

# THE ECONOMIC CONDITION OF HANDLOOM WEAVERS\*

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I

## INTRODUCTORY

TWO conflicting views are now held regarding the present economic condition of the handweaver. The view that is most commonly entertained is that the condition of the weaver has been worsening and the weaver and the weaving industry have been as much hit by the modern industrial development as other artisans and their crafts. The census and other estimates indicating a great fall in the number of persons following the occupation of sizing and weaving (outside cotton mills) are cited in support of this conclusion. On the other hand, there is coming into vogue another opinion which asserts that, though many weavers have lost their hereditary occupation, and though their condition is miserable as compared with that of workers in organised industries, those who still depend on hand-weaving are now very much better off than they were ever before, and even better off than other sections of the rural population. The increasing consumption of yarn by the handloom is noted as an evidence of their prosperity. These are vague and uncritical generalisations based on insufficient data, and they are misleading. Our attempt here is to collect and sift such factual data as will enable us to answer (1) what is exactly the present condition of the handweaver? (2) has his condition improved, deteriorated or remained stationary during the period for which such a comparison is possible? (3) what are the causes for the changes in his economic life? and such other questions which are germane to this enquiry.

*The inadequacy of the surveys so far made* :—Studies of the handloom industry so far made are not helpful in this respect. They relate more to the technique of weaving than either to the economics and the competitive power of the handloom or to the economic status of the weavers. In fact no systematic enquiry has been hitherto made in this direction. Departmental bulletins, *obiter dicta* in official dispatches, vague generalisations of commissions and committees casually refer to the condition of the weavers; but they do not serve any purpose. An enquiry to be useful must be so planned and conducted as to throw light on all details of the problem like the number of looms and workers engaged in the manufacture of cotton, silk, rayon, woollen or mixed fabrics respectively, the size of the weaver's family, his earnings, and the income of his family, the nature of his family budget, the extent of his indebtedness, his dependence on the middleman-employer, the rate of interest on and the system of repayment of his loans, the wage rates, the working hours, the conditions of employment, the methods of remuneration and a number of other matters relating to his social and economic life. Instead,

what we have got in the official literature relating to the handweaver is something of a vague estimate of the income per day which an average weaver could have earned under given conditions of prices, wages, and efficiency. This is obviously inadequate for evaluating the economic and social progress of two millions engaged in this handicraft. It is of course admitted that it is well nigh impossible to carry on an investigation on these lines extended to all weavers in any one province, (not to speak of such an enquiry covering the whole of India) ; and even an enquiry restricted to a district or a taluka has to overcome a number of difficulties.

*Difficulties of an intensive study* :—At first the workers have to be grouped according to the materials they use in their manufactures like silk, cotton, rayon, wool and others. Though the weavers using cotton, silk and rayon do not constitute non-competing groups, the condition of each group has to be separately studied. Further, even in the same group there is a great deal of diversity in the conditions of employment and methods of remuneration. One cannot ignore the regional and communal differences relating to the social and economic life of the weavers. Further, the basic wage rates are different for the different counts of yarn used, patterns produced and technical equipment of the industry. Besides, the nature of the market for their goods is another factor determining the earnings of workers. The incomes of persons in the different stages of the industry, like winding, warping, sizing, etc., also differ. With these diverse conditions of employment, a mere estimate of the approximate daily earnings of workers in isolated centres can be of little use ; for the average daily earnings of the weavers having as a rule a long and uncertain period of unemployment and under-employment cannot be even approximately calculated. What is to be ascertained is the income of weavers over a fairly long period. Further, it is to be noted that for a proper comparative study of the condition of the weaving communities the weaver's family is to be studied and not the weaver alone, for the family, rather than the worker, is the proper social and economic unit. The members of his family usually have other sources of income, and the uncertain flow of these incomes add to the difficulties of an investigation. Weavers by themselves are not in a position to state the value of the work they have done during a year ; their employers are reluctant to furnish information in regard to the volume and value of the work done and the number of days in the year each weaver has worked. Production cards are maintained in certain handloom factories ; but they cannot be taken to represent the average monthly or annual outturn of non-factory workers. The difficulties become almost insuperable in the case of weavers working on their own account. Their earnings depend not merely on the volume of their output which is determined by the seasonal fluctuations in demand for their goods, their financial ability and marketing facilities but also on the fluctuating retail prices of yarn and raw materials they require and the prices at which they are able to sell their manufactures. Many of these data are difficult to obtain. In the case of workers under the domestic system, the amount of the work given, the rate and method of remuneration and the extent of their financial obligation to the employers are relevant for the determination of their net earnings. Even if the earnings of workers are

ascertained the study will be incomplete without an enquiry into their standard of living. The difficulties of an enquiry into working-class family budgets are too obvious to be mentioned. Yet it is necessary to find out to what extent defects in consumption as the cause of the existing poverty of weavers can be remedied and their economic efficiency be improved. At present there is no dependable information under these heads; and it is the object of this study to make a small beginning in the direction of providing the socio-economic data concerning the life of workers in one of the important Indian handicrafts.

*The scope of the present enquiry:*—This note is based on an investigation made into the condition of (cotton) hand-weavers in Poona, Ahmednagar and Sholapur in Bombay-Deccan during 1935-36 and in certain centres like Salem, Coimbatore, Madura and others in the Madras Province during 1928. An intensive study of the economic condition of about 150 families in Bombay-Deccan cannot claim to be quite representative of the condition of the weavers in India as a whole. Yet it can reflect in a general way the condition of weavers in semi-urban centres. Again it must be noted that while a great deal of first-hand statistical data are collected from the books of merchants and employers, still a great deal more has to be drawn from the vague personal impressions of weavers themselves. Further, within the limited range of the families investigated, varieties of circumstances have been noted and comparative analysis wherever possible has been attempted. For example, (a) the condition of weavers manufacturing ordinary fabrics and subject to the direct powerloom competition is compared with that of the weavers producing superior kinds of handwoven fabrics; (b) a comparison is also made of the economic condition of weavers under different systems of production like workshop or factory system and put-out or domestic system; (c) similarly a few enquiries are made for comparing the condition of weavers in the two different regions like Bombay-Deccan and South India; and (d) lastly, the economic condition of the handweavers is compared with that of (1) the workers in the small powerloom factories in Poona and Sangli producing more or less identical cloths, (2) the workers in big cotton mills in Bombay, Sholapur and Ahmedabad and (3) the agricultural workers and rural artisans.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, much attention is devoted to the present economic condition of the handweaver. However, a study of the fluctuations in his fortunes in the past is not altogether neglected. Though many facts in this connection have to be drawn from the memory of old weavers and from uncritical references to wages, conditions of trade and other matters concerning the industry made in official records, an attempt is made to piece together such data as can throw light on this question of the changes in the economic condition of the handloom weaver during the last seventy years.

