

HANDLOOM WEAVING INDUSTRY IN SALEM DISTRICT C.1850-1947

Article Particulars: Received: 29.12.2017 Accepted: 03.01.2018 Published: 20.01.2018



Dr.V.PALANICHAMY

*Assistant Professor, PG & Research Department of History
Arignar Anna Government Arts College
Musiri, Trichy District, Tamil Nadu, India*



P.SELLADURAI

*Assistant Professor, Department of History
Government Arts College, Ariyalur, Tamil Nadu, India*

Abstract

The handloom industry is one of the most ancient cottage industries in Salem district of Tamil Nadu. Next to agriculture hand-loom weaving is considered the most important industry in Tamil Nadu as well as India. In Salem district the chief industry was weaving, which was carried on in almost every large town or village, and the weavers of Salem and Ghazipur are especially noted above mentioned the period.¹ The textile cottage industry includes cotton, silk, and bleaching, dying, finishing, hosiery, lace embroidery, silk reeling, silk twisting. It was the chief means of livelihood to people who entirely depend upon it. The word "textile" is derived from the Latin word "Texere" meaning to weave and originally applied only to woven fabrics.² The Handloom sector plays an important role in state economy. Weaving is the basic process among the various manufacturing stages of handloom clothes. It is defined as a frame for weaving equipped with some wooden devices. The sound of the handloom is the music of rural home. In the process of weaving the handloom weavers achieve harmony of motion and rhythms in this region. It is important both as an urban and a rural industry, giving employment to thousands of men, women and children of all communities.³

Keywords: *weaving, cottage industry, textile, Handloom sector, fabrics*

The term 'hand-loom weaving' has a wide connotation. It comprises weaving of fabrics of cotton, silk, wool, coir and cora-grass, weaving in each of them obtaining in such areas as there is natural facilities. Woolen spinning and weaving as cottage industries are found in many districts of Madras Presidency. But all these can never equal either in magnitude or value the cotton textile home industry.⁴ the importance of the cotton textile industry cannot be exaggerated. The three main human physical needs are food, clothing and shelter; while agriculture provides all of them in a sense; it is the cotton textile industry that supplies the bulk of the cloth required. Cotton is the natural clothing of the people of Tamil Nadu as well as in India. It was the rapid growth of mills still maintains its own and consumes more than a fourth of the yarn available for hand-loom in India.⁵ The Handloom weaving industry of India is still of great importance in the natural economy and has up to the present shown remarkable vitality in the face of competition with factory products. It is remain in Salem district of Tamil Nadu the form of village industry and there is no immediate reason to fear its decline under the colonial rule. Konard Specker has written in his article "Madras Handlooms in the nineteenth century" it deals about both the number of looms in operation and the number of weavers underwent an increase over the preceding 25 years. Similarly, in 1871, the number of looms had increased by at least 20-25 per cent since the latter half of the 1850s. He has given the data in district wise in the Madras Presidency. He has also discussed the development of the handloom industry in urban and rural areas of Madras Presidency in districtwise after 1850s.⁶ In the year 1856-1857, the average of total number of looms both urban and rural areas of Salem district was 15,068, in urban areas (6840 looms) and in rural areas (8228 looms). In the year 1869-1870, the number of looms at work was 18,981. This was increased by 3913 looms in urban and rural areas of this district.⁷ In 1883, the Board of Revenue, in order to assess the extent of dyeing conducted a survey in which we find some references to the weavers. C.D. Maclean, the Acting Collector of Salem, in his report said, the weaving was gradually languishing and there was scarcely and dyeing in the district.⁸

The handloom industry was pursued in almost every district of Tamil Nadu particularly in Coimbatore, Salem, Madurai, Tanjore, Tiruchirappalli, Tirunelveli. It is emphasized were of a distinct strand in the fabric of India's national heritage. Prior to the First World War these handloom spinners did not face the increasing problems relating to high competitiveness, and accumulation of stocks or capital needs. But the first half of the twentieth century witnessed various economic and political influences by which the handloom workers faced increasing unsteadiness of yarn supplies.⁹

