</td>
<td>1325</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dhurrumsey Uanchand</td>
<td>Piecegoods</td>
<td>1 Bale</td>
<td>3025</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dhurrumsey Uanchand</td>
<td>Cutch piecegoods</td>
<td>5 Bales</td>
<td>1350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4375</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ramchand Lalljee</td>
<td>Cambay Piecegoods</td>
<td>1 Bale</td>
<td>2750</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>14775</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Grand Total including expenses, charges, freight fee at the rate of 35% = Rs. 19782.

*Source*: Political Department, vol. 28, 33 of 1820-21, p. 50.

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1 Bombay Customs House, *Report of the Customs Master of 25 June 1818*. Political Department Diary, No. 307 of the year 1818, pp 716-18
In 1832 Indian *silk yarn* was exported from India to Lohaj (Lahedsje) though manufactures of all kinds are scarce there.\(^1\) By 1833 Mohammad Ali's scheme of self-sufficiency in cloth manufacture had reached some target as it is borne out by the rigour of his regulation which stipulated that the cloth that did not bear the *Pasha*’s stamp was liable to be seized. This was an indication that the *Pasha* was taking protective measure to safeguard his own developing textile industry.\(^2\)

Even though instances are there of efforts being made to establish cloth-weaving industry in Bombay and elsewhere in India on industrial pattern, one of which was cotton-spinning mill established in 1854 by Cwasjee Davar who was a Parsee.\(^3\) But practically India’s export of textile manufacture seems to have been reduced substantially. Even Egyptian’s manufacture of cloth had ceased to a great extent by 1856 under Sa’ad *Pasha*. The British imports from Suez during the year 1855 consisted of 90% of the cotton goods.\(^4\) This would have consisted of twist, yarn, cotton etc. It would obviously mean that if at all there was import of Indian textile to Egypt it was

\(^{1}\) J R Wellsted, *Travels*, Vol II, p 411. Our traveller noted that the silk weaving industry of Lohaj employed 30 weavers. The yarn in the industry was brought from India. *Ibid*

\(^{2}\) *Ibid*. p 216

\(^{3}\) D A Farme, p 37

\(^{4}\) *Ibid*
on very small scale. We have frequent description of the European manufactures such as "Grey domestics", long cloths, tanzeb and "madd sollam".¹ Those varieties of textiles imported into Egypt from Basra were mainly checked cotton, used as outdoor dresses by the country people and middle classes, both in Jedda and Egypt. Cotton goods to Jedda to Egypt were also imported from Persia.²

Palgrave (1862-1863) observed cotton growing at Kaseem. Indian silk was also exported there but the quantity was quite meagre. Palgrave says that cotton-shrub of Kaseem was identical in species with that cultivated in Gujarat and Cutch. The inhabitants of Kaseem were well acquainted with its use but the quantity was quite meagre for export but there was hope of favourable circumstances of cotton cultivation that might enhance the wealth of the country. It was mainly because of the congenial climate and fertile soil of Kaseem. The cotton plants were numerous as in India and the quantity was also not inferior to India.³ But despite all this there was market shift in the pattern of trade. As like 17th century, 18th and 19th century.

¹ Farnie, p 37
² Ibid.
³ W.G. Palgrave, Personal narrative of a year's Journey through Central and Eastern Arabia (1862-63), London, 1908, p. 149
Middle Eastern countries remained the main market of Indian cotton textile. This phenomenon suggests that the English Industrial Revolution and manufacture of cheaper and attractive textile of Britain had yet to occupy its prominence in textile export to the Middle Eastern countries. It is quite likely the situation might have changed after the opening of the Suez Canal.

However, Middle East was still importing large amount of Indian textiles and silks. In return Middle East sent to India pearls, dates, fruits, horses, carpets and a large amount of bullion. It was indeed a strange precipitation in trade position that on one side the crafts of the Middle East was dwindling whereas Indian craft was improving. Urban markets in both the Middle East and south-east Asia cattered remarkable influence on the growth of cotton in Gujarat and on the Eastern coastal India.¹

Date by far was the main export of the Middle East to India. Mesopotamian region remained by far the main producer of dates though date was grown in all parts of Arabia including upper Egypt, Syria and Asia Minor. According to an estimate

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the River country i.e. Tigris and Euphrates alone produced 150,000 tons.¹ Hasa and Oman too produced date but the quantity was comparatively inferior than that of Basra.²

¹ Zwemer, op cit., p 122n
² Ibid.