<sup>1</sup> The publications of the Bombay Labour Office, the Provincial Surveys of Cottage Industries and a number of unpublished materials have been freely used in this connection.

## II

THE ECONOMIC CONDITION OF (COTTON) HANDLOOM WEAVERS  
IN POONA AND AHMEDNAGAR

The nature and the accuracy of the data from which this note is prepared may be briefly explained. Over 150 families of the handloom weavers in Bombay-Deccan were studied by the writer ; and an intensive enquiry was made in respect of about 80 representative families regarding their size and composition, their income from weaving and other sources, the extent of their property, debts and expenditure on drinks, etc., the average volume of weaving done and wages earned by them, the causes of the changes in their earnings and also in some cases the details of their expenditure.<sup>1</sup>

(a) *The size of the worker's family* :—Of the 77 families for which full details are available, Poona accounts for 62, with 67 men, 62 women and 81 children, and Ahmednagar for the other 15 families with 19 men, 18 women and 22 children. Their distribution according to their size and composition is given below :

Composition of families	Number of such families	Remarks
(a) One member	8	4 are bachelors.
(b) Two members	16	15 having one man and one woman each.
(c) Three members	17	13 having 1 man, 1 woman and 1 child each.
(d) Four members	18	16 having 1 man, 1 woman and 2 children each.
(e) Five members	9	8 having 1 man, 1 woman and 3 children each.
(f) More than five members	9	Varied composition.

Thus about 10% of the weavers live alone, being unmarried or having their dependants elsewhere. There are only nine families having more than one adult male worker. In ten cases there is more than one adult female working dependant. The size of the 18 families of the last two groups is large, and each has more than four members. These are the deviations from the normal-sized or natural family which commonly comprises a weaver, his wife and one or two children. The three-member families in Poona and four-member families in Ahmednagar are the dominant types ; next in importance come the two-member families. It is to be noted that the average family in Ahmednagar is slightly larger than that in Poona ; and of the 41 families of the first three groups noted above only six belong to 'Nagar.

<sup>1</sup> The accuracy of data and the explanation of the methods adopted in ascertaining them are given under each Statistical Table.

(b) *The classification of the weaving population* :—The workers are grouped according to the karkhanas they are working in. Eight karkhanas were investigated and therefore there are eight groups. Some produce special varieties of cloth and some work under different conditions. Besides, the classification of the weaving population is made according to their economic position in their families. They are classed, as in the census returns, into 'earners,' 'dependants' and 'earning or working dependants.' All male adults are principal earners; 82 of them depend only on weaving and the other 4 on other occupations. 67 out of 80 women are earning dependants. 27 of them are employed in the processes connected with weaving, while the rest, mostly in Poona, work as beedi makers. Only two children are returned as working dependants; this is evidently an underestimate, for it is the usual practice that children assist their parents in pirni-winding and beedi-work done at home. But as they are not paid separately, they are not shown here as working dependants.

(c) *The incomes of the weavers* :—The earnings of weavers in Poona Ahmednagar and Sholapur are ascertained for the year 1935-36. Their income is derived from two sources: (a) income from weaving and (b) income from other sources. Their income from weaving is taken from the personal ledgers maintained by their karkhanadars. The actual amount paid to each worker every month and the quantity of work done by him are noted. The wages paid for a continuous period of about a year are totalled up and the monthly average is arrived at. Their incomes from other sources are mostly estimated. Beedi manufacture is one chief source of subsidiary income to the weavers in urban centres. For several reasons the individual earnings under this head cannot be precisely ascertained. They are therefore estimated on the basis of an average output per worker as mentioned by the workers and the merchants concerned. It is assumed that a woman can earn about 3 annas a day if she takes work to her home and 5 annas if she works in the beedi shop. A man can work for longer hours and can earn a couple of annas more. A youngster can earn as much as a woman does. It is taken that they work for about 20 days in a month. It is on this basis that their earnings from this source are estimated. Another insignificant source of income to weavers is from their landed properties in their villages. About 40 families (i.e., about 50%) own some property of this kind, though it seems that the trend for the weavers to be divorced from their ancestral lands is gaining strength. At present many weavers own jointly with their coparceners, a house or a few cents of dry lands in their native villages. The incomes from their properties are not only uncertain but almost negligible. Very often they are pledged to money-lenders. It is not possible to estimate the magnitude of this income. Hence it is excluded from the estimates of the weaver's incomes noted here.

The average monthly income of the 62 families in Poona during the year is about Rs. 1,070 of which the income from weaving alone amounts to Rs. 837. Beedi manufacture is the chief source of subsidiary income of the families. 35 women earning on an aggregate Rs. 189, 2 children earning Rs. 8 and four male adults earning Rs. 36 a month secure this additional income of Rs. 233 to the weavers' families. 17 women assist the weavers in their work; and their earnings are included in the remunera-

tions paid to weavers, and are not therefore separately noted. In Ahmednagar the two groups of 15 families have an aggregate monthly income of Rs. 203 from weaving and Rs. 10 from other sources. The subsidiary income of Ahmednagar groups amounts hardly to 5% as against 22% in the case of Poona weavers. While most women in Ahmednagar have to work and earn for their families as much as the women in Poona, only a few of them (in fact 4 only) have income from sources other than weaving. It is different in Poona where subsidiary incomes are derived in most cases from sources other than weaving.