The New hand Weaving Industry

The handloom weavers gradually learnt to adjust themselves to the changing circumstances afterward adapted their looms to the use of mill-spun yarn. The old hand-weaving industry depending on hand-made yarn, succumbed before the offensive of the foreign mill competition. The new industry used mill-spun yarn; it had in ample quantities and in suitable qualities with strength and fineness. The price of mill yarn was also more reasonable. Yarn production in the Indian mills had been growing and handlooms came to depend more and more on Indian mill yarn. Yarn imports still continued, but the bulk was yarn of high counts. The mill made yarn necessitated a change in the status of the weaver and in the organization of the industry as a whole. The daily yarn supply of the weaver had come either from his own household or his immediate neighbourhood, but yarn come from a distance and had to be brought by yarn-dealers and financier became necessary. But the average weaver had little credit, the industry fell more and more into the grip of middlemen. Technical improvements were also introduced during this period; it was largely owing to the initiative of European missionaries working in Southern India. The Christian missionaries working in the west coast of south India and set up small handloom factories in Mangalore, Cannanore and Calicut. They introduced the fly-shuttle loom and made experiment in dyeing. Later state, the handloom factories were set up in Salem district.¹⁰

Hand-loom that survives in this presidency not only produced fabrics which were not as yet produced on power-looms. But also manufacture different kinds of cloth in direct competition with power-looms. In 1901, the number of looms in Salem district was 16,341. In 1921, it was increased to 23, 890 looms. In 1931, the total number of weavers was worked as full time occupation was 36,317, men (29,466) and women (6,851).¹¹ the individual weaver cannot compete with the mill which has elaborate organization, resources and power. He has to submit himself to the ever-growing competition of the mill and weave his own philosophy of resignation and contentment.¹²

Markets of the Hand-Weaving Industry

The hand-weaving industry enabled it not only to survive but also to maintain, and even to extend its markets. The imports of cotton piecegoods increased rapidly after 1850; large quantities of coats and shirts were brought this country. This was mostly utilized by urban classes because they want to make themselves like westerners or they want to change their culture like western style. The mill-made dhotis were also imported, and due to their cheapness they became popular not only in urban but in rural areas also. In most areas, cheap imported dhotis came into vogue, but the more expensive dhotis and most of them wore commonly. A certain proportion of the rural-population generally preferred the hand-made fabric. Hence the survival of dhoti manufacture in Salem and Madurai districts of Madras Presidency. The State government trying to help weavers of handloom industry to produce the best quality of cloth, besides to start a weaving factory at Salem in 1906 for undertaking experimental work by Alfred Chatterton.¹³

Handloom censuses were taken several times in the Madras Presidency, during the 19th century. According to statistical report there were 280,000 looms produced worked in 1871. In 1889, the Board of Revenue estimated the number of looms was 300,009. In 1920, the statistical gives the total number of looms was 242,000 and in 1921, the number of hand-loom worked in this region was 169,403. In 1931, the number of looms was 334, 407. In 1932, the tariff Board was conducted census and reported that the number of looms was 225,000 and in 1941, the number of looms was 340,451. Thus, there has been an increased in the number of looms in Madras.¹⁴ Most of the weavers in Madras presidency as well as India are members of certain

castes, whose hereditary occupation from time immemorial has been weaving. Among the Provinces of India, Madras produces the largest quantity of handlooms cloth. There were four district in Madras presidency contain more than 5,000 looms per 1,000 sq. miles; viz Madras, Chingleput, North Arcot and Salem. Ten other districts contain between 2,500 and 5,000 looms. But Salem district come first place with its high-class coloured saris and dhotis.¹⁵ The following table gives the number of looms in each district and the quantity of yarn allotted under the district wise allocation scheme.

Number of Looms and the Quantity of Yarn Allotted

Name of the District	Number of active looms	Quantity of yarn allotted (in bales of 400lb)
1. Salem	71,898	2,190
2. North Arcot	33,740	1,266
3. Tirunelveli	29,981	1,265
4. Coimbatore	44,173	1,221
5. Ramnad	29,775	983
6. Tiruchirappalli	14,397	917
7. Chingleput	31,868	834
8. Madurai	24,416	778
9. South Arcot	24,967	740
10. Tanjore	9,652	298
11. Madras	3,884	106

The statement made regarding the district concentration of the handloom industry. Salam, North Arcot, Chingleput, Tirunelveli, Ramnad, Madurai, South Arcot and Coimbatore had about 2,000 or more looms. About 3.02 lakhs out of the total 5.36 lakhs looms in the Madras Presidency, nearly 56.3 percent were concentrated in eight districts out of 11 districts. With respect to yarn consumption about 10,300 bales out of 19,200 bales distributed in province were consumed by the weavers in these eight districts.

