

STAGNATION AND DECAY OF THE AGRICULTURAL ECONOMY OF COASTAL ANDHRA*

G. N. RAO

THE agricultural economy of Coastal Andhra¹ was in a state of stagnation in the early decades of the 19th Century. The permanent Zamindari Settlement which was introduced in the region during 1802-04 resulted in strained agrarian relations, a heavy burden of taxation and a parasitic and exploitative role played by the *Pettandars* (Village Leading Ryots), *Karnams* (Village Accountants) and other Revenue Officials at the Taluk and District levels.² This had sapped the energies and curbed the incentives of the agricultural community. Over and above this exploitative system of agrarian relations which was common to all the regions which went through the Permanent Zamindari Settlements, certain special factors pushed Andhra's stagnant agriculture to a stage of decay by the middle of the nineteenth century. Coupled with these adverse factors, handloom industry—the major manufacturing activity in the Pre-British and early British times and a vital component of coastal Andhra's rural economy underwent a metamorphosis during the first half of the 19th century. Till the advent of the British rule, the handloom industry was strongly interwoven with the agrarian economies of rural regions in India. It is this happy combination or harmonious blending of manu-

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¹ Coastal Andhra here refers only to the present-day districts of West Godavari, East Godavari, Krishna, Guntur and Prakasam; it excludes Srikakulam, Vizagapatam and Nellore districts. During the first half of the 19th century the region under study was divided into three districts of Rajahmundry, Masulipatam and Guntur. They were later merged into two large districts of Godavari and Kistna (also spelt as Krishna).

Anicuts (irrigation dams) were constructed across the rivers Godavari and Krishna at Dowleswaram and Bezwada (present-day Vijayawada) respectively in the early Fifties of the Nineteenth Century. Sir Arthur Cotton an indefatigable and dynamic engineer was the moving spirit behind these projects.

² G. N. Rao, "Agrarian relations in Coastal Andhra under early British Rule", *Social Scientist*, Vol. 6, No. 1, August 1977, pp. 19-29. The word exploitation is used in a limited sense of squeezing the agricultural surplus from the peasantry by the landed aristocracy and the Revenue bureaucracy.