(d) *The average incomes of the Poona and Ahmednagar weavers*:—The following table analyses the incomes of weavers in Poona and Ahmednagar. The number and composition of weaving families and the calculated consumption units in each group, the average monthly income from weaving and from all sources for each group, and the average income per family and per consumption unit are noted below :

*Table showing the monthly incomes of the groups of weaving families in Poona and Ahmednagar, the number of families in each group, the composition of the families, the total consumption units, the sources of their incomes and the average income per family and per consumption unit*

Groups	No. of families	Composition of the group			Total Consumption units	Average Monthly income from		Average income per	
		Men	Women	Children		Weaving only	All sources	Family	Consumption unit
					Rs. as.	Rs. as.	Rs. as.	Rs. as.	Rs. as.
<b>POONA</b>									
A. ..	11	11	10	9	23.4	110 11	145 11	13 4	6 3½
B. ..	15	16	13	17	34.8	214 6	260 6	17 5½	7 7½
C. ..	21	24	24	31	58.5	327 15	430 15	20 8½	7 6
D. ..	5	6	6	12	16.8	57 2	95 2	19 0½	5 10½
E. ..	3	3	3	3	6.9	37 12	37 12	12 9½	5 6
F. ..	7	7	6	9	16.3	89 4½	99 4½	14 3	6 1½
<b>Total for Poona ..</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>156.7</b>	<b>837 2</b>	<b>1069 2</b>	<b>17 4</b>	<b>6 13½</b>
<b>AHMEDNAGAR</b>									
G. ..	10	14	12	15	30.9	156 14	162 14	16 4½	5 4½
H. ..	5	5	6	7	13.3	46 9	50 5	10 1	3 12½
<b>Total for Nagar ..</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>44.2</b>	<b>203 7</b>	<b>213 3</b>	<b>13 3½</b>	<b>4 13</b>

(e) *The incomes of the weavers of the Poona group*:—Poona is mainly a sari producing centre. Most manufactures are superior ones made of mercerised yarn for warp and spun silk or rayon for weft and silver thread for border and heading. They are not subject to direct power-

loom competition. The wage-rates in Poona are also higher than in Ahmednagar. During the year under review they have varied from Rs. 1-12-0 to Rs. 5-4-0 per sari according to the quality of the fabric woven. For ordinary cotton saris the rates range between Re. 0-14-0 and Rs. 1-10-0 per sari. From the cases that are studied it is seen that the maximum amount that a man assisted by a member of his family can earn is Rs. 20-1, and the minimum Rs. 12-12, while the corresponding earnings of a weaver not assisted by any member of his family are Rs. 14-5 and Rs. 10-4. The average earning of a woman helper ranges between Rs. 2-9 and Rs. 3-11 per month. The monthly income (from all sources) of a representative family in Poona is about Rs. 16½ where the woman's share is about Rs. 3½. The weavers of superior cloths (*e.g.*, groups A, B and C in the above table) employing spun silk and silver thread generally earn more. The monthly average earnings of 19 cases of men belonging to this category come to Rs. 14-5 per head when unassisted, and amount to Rs. 18-2 when assisted by their family members. Those weaving inferior kinds of saris are able to earn on an average Rs. 11-10 per month when unaided and Rs. 13-6 when assisted by the members of their families.

(f) *The incomes of the weavers of the Ahmednagar group*:—The types of cloth manufactured in 'Nagar are much coarser and cheaper than those of Poona. The money rates of wages are also slightly lower than the rates in Poona for similar work. The differences in the money incomes of weavers in the two centres should be understood in the light of these facts. A man and his wife producing slightly non-competitive types of silk saris for which the wage rates in Ahmednagar range between Rs. 1½ and Rs. 4 per unit can earn on an average Rs. 13-14 per month while the weaver unassisted can earn about Rs. 10-2. This means that a woman assisting the weaver can get Rs. 3-12 a month. In the case of ordinary cotton fabrics subjected to internal and external competition the weaving rates are lower and the earnings of workers are poorer. For instance, the wage rate per sari of this type has been 11¼ annas; and a man with his wife can get Rs. 10 per month, the contribution of the woman to this income being Rs. 2 or 2¼. The average monthly income per family in Ahmednagar is Rs. 14-3-6; Rs. 13-8-9 from weaving and Re. 0-10-9 from other sources.

It is felt that this concept of 'average income' per worker or per family is a loose one; and that a more scientific basis for comparison would be the 'average income per consumption unit.'<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For the purpose of calculating the consumption units in a family the following values are taken:

- Adult male worker=1 consumption unit,
- Adult male dependant=0.8 consumption unit,
- Adult female worker=0.8 consumption unit,
- Adult female dependant=0.7 consumption unit,
- Children and other dependants=0.5 consumption unit.



*Table showing the distribution of the weaving families according to their average income per consumption unit*

With an average income per consumption unit	Number of families in	
	Poona	Ahmednagar
Below Rs. 3 ..	1	nil
Between Rs. 3 and 4 ..	2	4
Between Rs. 4 and 5 ..	7	5
Between Rs. 5 and 6 ..	5	3
Between Rs. 6 and 7 ..	12	nil
Between Rs. 7 and 8 ..	12	2
Between Rs. 8 and 9 ..	11	1
Between Rs. 9 and 10 ..	6	nil
Above Rs. 10 ..	6	nil
<b>Total number of families</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Average income per consumption unit</b>	<b>Rs. 6-13-3</b>	<b>Rs. 4-13-1</b>

Thus it seems that a representative family in Ahmednagar consists of a man, a woman and two children, and has an average monthly income between Rs. 4 and 5 or more precisely an average income of Rs. 4-13 per consumption unit, while in Poona the representative family is slightly smaller in size but has a larger average income ranging between Rs. 6 and 7 or an income of Rs. 6-13-3 per consumption unit. This close correspondence between the average income per family and the average income per consumption unit is to be noted.

The differences in the average incomes in the two centres and the average incomes of families in the same centre can now be accounted for. The causes for the deviations from the average income of the normal sized family are noted below :—

	Poona	Ahmednagar
(A) <i>Number of families whose incomes are lower than the average</i> ..	15	4
(1) due to factors affecting efficiency of workers :		
(a) Illness ..	2	..
(b) Earners being new to the art of weaving ..	2	..
(2) due to factors relating to domestic circumstances:		
(a) Families having a large proportion of non-workers to earners ..	7	2
(3) due to other factors :		
(a) Insufficient work ..	2	2
(b) Others ..	2	..
(B) <i>Number of families whose incomes are above the average</i> ..	22	3
(1) Due to family conditions :		
(a) Favourable ratio of workers to dependants in the family ..	9	1
(b) Families having only earners ..	6	1
(2) Due to extra sources of income ..	4	1
(3) Due to other causes ..	3	nil

This analysis brings out one fact clearly, *viz.*, the larger the family, the greater is the ratio of dependants to workers, and therefore, the greater is their poverty. This is quite obvious even otherwise. But it points to the lines of reform considered necessary for the improvement in their economic conditions: *viz.*, either enlarge the opportunities of work and income to them or limit the size of their family.