Note: The number of active looms had been brought up to date, but the quantity of yarn referred to the quantity allotted but not actually delivered under the district allocated scheme. The table was prepared on the basis of the loom census taken in 1945.

Source: B.V. Narayanaswami Naidu., Report of the Court of Enquiry into Labour Conditions in the Handloom Industry, Government Press, 1948, p.5.

Weaving Communities

F.J. Richards gives the details of the important weaving communities of Salem district was Kaikolar, Devangar, Saliyar, Patunulkarar or Sourashtras etc. There were more than 400,000 Kaikolars found in various districts of Tamil Nadu.¹⁶ The Kailolars settled in the Talaghat (Salem 15,205, Tiruchengodu 10,981, Omalur 4,682, Attur 3,444), but there were a few thousands in the Baramahal too. According to their own account they were immigrated from Kanchipuram, which is still the head-quarter of their caste.¹⁷ The Devangas (commonly called Jedars) were settled mostly in Salem taluk, where their number exceeds 17000. In Tiruchengodu there were 5,732, in Omalur 4,523 and in Dharmapuri 2,128, but in other areas they were comparatively rare. They were migrated from Hampi, the capital of the Vijayanagar Empire. They were divided into two main groups, one speaking Telugu, and the other speaking a corrupt form of Kanarese. These two groups may not intermarry and appears to be true sub castes.¹⁸ The Salis¹⁹ in number 6,500, nearly three-fourths occurred in Salem taluk and rest of them scattered throughout the district. The Sourashtras (silk-weavers popularly known as Pattunulkarans) were immigrants from Gujarat and calling themselves Saurashtra Brahmans. The community was almost limited in Salem and Rasipuram towns their numbers in 300 to 400 families has had worked in these two centres.²⁰ There were 225 Adi-Dravida weavers involved in handloom weavings. This community was not weavers by caste, but occasionally they were involved in this work.²¹ Census report of 1921 show that in this region many Vellala villages women spin their cotton into yarn and the Panchama weavers who were partial agriculturists convert it into cloth for customary wages i.e. to local measures of ragi and four annas per piece.²² The Fact Finding Committee gives the details about nearly 85 percent of the weaving communities were worked in hereditary occupation. Trade in European textile fabrics was mainly in the hands of Muhammadans. Komatis were the chief dealers in country-made cloths, though in some cases the weaving communities themselves, Sourashtras, Kaikolars, Devangas and Salis trade in their own product. In the Baramahal and Balaghat the local manufactures did not exceed the local demand, but from Salem taluk there

was an extensive export trade. The middlemen in Salem received from the manufacturer one anna in the rupee and the total value of the cloths sent by them and said to get six pies per cloth from the retail dealer.²³ The weaver's income was not sufficient to run their family but they were borrowed money from their employers or dealers. The annual income of the weavers per head was Rs.66-9-5.²⁴ Weavers of this region eat meat and fish at least twice a month. In 1927, a survey report stated that the family average income per month was Rs.35, but they spend for food Rs.22-6-0 and also to spend Rs.30-10-0 for other expenses like fuel and lighting, house rent, clothing, drink, tobacco and interest on loan.²⁵ Therefore, their annual income was not sufficient to run their family. N.G. Ranga has pointed out in Salem centres the weavers gets less food than the marginal weavers, therefore they were below the marginal line of poverty.²⁶ They were spent the annual overhead charge of family budget for food and clothing (including festival times) was Rs.36-8-0.²⁷

