

THE WEAVING INDUSTRY OF ICHALKARANJI*

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Growing from small beginnings, step by step, Ichalkaranji with its 1521 powerlooms and 1409 handlooms and many other ancillary activities connected with the weaving industry, was humming with great industrial activity in 1954 and had rightly come to be regarded as the "Little Manchester of Maharashtra". The handloom industry had been in existence for quite a long time; the powerloom industry, however, was primarily a development of the post-1929 period. The initiative and resourcefulness of the people of the place, the arrival of the Marwari merchants with financial resources and marketing experience, the encouragement of the Ruler of the place to the industry contributed to the development of the powerloom industry at Ichalkaranji. The people of the place purchased the second-hand powerlooms from the mills at Bombay after the depression of 1929, reconditioned them to suit the requirements of saree manufacturing and used the Japanese mercerised yarn and the German dyes and chemicals to produce the coloured saree or 'Patal' as it came to be widely known. The powerloom industry at Ichalkaranji had thus specialised in the manufacture of coloured sarees and created quite a distinct market for them by offering ever-new body patterns, border designs and colour shades. The handlooms were also gradually shaken out of their traditional lines of production — manufacture of old-fashioned 'lugade' — by the changes that had been taking place in the powerloom sector.

The period of the Second World War brought about an enormous expansion of the handloom weaving industry. There was a sizeable increase in the number of handlooms. Owing to the difficulty of obtaining fresh Texmarks, the powerloom industry did not expand much in size. Under conditions of cloth shortage, the handlooms as well as powerlooms enjoyed quite a bright spell of prosperity up to about 1950. Thereafter the industry was in doldrums and it had begun to recover from the recession by about 1953.

Structural aspects of the industry

Statistics relating to the industry in 1954 were collected by undertaking a sample survey in 1955. In all 25 per cent. of the handloom as well as powerloom units were intensively studied. The intensive study of 40 power-

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