(g) *The fluctuations in the monthly earnings of weavers from weaving only* :— The earnings of weavers fluctuate from month to month; and so does the volume of their employment. The following table indicates the variations in the incomes and employment of weavers from month to month :

*Table showing the monthly variations in the average income from weaving per weaver and in the extent of employment in Poona and Ahmednagar*

Month	Poona		Ahmednagar	
	No. of weavers employed each month	Average monthly earnings from weaving per weaver	Number of weavers employed each month	Average monthly earnings from weaving per weaver
		Rs. as. ps.		Rs. as. ps.
Chaitra .. ..	28	14 0 11	18	12 13 11
Vaisak .. ..	29	14 0 10	18	12 12 11
Jeshta .. ..	29	13 11 4	19	11 11 6
Ashada .. ..	30	11 14 10	19	10 15 7
Shravan .. ..	29	13 8 10	18	9 9 6
Bhadrapad .. ..	27	12 8 3	17	10 0 11
Aswin .. ..	28	14 13 0	16	10 13 9
Kartik .. ..	25	10 7 1	17	10 4 1
Margasersha .. ..	27	11 3 9	16	9 8 3
Pousha .. ..	28	11 7 0	16	9 10 0
Magha .. ..	28	12 9 9	16	10 14 5
Palgun .. ..	30	12 15 9	16	11 13 5
Monthly average for the year .. ..	28.2	12 13 0	17.2	10 12 2

The months from Palgun to Jeshta are evidently the busy months. There is during this period an increase in the number employed and also in the monthly earnings of weavers. Both at Poona and Ahmednagar the earnings of the weavers reach their maximum in Chaitra and touch their lowest level in Kartika or Margasersha. Between Palgun and Jeshta, usually the season for wedding and other festivities, the demand for saris becomes brisk. From Shravan there is a tendency for earnings and employment to fall. There is a slight rise in Aswin, but after Deepavali there is again the down-trend in the earnings and employment of weavers. The swing upwards begins again from Magha. These are the seasonal trends in employment and incomes, which fluctuate between Rs. 10-7 and Rs. 14-13 in Poona and between Rs. 9-8 and Rs. 12-14 in Ahmednagar. Fluctuations in the earnings of individual weavers are much greater, and they are due to a variety of causes such as insufficiency of work, absence from work due to illness and domestic considerations, defects in the personal character of weavers, etc. These wide fluctuations in the earnings of weavers are damaging to their character, and measures to eliminate them have to be devised in any scheme of reconstruction of this industry.

(h) *Absenteeism and labour turnover among weavers in Poona and 'Nagar* :— It is found that out of 80 weavers working in the eight karkhanas we have studied, only 54 have been working for the whole year. Most of them are new to their present employers, and have worked for them only for a few months. It is possible that they have changed their masters. Counting these cases out, the actual number of regular weavers who have worked in each month ranges between 42 in Kartik and 49 in Ashada. Thus at any time during the period monthly absenteeism has not been below 10 and not over 23%. As it is just noted, the level of employment reaches its nadir during the months of Kartik and Margasersha. The absence of weavers from work was partly due to slack season and partly due to their ill-health.

The incidence of ill-health as the cause of absence from work has received special attention. Loss of income and working days is sometimes due to long period illness and sometimes due to short-period or intermittent illness. The latter lays a heavy toll in Poona where malaria is endemic. This accounts for the low earnings of some weavers working apparently for all the twelve months in the year. Further, weavers often take a long leave from their work and go to their villages when they are affected by persistent and serious illness. If an attempt is made to add up the number of working days lost on account of casual illness and persistent disabling diseases, the toll of ill-health must be serious.

The total loss of working days on account of long-period absence from work of 54 cases we have studied comes to 13% of their total working days. It is ascertained that during the year under review they have lost 86 out of 648 working months.<sup>1</sup>

It may be mentioned in this connection that the weavers of Poona and Ahmednagar belong to the Telugu Padmasale community. They have migrated temporarily from the neighbouring districts of Hyderabad State. Investigation shows that more than two-thirds of the weavers have never been permanent residents of Poona or 'Nagar ; but they have been moving from one weaving centre to another. The causes of their migration are due to the insufficiency and uncertainty of their incomes. These make life in urban centres intolerable. They migrate to their villages or to another weaving centre as an escape from their moneylenders. Under these circumstances their connection with their villages to which they often return is in a way a blessing ; for they offer them a cheap asylum during periods of illness and unemployment. But in some cases their village connection has encouraged their absence from work. 17 out of the 54 weavers have left their work during the year to pay a visit to their villages and lost 12% of their working days. Whatever may be the justification for this, it must be admitted that it results in avoidable waste in the form of the existence of a large floating population and casual labourers and of a chronic state of unemployment and under-employment.

<sup>1</sup> This estimate is based on the following computation : (a) In three cases there is a loss of three months due to illness, (b) In three other cases 4 months on account of illness and nine months on account of the visits of the weavers to their native places are lost and (c) in 13 other cases 70 working months are lost. In most cases the cause for the weavers going back to their villages is stated to be their illness or insufficient income. The year 1936 was a particularly bad one for handloom weavers. This accounts for the high rate of absenteeism ; nor ally it is somewhere about 7%.

## III

## EARNINGS OF WEAVERS UNDER THE DOMESTIC SYSTEM IN POONA

The weavers whose conditions we have so far described are workers in karkhanas or factories. The industry is now passing through a transition from the domestic to the factory system, and karkhanas have become the most dominant type of organisation of the handloom industry in these centres ; hence this detailed study is made ; yet with a view to compare the condition of workers under the two systems, a few cases of domestic workers have been studied. The severe limitations of this study should in fact caution one from drawing hasty inferences.

There is no permanence in the economic relations between the workers and their employers under this system. The system itself is rapidly declining. It now obtains in cases where workers cannot secure proper introduction to employers or when a weaver working for another who is usually a merchant desires to become an employer himself. Without giving up his work under his employer, he gathers together two or three persons who cannot otherwise find employment and secures work for himself as well as for his men from his merchant-employer. Usually this middleman-weaver secures orders from the merchant, takes yarn and raw materials on credit from him and sells his manufactures to him and receives the difference in cash. He also provides his workers with looms and other requisites and sometimes their lodgings. They are paid a few annas less per sari than what he has received from the merchant. This difference in the rates covers the expenses of the equipment and lodgings the middleman-weaver provides and the returns for the trouble he has taken. The middleman-weaver often works for more than one merchant at a time and this makes the study of the system more difficult. The details of a few cases studied in Poona are noted below.