Hand-weaving a full-time occupation

Generally men are employed for sizing and weaving while women, for bobbin' and printing and winding. In some factories children were employed for doubling the thread and knotting the ends. The fear, that the organisation of the factory will eliminate women labour or that women would not come to the factory for work, is, unfounded. 'For, in the West Coast the success of the handloom factory is due to the greater readiness of women and - men of non-weaving castes to come arid work there. It must be noted that in Kumbakonam and Madura women are unwilling but this conservatism is slowly disappearing. Another interesting fact is that in Kumbakonam and Salem there are factories which are, run and owned by weavers themselves while in the West Coast most of the factories are owned by capitalists belonging to the 'non-weaving communities. The professional weavers of Salem were unwilling to work in the factory.²⁸ N.G. Ranga visited in Salem district and reported that the Kaikolan (Tamil) weavers in the Ammapettah quarter and Devanga (Telugu) weavers in the Guhai quarters of the Salem town. Weavers of these two castes were employed on both cotton and silk weaving; while gold and silver thread work was common to them and the few Padmasalis who lived in Salem town. The following table shows the details of the sarees woven by them and sold to the merchants.

Name of the Sarees woven	Price at which Employers sell	Merchants' price	Length Cubits	No of days taken in weaving	No of people working	Wage paid per Saree	Amount of profit made by the employer
	Rs.	Rs.				Rs. A. P.	
Kasikudi	35	40	6	6	2	5 - 0 - 0	8 as per yard
Jaganmohan small	33	37-38	6	5	"	4 - 8 - 0	
Jaganmohan	22	25-26	"	3	"	3 - 0 - 0	
Hansam pettu	24	30	"	4	"	4 - 0 - 0	
Parrof pettu	25	30	"	4	"	4 - 0 - 0	
Three Figurs	32	37	"	5	"	5 - 0 - 0	
Anasikodi	21	24	"	3	"	3 - 0 - 0	
Tutipetu	90-95	105-110	16	10-12	"	15 - 0 - 0	
Anasikodi	40	45	14	8	"	7 - 0 - 0	
Anasi	15	17-17 ½	14	5	"	3 - 8 - 0	1 Rs. Per cloth
Kodipavu	18	21	14	6	"	4 - 0 - 0	1 ½ Per cloth
Tagamohan	18	21	14	6	"	4 - 0 - 0	1 ½ " "
Tagamohan	7	8	6	2	"	11 - 3 - 0	1 " "
Kasikodi	7	8	6	2	"	11 - 3 - 0	1 " "

Source: N.G. Ranga, The Economics of Handloom (Being a study of the Social and Economic conditions of Handloom Weavers of South India), Taraporewala sons & Co., Bombay, 1930, p.130.

From the above table, Prof. N.G. Ranga and others gathered that a weaver working with the help of a boy, who was paid to him Rs.2 to 4 per month and he could earned Rs. 10 and Rs. 24 a day. For six kinds of silk sarees, a weaver got one rupee a day. Then he used to pay the wages of his boy, therefore his monthly net earning was Rs.27. But he was worked on cotton cloth of high quality; he got Rs. 9 a day on the average or Rs. 16-14-0 per month. His net earning was Rs.13-14-0 a month, which was not sufficient to maintain him. The last five years (1924-1928) the earning

of weavers was decreased. Therefore, the introduction of the weaving of artificial silk sarees has been worked destruction in the market for silk cloths, the basis on which the industry has been organized was found to be the same as 1925. The relations between employers and employees; employers and yarn and cloth merchants were just the same. There was no competition between one employer and another in paying the wages of workmen. Advances to weavers were provided in the wage market. The indebtedness of the weavers was worse condition. The method of fixing the wages paid to workers was the same and the place of the independent weaver has become worse. The old loom was used on a large scale in the manufacture of petu bordered cloths. The old relieving feature was that the fashion for Salem dhotis, upper cloths and sarees has become more widespread and intensive and so the demand for the Salem cloths has increased from 1923 to 1928.²⁹

K.S. Venkataraman has mentioned, in 1929 a Marketing officer of the grade of Sub-Deputy Register of Co-operative societies was appointed to organize production and sale on behalf of the Salem Weavers' Co-operative Society. The experiment had proved a success. He had regular production, and found market for manufactures in Madras and other places eliminating the costly and expensive services of the Salem Commission Chettis. This was highly commended by the Registrar of Co-operative Societies and the Economic Depression Enquiry Committee. But the Government put an end to this experiment as a measure of retrenchment. Generally the society had not developed the marketing side of their activities. Therefore, he met great difficulties in the way of the societies undertaking the marketing, e.g., absence of regularity of cloths produced, lack of that personal interest of private merchants (the requisite for success in business), insufficient finance for developing the trade, and small production which does not attract the large capitalists and wholesale cloth dealers to the business.³⁰

