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THE ECONOMICS OF HANDLOOM.

(Being a study of the Social and Economic conditions of
Handloom Weavers of South India.)

BY

Prof. N. G. RANGA, B. LITT. (OXON.) M. L. A.,

PROFESSOR OF HISTORY AND ECONOMICS

PACHAIYAPPA'S COLLEGE, MADRAS.

For sometime, special officer for Economic survey,
Madras Government, and Secretary to the
Economic Enquiry Committee, Madras.

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THE BELOVED MEMORY OF

Sir P. THYAGARAYA CHETTI, K. C. S. I.

AND

THE VOICELESS WEAVERS OF INDIA.

PREFACE.

This volume is a part of the thesis presented by me to the University of Oxford. This survey into the economic and social conditions of the Handloom Weaving Industry was made in 1925—1926 when I toured for a period of six months in the different parts of South India. I was able to visit Salem, Coimbatore and Guntur Districts again in 1928, when I was deputed by the Madras Government to make an economic survey of villages and to assist the Special Officer for the survey of cottage industries. I got another opportunity of acquainting myself about the conditions of handloom weavers of Kristna, West and East Godavaries, while I was working as the Secretary of the Resettlement Economic Enquiry Committee, appointed by the Madras Government.

Although the main thesis was written in 1926—27 what is embodied in it will still be found to be applicable to the conditions prevailing at present in this very important industry and some of the main changes that have since come upon this industry have been fully incorporated in this thesis.

The substitution of silk weaving by artificial silk weaving has been effected in many places, while in other places, cotton weaving has been replaced by silk weaving. It is largely true to say that weaving on rough cotton yarn has been given up in almost all places, its place being taken up by fine yarn, silk and artificial silk weaving.

The removal of the Cotton Excise Duty, the fall in the purchasing power of the masses, and the progressive cheapening of the mill cloth have all contributed much to the present depression in handloom weaving industry.

Although the earnings of weavers have gone down by at least 10 per cent since 1925, the fall in general level of prices has slightly helped them and therefore the standard of living of weavers has not very much altered since 1925. The recent boom of Sarada marriages has contributed not a little to the mitigation of the effects of the depression in this industry.

The survey of cottage industries organised by the Madras Government has added but little to our knowledge of the conditions of this and the kindred industries; instead of trying to study the conditions of employment, the nature of the relations between employers and employees, and the standard of living of workers and their masters, the special officer has confined his attention to the kind of work done and the nature of cloths manufactured. The suggestions made and the recommendations advanced by the special officer will be found to have been anticipated by me so long ago as 1925, apart from other solutions and recommendations suggested in this thesis.

Besides many other aspects of this industry, the following need the immediate and paternal attention of the State.

There is everywhere a crying need for more and more credit and unless special banking facilities are

provided, this industry cannot be properly financed. The present organisation of this industry is very primitive, uneconomical and inefficient and the only way by which it can be improved is by introducing better skilled and trained employers who are adequately financed by the special banks to be organised in future. The workers are mostly unskilled and inefficient and if their earnings are to be increased considerably, a proper system of apprenticeship must be provided. Most of the workers are to-day being hopelessly exploited by heartless and inefficient employers and a proper system of Trade Boards is urgently needed to safe-guard the interests of the workers, to improve their conditions of work, to increase their remuneration and to facilitate the introduction of new methods of work. Better Living Societies are urgently needed to improve the standard of living of weavers and to prevent such abuses as the consumption of toddy, Ganjai, Opium and the expenditure upon cock-fighting and gambling. The improvement of the status of women and children of weavers is an urgent need. If a better fitted sizing machine were to be introduced, their women can be induced to take to weaving and their children can profitably be left in the schools. The last but not the least important need of the weavers is the introduction and popularisation of co-operative methods of organisation.

It may not be out of place here to remark that in spite of the fact that much good work has been done by the Textile Departments of the various Provincial Governments, not much attention has been bestowed upon any of the above needs of this industry. I sincerely

hope that the newly constituted Cottage Industries Committee of the Madras Government will try to remember the elementary fact that a study of the weaver's life is not exhausted by an examination of the implements used and that a large number of activities lie beyond their implements.

I take this opportunity to thank Dr. Gilbert Slater D. Sc. (London) M. A., (Cantab), formerly professor of Economics in the University of Madras, and at present, Lecturer in Indian Finance at the London School of Economics, for the very valuable help, he has rendered me, when this thesis was being prepared. I must also thank my friend Mr. L. V. B. Choudary, B. A., (Oxon.) Bar-at-Law, who has kindly undertaken the thankless task of proof reading. But for the valuable, willing and sincere co-operation of many hundreds of humble weavers, many of whom, I am very sorry to say are to-day starving for lack of food, I could not have collected the materials presented in this report. I am much obliged to Mr. G. V. Subbayya, a student of the Pachaiyappa's College for preparing the Index.

This book is dedicated to the late Sir, P. Thyagaraya Chetti, the former President of the Madras Corporation who was largely responsible for the introduction and popularisation of the fly-shuttle and who rendered invaluable help to the weavers and also to the voiceless but industrious weavers of India.

Pachaiyappa's }
 College, }
 15-4-1930. }

N. G. RANGA,

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