(1) One *Rajamayya Gosal* having five looms employs four weavers under him. He takes yarn from one Kunden, a merchant, prepares saris and sells them to him. An examination of the books of Kunden reveals that during a period of six months from Kartika to Chaitra, Gosal has received raw materials worth Rs. 1,126-12 and cash to the extent of Rs. 743. He has returned manufactures to the extent of Rs. 1,869-12. A part of the sum he has received in cash covers the expenses on silk and silver thread he has purchased. 326 saris have been prepared and delivered to Kunden who pays Gosal at the rate of Rs. 1-5-0 per sari as labour charges. The weavers under Gosal are paid at the rate of Rs. 1-2-0 per sari. The difference of 3 annas per sari between the two rates represents the returns for the middleman's services of Gosal. This amounts to Rs. 61 (excluding the wages he has himself earned and the wages he has paid to his workers). Out of this sum he has to pay Rs. 24 as rent for the building. If an allowance is to be made for the depreciation of the looms and the interest on his investment, his net profit comes to Rs. 30 for 6 months. Gosal is not in a position to say how much work has been done by each worker under him but it is calculated that their average monthly earnings amount to Rs. 12-4-0 per head, while Gosal earns, including his income on account of weaving and middleman's services, a sum of Rs. 18-4.

(2) *Rajamulla Konda* working for a merchant named *Ande* has taken materials worth Rs. 245 and returned 80 saris valued at Rs. 360. The difference of Rs. 115 represents his earnings for the year as a domestic worker. This works out at the rate of Rs. 9-9-5 per month and out of this he has to meet his charges on account of the hire of the loom and the building in which it is located. His earnings compared to those of workers in karkhanas are very low. Enquiries show that *Konda* and his wife supplement their incomes by taking out work from beedi merchants.

(3) *Rajanna Gindan*'s is another weaver working under *Ande* on a similar basis. He has received during a year raw materials for Rs. 220½ and delivered finished goods of the value of Rs. 121½. This means his average monthly earning from weaving amounts to Rs. 10-2 which is supplemented by his wife earning Rs. 2 or 3 from beedi manufacture.

These data regarding the earnings of domestic workers are not sufficient to warrant our comparing their economic condition with that of workers in karkhanas; yet one cannot help feeling that the condition of the karkhana weavers is a shade better. If the weavers in the karkhana can in fact earn a little more than those under the domestic system, though the karkhana is no better in respect of its technical or internal organisation, it furnishes a pointer to the line of reorganisation of the industry.

## IV

## EARNINGS OF SILK WEAVERS IN POONA

For the purpose of comparison the earnings of a few silk weavers in Poona are noted. We have seen in the preceding sections that the average earnings of workers producing saris with spunsilk and silver thread (groups B and C of the table on page 80), are 20 to 25% higher than those of other weavers manufacturing ordinary cloths. The silk weavers earn still more. Their average monthly earnings are a little over Rs. 20 a month.

*Earnings of weavers of silk fabrics in Poona in 1935-36*

The name of the weaver	Kinds of fabrics woven	Out-turn in yards	Time taken to weave	Total receipts	Net receipts after paying the sider and dobbie boy	Net monthly average earnings
<i>Saka</i>	Salu and blouse of bhutti Benares pattern	45	4 mths.	Rs. 115	Rs. 87	Rs. as. ps. 21 12 0
<i>S.B. Sangle</i>	do.	38	3½ mths.	97	69	19 11 6
<i>Rasale</i>	do.	32½	3 mths. 5 days	89	67	21 2 6
<i>B. Sangle</i>	Kad	97	3 mths. 20 days	76	76	20 11 6
<i>Badmore</i>	Lugdi	90	3 mths.	60	60	20 0 0

Silk weaving needs special skill and dexterity ; particularly brocade weaving is a great art. It is so complicated that a weaver can produce in a month 10 to 12 yards of *salu* (*bhutti Benares pattern*) or 30 yards of silk *kad* or *lugdi* as against 100 or 120 yards of ordinary saris he prepares. Belonging to a non-competitive group, the silk weavers earn nearly twice as much as other weavers. It is said that in recent years their wages have been affected, particularly in the manufacture of *kad*, by the competition from Surat powerloom products. Another matter also deserves notice. In the manufacture of ordinary cloths very few children are fully and directly employed, while in silk *salu* weaving with decorative patterns a number of boys are engaged. Some of them operate the country jacquard device and some assist the principal worker as side weavers when solid-bordered cloths are made. The boys operating the jacquard are usually of tender years, not more than 12 ; and they are paid Rs. 3 to 5 a month. The sider is more advanced in age, and he is usually a younger brother of the main weaver, under whom he works as an apprentice. If he is a stranger he is paid Rs. 4 to 6 per sari.

## V

## (i) EARNINGS OF WEAVERS IN HANDLOOM FACTORIES (PROPER)

The karkhanas in Bombay-Deccan are not factories in the proper sense of the term. Proper organisation of the handloom industry on factory lines however obtains on the West Coast of the Madras Presidency. For the purpose of comparison the earnings of weavers in the handloom factories on the West Coast were obtained. It is found that the factory weavers are able to earn more as a rule than other weavers. In Trivandrum, for instance, the non-factory worker has an income of Rs. 7 or 8 while the factory weaver earns Rs. 9 or 10 per month.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The earnings of workers in one of the factories at Trivandrum in the month of March 1936 are noted:—

Name of the weaver	Earnings	Name of the weaver	Earnings
1. Apollo ..	Rs. 8-26 ch.	7. Balakrishnan ..	Rs. 11-9½ ch.
2. Sivaram Pillay ..	Rs. 9-11½ ch.	8. Raghavan ..	Rs. 9-12½ ch.
3. Ramkrishna Pillay.	Rs. 9-11 ch.	9. Daniel ..	Rs. 9-7 ch.
4. Gopalan ..	Rs. 10-9 ch.	10. Chellappan ..	Rs. 7-6½ ch.
5. Govinda Pillay ..	Rs. 11-15 ch.	11. Chellan ..	Rs. 11-18½ ch.
6. Punnose ..	Rs. 10-0½ ch.		

Total earnings of 11 weavers for the month Rs. 104-15 ch.

Average monthly earnings per weaver Rs. 9-14 ch.

(Note : 28 chakrams = one rupee)

(ii) EARNINGS OF WEAVERS IN THE KALLAR WEAVING FACTORY  
AT TIRUMANGALAM

The factory is run for the purpose of reclaiming the criminal tribe of Kallars. The average monthly earnings of weavers in the factory during 1927-28 are noted below:

April ..	Rs. 10-4-0	October ..	Rs. 15-11-6
May ..	Rs. 16-14-9	November ..	Rs. 16-6-0
June ..	Rs. 11-12-3	December ..	Rs. 13-0-0
July ..	Rs. 11-7-9	January ..	Rs. 5-15-3
August ..	Rs. 18-13-9	February ..	Rs. 9-11-6
September ..	Rs. 12-15-6	March ..	Rs. 16-14-3

Monthly average for the year, Rs. 14-2-6.