The Merchants

Each employer in the Ammapettah (hereafter Ammapettai) quarter invested Rs. 4000 in his business. He usually borrowed money at 12 per cent interest. Such employers bought silk and gold, silver thread as well as yarn from the bigger merchants. The merchants imported materials from Madras, Bangalore and Bombay, and made very high profits.³¹ they have been given these materials on credit, and charged 12% interest after a month. They were charged at higher prices, for instance they sold 120 *tholas* of silk of which the cash price was Rs. 40 but it was sold Rs.42 to Rs.43 and gold thread in the market money value was Rs.48 but it was sold Rs.50 and so on.³² But the yarn was sold for ready cash because the trade in cotton cloths was considered to be very risky. Therefore the employers in that manufacture were very poor and untrustworthy. There were 240 yarn merchants of Ammapettai town, who were belongs to Sourashtras community. Each of them had invested sum of Rs.10,000/-. And also there were 15 silk merchants, each had Rs.10,000 capital and 20 merchants dealing in gold and silver threads, they were invested nearly Rs.10,000/-.³³ There were hundred cloth merchants, who bought the cloth from weavers, each of them had from Rs.30,000 to Rs,1,00,000. They were generally commission agents. They took 2 as. per rupee from the employers and sold the cloth.³⁴ The whole sale merchants give orders to the employers and took commission for delivery of the cloths. Sometimes they keep a stock and then sell their cloths.³⁵ there were between 60 to 70 commission agents in Guhai itself. Five of them have been invested Rs. 60,000/- each, with only one turn over in the year. Another ten agents had Rs. 20,000/- each and doing business of Rs 80,000/- per year and 40 other merchants about Rs.10,000/- each with a turn over Rs 30,000/- each per year. Those who invested only Rs.20,000/- had a better 'turnover' on their capital than any other group of merchants. Among them those who deal per ready money only had better turnover than those who deal on credit.³⁶ Employers who sell their own cloth directly are able to do four times they became as the commission agents. There was an employer who had 200 looms working under him, but has been invested only Rs.20,000/- and he managed to get along because he sold his cloth often in the market for ready money.³⁷ Then, he had reduced the number of his looms because of the depression in the trade. These employers traditionally gave advances of Rs.50 to 100 to each of their workers, but most of them unable to clear their debts. It was not uncommon for employers to take action against weavers because there was no agreement

between the employers and weavers. Therefore, the weavers did not pay their advances and run away.³⁸

The retailers also took goods of others on commission basis for sale. The wholesale dealers, on their part, buy either directly from the weavers or through middlemen and stock large quantities of handloom goods in their godowns (Custom house) for subsequent sale in the local as well as inter-provincial markets. Such wholesale dealing takes place in some of the biggest handloom cloth markets in Tamil Nadu was Madurai, Salem and Coimbatore districts etc. The consumers in the inter-provincial market mostly belong to the richer and middle classes, who had developed a taste for variety and artistic design. The modern Indian woman prefers to have a ward robe containing saris and other fabrics drawn from various centres of the handloom industry. The principal handloom fabrics sold in the inter-provincial markets are saris, silk brocades, lungis, muslins carpets etc. The principal centres in Madras presidency was Masulipattinam, Madurai, Coimbatore and Salem and Calicut. Besides, there were numerous others big as well as small centres which also were in a position to send their products to the neighboring States.³⁹

Independent Weavers

Most of weavers in Ammapettai of Salem district were worked as independent artisans. Among them only some of weavers receiving wages better and better off. But an average weaver was earned only Rs. 20 per month; while in some exceptional cases especially skilled weavers earned Rs. 60 per month as independent artisans. A worker did his best work between the years 20 to 30 during that period his capability was rises. But from that age onwards, his power to work for as long and as skillfully falls gradually. Nine-tenths of the wage-earners were unable to rise above the rank. Prof. N.G. Ranga, has gives in his table a independent artisan to manufacture of a high quality saree he needed capital Rs.100 for 2 looms. For manufacturing Kalabattu white cloths Rs.100 to 300 for per loom and for manufacturing of Goranchu dhotis the capital needed Rs.20 for per loom. In 1908, there were 3000 looms in Guhai and worked 350 independent artisans. It was increased to 5000 looms in the year 1928, where the number of independent artisans arose up to 1200. Among the artisans, there were only three women weavers worked because women did not allow to weave. In Ammapettai and the neighbouring places among the Kaikolans one quarter women weavers were involved for weaving cloths.⁴⁰

In Tiruchengodu (Salem district), there were 1000 looms worked, where only five Mudaliyars who bought yarn from Coimbatore and Madurai and sold it to the weavers. The agents of the Kaleswarar, Ranga Vilas and Radhakrishna mills of Coimbatore were sold large quantities of grey yarn to the Tiruchengodu yarn market. Among the agents except the agents of Ranga Vilas sold their yarn on credit to the weavers of the neighbouring villages of Tiruchengodu. The agents of Radhakrishna imports a large number of bales of dyed yarn from Madurai and Bombay, he sold it to the weavers of the Tiruchengodu because of they were manufactured coloured cloths. There were also many petty merchants and employers who buy grey and dyed yarns from these big merchants for ready money or on credit and who sold to the weavers. V.V.S. Iyyar had invested a lakh of rupees in this business. Most of the weavers in Tiruchengodu belongs to independent artisans they were sold their cloths in the weekly market of Tiruchengodu. The weavers of neighbouring villages go for their weekly purchases. So these weavers were dependent upon the purchasing power of the ryots in the villages. In the whole areas of this district was affected by terrible monsoons from 1923 to 1927, therefore, impoverished those weavers to great extent and most of them have been consequently become heavily indebted. But luckily in 1928 was a favourable year both for ryots and weavers because in the month of April and May the agricultural labourers were come and joint with them. Kumarapalayam of Tiruchengodu taluk was another important centre of handloom weaving. There were more than 1000 looms manufactured coloured cloths, where the weavers mostly belong to Devanga community. There was a big dying industry in Kumarapalayam, it was advantage for weavers easily to coloring for their yarns. The most important business in Kumarapalayam was export silk and other sarees to Mangalore for about six months in the year. There were six merchants in this place each had invested more than Rs.50,000/- in this business and they employed more than a hundred weavers for producing cloth. There was a merchant who specialized in exported sarees in small parcels to Colombo, Kandi and

other places in Ceylon or Sri Lanka, Singapore and Penang. One of his partners was in Ceylon to push up sales. Many of these merchants produced kailis and they kept their agents in Singapore. These agents were paid Rs. 500/- per annum with food and housing accommodation in Singapore.⁴¹ Artificial silk has been captured this centre and made various designs for sale. Silk sarees were famous were produced in large number and sold at very cheap rates. One Devanga weaver from Salem was involved for making designs with lace work.

There are two distant contracts: one between the merchant and the middleman and the other between the middleman and the weaver. The dependence of the weaver on the middleman and the dependence of the middleman on the merchant vary in degree in different places. This system is most commonly found in the trade of the Madras handkerchiefs, *lungis* and *kailis* in the East Coast district. It is also found in many places in Coimbatore and Salem districts. There is not personal contact between the merchant and weaver. The workers are indebted to the middlemen and they are not in direct touch with the cloth market and this invariably results in their exploitation. How the system works out in practice in the case of the *lungi* trade and of the sari trade in Salem is worth notice. In 1928, the cloth dealers of Salem, to cite an instance, place orders with the middlemen for coarse saris which are manufactured by weavers in villages somewhere near Erode. The Salem merchants give them coloured yarn and for each sari contract to pay 14 annas as wages and commission. The middlemen gave 12 annas per sari to the weaver and get the cloth manufactured. The merchant sold it for Rs.2-12-0 or Rs.3-0-0 thus making a profit of 6 to 9 annas. After paying the cost of winding and warping which is very nearly 2 annas the weaver gets only 10 anna per sari He does 5 or 6 saris a week. Each middleman has a number of weavers who work for him and he goes to the village every week, gives them yarn and collects the manufactured cloths and pays them wages. The weaver earns about 3 to 4 rupees a week while the middleman by merely distributing work can easily that amount, perhaps much more.^{42.}