The Kallars are agriculturists and therefore their income from weaving is low during the months of busy agricultural operations. Their earnings are slightly higher than those of others though they manufacture competitive goods like towels, dhotis, napkins, sheets, etc. They are able to make Rs. 14 to 15 a month. Even if we allow for the reduction in the wage rates during the period of depression, their earnings cannot be less than Rs. 10 a month. If these factory workers manufacturing ordinary cloth and not belonging to traditional weaving communities can earn this much, there can be little surprise that workers in the handloom factories at Calicut and Cannanore in the West Coast manufacturing special fabrics like shirting and coating earn Rs. 18 to 20 a month.

## VI

EARNINGS OF WEAVERS OF KHADI (HANDSPUN AND HANDWOVEN)  
CLOTH AT TIRUPUR

Weavers of khadi cloth are drawn from the class of handloom weavers, and it is assumed that they would not take to khadi weaving unless they are paid a little more than or at least as much as they otherwise earn. The earnings of a few weavers in centres round about Tirupur in 1927-28 are noted below:

*Monthly earnings of khadi weavers at Tirupur in 1927-28*

Month		A weaver with two looms (fine dhoties)	A weaver pro- ducing shirt- ings (plain)	Dhoti weaver at Utukuli
		Rs. as. ps.	Rs. as. ps.	Rs. as. ps.
1927	May .. ..	63 10 6	21 11 3	23 4 6
	June .. ..	81 12 0	27 4 6	17 13 6
	July .. ..	58 13 0	18 10 0	17 2 3
	August .. ..	41 9 0	26 6 3	29 5 6
	September .. ..	57 8 0	17 1 6	11 4 0
	October .. ..	59 0 3	18 14 6	12 8 9
	November .. ..	20 7 0	18 7 9	29 4 0
	December .. ..	68 13 0	18 13 9	20 7 0
1928	January .. ..	51 0 0	24 7 3	18 6 0
	February .. ..	55 11 0	7 10 6	18 8 3
	March .. ..	63 14 0	13 12 0	12 15 0
	April .. ..	48 13 0	15 2 6	17 6 0
Total earnings for the year ..		670 14 9	228 15 9	238 10 0
Average monthly earnings per loom or per weaver .. ..		27 15 0	19 1 4	19 14 2

Khadi weaving is a sheltered industry. These wages may not therefore represent the normal earnings of other handloom weavers. But nevertheless it is indicated that a good weaver can earn about Rs. 25 a month and a weaver of average efficiency can earn Rs. 18 to Rs. 20 a month. To make the wages comparable with the earnings of weavers in Bombay-Deccan, these earnings of Tirupur weavers for 1927-28, when converted on the basis of 1936 rates, will be equal to Rs. 20 (in the case of an efficient weaver) and Rs. 16 (in the case of an average weaver).

*Some observations* :—Though these earnings of weavers noted at different centres and at different times may not be exactly comparable, certain observations can be made :

1. There is not much difference in the earnings of weavers working for a merchant and of those working for a middle-man weaver.
2. The class of independent weavers is fast disappearing ; this perhaps indicates that their economic condition is not enviable.
3. The weaver working in an organised factory or workshop earns 20 to 25% more than one working in his own home for a merchant. While the latter earns about Rs. 10 to 12 per month, the former gets Rs. 13 to 15.
4. The more superior the cloth woven, the better the weaver's earnings. One producing silk cloth with *jari* solid border and floral designs obtains better wages. Wages are low in the case of those manufacturing ordinary cotton fabrics with simple border designs.
5. The urban weaver earns nominally more than the village weaver. But there are compensating economic and social factors in favour of the latter. His house rent is lower ; his foodstuffs are cheaper ; and his conditions of life are on the whole much easier than those of his fellow worker in the town.

## VII

### THE ECONOMIC CONDITION OF PADMASALE HANDLOOM WORKERS IN SHOLAPUR

Sholapur is another big handloom weaving centre in Bombay-Deccan. According to some estimates there were about 8,000 looms at work before the depression and the advent of competition from Narasingiriji Mills at Sholapur and Swastik and other mills at Bombay. Even now it is estimated that there are not less than 5,000 looms actually working. The industry at Sholapur is carried on under two systems : (1) the *asamee* or the out-work system and (2) the *karkhana* or factory system. The *asamees* are something like the clothiers of the English linen trade having some four or five weavers under them. Independent weavers owning their own looms and working at their own risk have practically disappeared. The *karkhanas* are workshops owned and managed by rich cloth merchants employing a number of workers, often 30 to 40. The looms are equipped by the merchants and the weavers have very



little initiative in the technical or commercial organisation of the karkhanas. From the point of view of the weaver, whether he works for an *asamee* or for a *karkhanadar*, it is immaterial to him as his interest in the work and his relation to his employer are not anything very different. The two systems differ only in their magnitude and to some extent in respect of marketing and finance.

Our study of the economic condition of handloom workers in Sholapur relates to the investigation of about 80 families of weavers attached to four karkhanas. Detailed information regarding their working and living conditions was obtained for 40 families. In regard to others the data obtained are insufficient, as some of them have just started their life in Sholapur and the principal earners in some other cases have abandoned their traditional occupation for work in local mills. This sign of unrest is now much in evidence in Sholapur. Perhaps the industry at Sholapur has been very hard hit by the Depression and the growing powerloom competition.

(a) *The size and composition of the weaving families in Sholapur:—* Detailed information has been obtained for 37 families having 46 men, 28 women and 25 children. The distribution of the families according to their size and composition is noted below :

Size of the family			Number of families	Number of			Number of dependants to one adult male weaver
				Men	Women	Children	
Men	Wo-	Chil-					
1	0	0	11	11	0	0	nil
1	1	0	10	10	9	1	1
1	1	1	4	4	4	4	2
1	1	2	3	3	3	6	3
1	1	3	3	3	3	9	4
Varied composition			6	15	9	5	
Total			37	46	28	25	1.15

Two workers in the last group are widowers ; 4 are unmarried and there is one case of a weaver living away from his wife. In the first group 4 are unmarried, and 5 are widowers ; and all of them for one reason or other live alone. This abnormality is peculiar to Sholapur. The dominant type is the family having two members (one man and one woman or one dependant for each male worker). Thus the normal family of a weaver in Sholapur is still smaller in size than that of the family in Poona or Ahmednagar. On an average there are a little more than two dependants per male worker in Poona and 'Nagar while in Sholapur there is only a little more than one.