Wages and Earning

Generally wages are paid on the piece basis. In Rasipuram taluk of Salem district wage was paid on the basis of counts in annas. Handloom weaving has been generally done on the primitive throw-shuttle looms and the more efficient fly-shuttle looms and very rarely on other kinds of looms which use automatic processes. Since the Fact-Finding Committee reported that the position in respect of use of fly-shuttles as well as other improvements in looms had improved. More than 55 per cent of the looms were fitted with fly-shuttle sleys. There was 85 per cent of the weavers were worked by hereditary occupation. Since 1895 to the commencement of the war in 1914 is a period of accidental protection of the handloom. It is a period of steady, if not spectacular, expansion of the handloom industry and improvement in the economic condition of the hand weavers. It is a period of agricultural expansion, construction of railways and irrigation works, industrial development and improvement of trade. The war period (1914-1919) records a fall in the handloom production due to the difficulty of getting an adequate supply of yarn from abroad and even from Indian mills. In the years immediately after the war (1918-1919) occurrence of famine and the prevalence of influenza as an epidemic affected handloom production seriously. Yet the weaving margin increased rapidly.⁴³

The Fact Finding Committee reported a pitifully low rate of wages, as it prevailed in 1941, around 1 to 2.8 anna per yard. The monthly earnings of different classes of weavers, as in 1941 based on the Fact Finding Committee Report and in 1955, based on the Madras University Report have been compared. The conclusion derived is that while earnings have risen, the real wages have not changed, due to high cost of living. The average monthly earnings of independent weavers work out to be higher than that of weavers working under master weavers and those of them in the co-operative sector.⁴⁴ The higher earning of the Independent weavers may be due to their better caliber of workers or to their more sound financial position. These two reasons will be evident to one conversant with the handloom weavers among whom it is the less solvent and the less self-reliant who tend to approach the master weaver or join the co-operative society.⁴⁵ The wages in the handloom industries had been already fixed by Handloom Wages Board appointed by the Government. At the present level of wages, the weavers would be earning about Rs.80 per

month if arrangements were made to supply yarn sufficient to give them employment for not less than 20 days in a month.

Conclusion

The growing rationalization of hand-loom production, in order to keep pace with the progress in power weaving has been created more unemployment among weavers and many cases a fall in their earnings. This is inevitable in a changing and progressive world. The decline in the industry which every one bemoans is not quantitative, for the hand-loom had increased its output; but it relates to the human factor in the industry which is most deplorable and for this the mill competition is partly, if not solely responsible. The changes in the tastes and ideas of fashion of the people have also led to the decline of the handloom industry. Both in fine and more especially inferior cloths the spread of Western ideas has had more prejudicial effects on the industry than the mere cheapness of the European goods. This is woefully true. Formerly rajas, courtiers and zamindars patronized hand-weaving which supplied celebrated muslins, silks and other fine fabrics. But later persons in liberal professions, the merchants-princes and industrial magnates who occupied a high social position had become patrons of cheap foreign foreign fineries and pseudo-works of art. This aspect has been much deplored by many writers. The imports of foreign piece-goods are meant simply to satisfy their demand. Thus because of the change in the tastes of the rich and the ideas of respectability prevalent among the masses of the urban and semi-industrial population who care more for cheapness than for art and more for show than for quality, mill production advanced and the hand-loom industry suffered in this district. The long-cloth has displaced the plain white cloth with a narrow border of coloured cotton. The individual weaver cannot compete with the mill made production which had elaborate organization, resources and power. The cotton, silk and wool textiles small-scale producers declined in number. During the period of 1875-1939 under the review his economic condition was at its lowest ebb. It seems that the worst the weavers had to fear from the powerloom competition had happened in the last century. The cotton spinning and weaving the number of small-scale producers considerably declined not only in this district as well as in entire India. However, as machine-spun yarn supplanted hand-spun yarn and as the fly-shuttle replaced the throw-shuttle in many parts of India, output per worker in handloom-worked production must have risen.

References

1. H.Le Fanue, Manual of the Salem District in the Madras Presidency of Madras, Government of Tamil Nadu, Reprint, 1998, Madras, p.112.
2. Encyclopedia Britannica, Vol. XXXIX, The University of Ciago, U.S.A, 1985, p.180.
3. Report on Handloom Industry in Madras Presidency, p.1.
4. Ibid., p.2
5. Ibid., P.7
6. Specker, Madras Handlooms in the nineteenth century, *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, vol, 26, issue 2. (1989), pp.145-146.
7. Ibid., p.147.
8. Proceedings of the Board of Revenue, May 31, 1883, No.1788 and also see P. Subramanian, Social History of the Tamils, D.K. Print World (P) Ltd, New Delhi,1996, p. 225.
9. N.G. Ranga, Economic of Handlooms, (Being a study of Social and Economic conditions of Handloom Weavers of South India, Taraporewala Sons & Co., Bombay 1930 and D. Narayana Rao, Preliminary Report of the Survey of Cottage Industries in Madras, 1929, p.2.
10. Report on the Fact-Finding Committee, Madras, 1942, p.6.
11. K.S. Venkataraman, op.cit, p.27.
12. Ibid., p.42.
13. Fact Finding Committee., p.22.
14. Fact Finding Committee., p.28.
15. Report on Fact Finding Committee (Handloom and Mills), Madras, 1942, p.42.
16. K.S. Venkataraman, op.cit.p.178.
17. F.J. Richards, Madras District Gazetteers-Salem, Vol.I, Part-I, Government Press, Madras, 1918, p.180.
18. The Devangas of Salem, however, will not intermarry with their fellow caste-men in Omalur, Bhavani or Elampillai (west of Kanja-malai), and also see F.J. Richard, op.cit, p. 181.

19. According to E.S.M. No. X, p.2, there are three sub-castes of Sales - (1) Padma-Sales who speak Telugu, (2) Pattu-Sales who speak Kanarese, and use silk in weaving, (3) Sakuna-Sales, who are latter immigrants. There were two sections of Sales are referred to in Baramahal Records, Section III, p. 185, viz ., (1) Padma Sales and (2) Pedda-Sales, whose customs are almost identical, and also see F.J. Richard, Madras District Gazetteer-Salem, Madras, 1918, p.182, K.S. Venkataraman, The Hand-Loom Industries in Madras Presidency, 1936, p. 179.
20. F.J. Richard, Madras District Gazetteers-Salem, Government Press, Madras, 1918, p.182 and see also Fact Finding Committee (Handlooms and Mills), 1942, p.273.
21. Fact Finding Committee, op.cit, p.273.
22. Census of India (1921), Report on Madras Presidency, p.55 and K.S. Venkataraman, op.cit. p.77.
23. K.S. Venkataraman, op.cit., p.280
24. N.G. Ranga, (1930), op.cit. p.167.
25. K.S. Venkataraman, The Economic Condition of Handloom Weavers in India, University of Bombay, 1942, p.111.
26. 1942, p.111.
27. N.G.Ranga, op.cit, p.172.
28. Ibid, p.177.
29. Report on Fact Finding Committee, Madras, 1942, p.77 and K.S. Venkataraman, History of Handloom Industry in Madras Presidency, Madras, 1940, pp, 12-13.
30. N.G. Ranga, op.cit, p.131.
31. K.S. Venkataraman, The Hand-Loom Industries in the Madras Presidency, The Diocesan Press, Madras, 1936, p.113.
32. N.G. Ranga, op.cit, p.131.
33. Ibid, p.132.
34. Ibid.
35. Ibid, p.133.
36. Ibid.
37. Ibid.
38. Ibid.
39. Ibid.
40. Ibid, p.141.
41. Ibid, pp.134 and 137.
42. Ibid, pp.137-138.
43. K.S. Venkataraman, (1936), op.cit, pp.65-66.
44. K.S. Venkataraman, The Economic Condition of Handloom Weavers, University of Bombay (Reprint), 1942, p.138.
45. Fact Finding Committee., op.cit., p.199.
46. G.J. Sudhakar., Handloom Co-operatives: A Regional Study, Loyola College, Chennai, 2001, p.52.