(b) *Earners, working dependants and dependants:—*All the 46 men are principal earners ; 44 are handweavers, one plies a cart for hire and

another is a worker in one of the local cotton mills. Of the women 21 are working in the karkhanas as pirn winders, bobbin winders or sizers. One of them works at the handloom ; 3 are working in cotton mills ; 2 work for the beedi merchants and only one is a non-working dependant. If the women noted here are to be classified according to their age, most of them will have to be grouped as children ; but being married they are returned here as women, who are working dependants. If these child-wives are to be excluded, there are in fact only two children who may be called working dependants who assist the weavers in preparatory processes. 2 out of 25 children in Sholapur as against a much larger proportion in Poona are earning dependants. This is also significant.

(c) *Sources of wages and income data* :—So far as the income from all the connected activities of weaving are concerned, the karkhanadars are able to furnish full and reliable information. Unlike Poona and Ahmednagar, wages in Sholapur are settled every week on Tuesdays. Payments are made out separately for weaving and the different preparatory processes. The weekly outturn and the earnings of individual workers, the deductions made towards the adjustments of advances from employers, the regularity of work given, the extent of absenteeism, the seasonality of the industry, the trend in the trade and a number of other interesting details are noted from the books maintained by the karkhanadars.

So far as the weaver's income is concerned it is most dependable. The actual earnings of the weaver week by week are noted ; and the average of his monthly earnings is then arrived at. But the average individual incomes from preparatory processes are estimated. Generally speaking the preparatory processes are done by the female working dependants in the families. The same groups of workers more or less are assigned specified work ; one specialises in sizing and warping, and the other in pirn and bobbin winding. It is noted that 21 women engaged in winding have earned Rs. 416-6 in 23 weeks, the average per capita weekly earning thus being 14 annas. But those employed in sizing and warping earn 16 or 18 annas per head per week. In regard to the earnings of the families from other sources the estimates are very crudely made. But fortunately such cases are few. There are only five cases out of 45 where such incomes accrue to the families primarily engaged in handloom weaving and they are not likely to vitiate our estimates very much.

(d) *Income from weaving* :—The average weekly income per weaver at Sholapur is Rs. 2-2-0. Of 54 cases intensively studied, 16 are engaged in the manufacture of coarse saris with 30's for warp and 40's for weft, while the others produce superior saris with 40's or 2/84's mercerised yarn for warp and 60's for weft. The aggregate average weekly earnings of the 16 coarse sari weavers amount to Rs. 24-13-10, i.e., about Rs. 1-8-10 per weaver ; but the individual average has been as high as Rs. 1-14-10 and as low as 12 as. 4 ps. In the case of those manufacturing fine saris 38 weavers on an average have earned Rs. 83-8-1 per week. Thus their average weekly income per head is Rs. 2-3-3. The highest individual

average is Rs. 3-12 and the lowest Rs. 1-4. The distribution of the 54 weavers according to their average weekly income is noted below :

Number of weavers	With income from weaving per week being
11	Rs. 1/8 and below
9	between Rs. 1/8 and Rs. 1/12
8	„ Rs. 1/12 and Rs. 2
8	„ Rs. 2 and Rs. 2/4
8	„ Rs. 2/4 and Rs. 2/8
5	„ Rs. 2/8 and Rs. 2/12
2	„ Rs. 2/12 and Rs. 3
3	Above Rs. 3
<b>Total</b> 54	

Twenty-eight workers have a weekly income of Rs. 2 per head. All the coarse sari weavers belong to this class.

(e) *The incidence of the causes for the lower earnings of weavers is mentioned below :*

The cause for low earning being	The number of cases
(a) Relatively low wage rates for coarse cloth weaving	16
(b) Absence of incentive to earn more due to the fact that :	
i. The weaver has no dependants to support	1
ii. The weaver depends on the earnings of others from beedi work or cotton mill	2
(c) Factors affecting the efficiency of the weaver :	
i. The weaver is a novice	2
ii. The weaver is a woman	1
iii. The weaver is old	2
iv. The weaver has bad health	2
v. Other causes	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>28</b>

(f) *The distribution of the families according to income per consumption unit :—*The average weekly earnings from 36 families specially noted from all sources of income amount to Rs. 120-4-0 of which the income from weaving is Rs. 90-12-0 ; i.e., 75% of the total income accrues from weaving. If the income from preparatory processes is to be included the total income from all activities connected with weaving amounts to Rs. 108, which is nearly nine-tenths of the total income. Thus while in Poona the weaver's family derives its income from sources other than the handloom industry to an extent of 23%, the family in

Sholapur depends to the extent of 90% of its income on its traditional calling.

The income per consumption unit, as explained in an earlier section, offers a better basis for comparing the economic condition of workers. Below is given the distribution of the weaving families at Sholapur according to the average income per consumption-unit :

Number of families	Having an average income per month per consumption-unit
<i>nil</i>	Rs. 3 and below
2	between Rs. 3 and Rs. 4
4	” Rs. 4 and Rs. 5
9	” Rs. 5 and Rs. 6
7	” Rs. 6 and Rs. 7
4	” Rs. 7 and Rs. 8
2	” Rs. 8 and Rs. 9
3	” Rs. 9 and Rs. 10
5	Above Rs. 10

It is evident from the table that the normal family in Sholapur is the one with an average monthly income per consumption unit of Rs. 6 to 7 as compared with that of Rs. 6 to 7 in Poona and Rs. 4 to 5 at Ahmednagar. One caution, however, has to be made. These incomes in Sholapur in all cases are exclusive of the free lodging provided by the karkhanadars to weavers; and to be comparable to the earnings of weavers at Poona they must be increased by Rs. 1½ per mensem per weaver. If this is noted the economic condition of the weaver at Sholapur compares more favourably with that of the Poona or Ahmednagar weaver.

Various are the causes for the existing differences in the average income per consumption unit of the weaving families at Sholapur. Of the six cases where the income per consumption unit is below Rs. 5 three have a larger ratio of dependants to workers and the others have a low income because of the illness or the old age or both of the earners of the families concerned. Ten families are distinctively well-off having an income of Rs. 8 and above per consumption unit. Five of them are very well off because they have no dependants to support and in three cases there are fewer dependants per male worker; and in two other cases the working dependants earn as much as the principal earners of the families, or earn more than what the working dependants in other families earn by engaging themselves in the processes preparatory to weaving.

(g) *The fluctuations in the earnings of weavers from weaving only* :—The monthly variations in the earnings of weavers are noted for the business year 1857-58 (corresponding to Nov. 1935—Oct. 1936).<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The business year commences from the day after Deepavali and being based on lunar cycles, it has thirteen months.

*Average earnings per lunar month (of about 4 weeks)*

Month		Actual earnings	Corrected
		Rs. a. p.	Rs. a. p.
1857	Kartik .. .. .	10 11 7	10 11 7
	Margasersha .. .. .	9 0 7	9 0 7
	Pousha .. .. .	9 11 3	9 11 3
	Magha .. .. .	10 12 2	10 12 2
	Paigun .. .. .	7 9 3	10 1 8
1858	Chaitra .. .. .	9 3 7	12 4 9
	Vaisak .. .. .	8 14 2	11 13 6
	Jeshta .. .. .	9 1 6	12 2 0
	Ashada .. .. .	8 11 3	11 9 8
	Adhika Masa .. .. .	7 0 11	9 6 7
	Shravan .. .. .	8 12 1	11 10 9
	Bhadrapad .. .. .	7 13 11	10 7 11
	Aswin .. .. .	8 5 3	11 1 8

As the wage rates for weaving have been reduced in Paigun, the actual earnings after Magha of 1857 have been corrected in order to make them comparable with the average earnings in the preceding months. From an examination of the last column in the above Table it is evident that the months of Chaitra, Vaisak and Jeshta are usually the brisker part of the year; then the average earnings of the weaver slowly decline. The months of Kartik, Margasersha and Magha are very slack; then there is an upward trend. This cycle more or less corresponds to that of Poona and Ahmednagar.

It is obvious that the earnings of the weavers depend on two factors: the prevailing wage rate, and the average rate of output per worker. The accompanying table shows the fluctuations in the average wage rate, the average production per worker, the average weekly earnings of the weaver since 1928-29 in one of the karkhanas studied:

Year	Number of weaver weeks*	Number of saris woven	Total wages paid to weavers Rs. as. ps.	Average wage-rate per sari Rs. as. ps.	Average outturn per worker (No. of saris)	Average weekly earnings per worker Rs. as. ps.
1928-9	1375	4089	3557 9 6	0 13 11	2.97	2 9 3½
1929-30	1637	5085	4515 5 9	0 14 2½	3.11	2 12 2
1930-1	1547	4636	3909 0 3	0 13 6	3.00	2 8 5
1931-2	1604	4649	3980 11 0	0 14 1½	2.89	2 7 10½
1932-3	1797	6096	4637 13 6	0 12 2	3.39	2 9 3½
1933-4	Not	available		Not	available.	
1934-5**	793	2459	1910 3 9	0 12 5	3.10	2 6 6½
1935-6	2375	8484	5010 15 0	0 9 5½	3.57	2 1 9

\* Weaver-week means the sum of the actual number of weavers working during each week during the period under review.

\*\* Returns for the year are available for 28 weeks only.

The above table indicates the fluctuations in the working of the particular karkhana studied. But more than that it indicates that there has been since 1929-30 a progressive fall in the average per capita earnings of the weaver mostly due to the reductions in the wage rate; it was also partly due in certain years to the decline in the average output per weaver. But in the years after 1931-32 it seems that the decline in the wage rate has been to some extent offset by an increase in the average outturn per weaver.

Since the last war there has been a steady *tendency for the weaving rates to fall*. The movement of the wage rates in Sholapur hand-weaving industry has been noted from 1920. As the types of saris woven in the centre has been changing, it is not possible to note the changes in the weaving rates of specified patterns; hence the average rate per unit of all saris is given.

*The fluctuations in the average rate for weaving per sari in Sholapurs ince 1920*

Year	Average weaving rate per sari		Remarks
	Annas	Index No.	
1920	15.05	115.7	
1921	15.04	115.7	
1922	16.10	123.8	Rising Wages
1923	16.62	127.8	
1924	17.41	133.9	
1925	15.04	115.7	Wages tend to fall: Abolition of cotton excise duty
1926	14.75	113.5	
1927	14.00	107.9	Specific duty on yarn levied
1928	13.50	103.8	
1929	13.00	100	Depression sets in
1930	13.00	100	
1931	12.25	94.2	The period of a rapid decline in wage rates
1932	12.00	92.7	
1933	11.25	86.5	
Jan. to Aug. 1934	10.50	80.8	
Sept. 1934 to March 1935	9.75	75.0	
April 1935 to March 1936	8.75	67.3	
March to Dec. 1936	6.25	48.1	

The weaving rate has been continuously declining since 1924. In 1929 it was only 80% of the rate that prevailed in 1924. And from 1929, the beginning of the agricultural depression in India, the rate was further steadily declining, and by the end of 1936 it came to only 48% of the rate that obtained in 1929. The real significance of this decline can be appreciated only in the light of the cost of living in Sholapur at different periods. The Bombay Labour Office have worked out an index number of the working-class cost of living for Sholapur, but it begins only from the year 1928. If, however, the index numbers of weaving rates in Sholapur can be stated in relation to the index numbers of the working-class cost of living in Bombay, the following fact at once becomes clear. While the wages in Sholapur declined from 1924 to 1929 by 26%, the cost of living fell by 6%. And when the wages have

shown a decline of 52% in 1936 as compared to 1929, the cost of living has declined only 32½%. In other words wages have been declining since 1924 much more rapidly than the cost of living. The extent of the misery actually suffered by the handloom weaver during the last 20 years due to a fall in his real earnings can now be easily gauged !

An attempt has been made to study the *plight of the hand-weaver at Sholapur during the period of the depression*. The accompanying table indicates the fluctuations in the weaving rates of two important varieties of saris woven at Sholapur, their index numbers, and the index numbers of the cost of living at Sholapur as compiled by the Bombay Labour Office :

*Index numbers of the weaving rates and the cost of living at Sholapur*

Period	Weaving rates for				Index Numbers of the cost of living at Sholapur
	"Charbund" Sari		"Maheshwari" Pattern		
	Annas	Index Nos.	Annas	Index Nos.	
Nov. 1928 to Nov. 1929 ..	13½	100	18½	100	100 (1929)
Nov. 1929 to March 1931 ..	13	96	17½	95	92 (1930)
March 1931 to March 1933 ..	12½	91	17	92	74 (1931 & 1932)
March 1933 to Jan. 1934 ..	11½	84	15½	84	70 (1933)
Jan. 1934 to Aug. 1934 ..	10½	78	13½	73	73 (1934)
Nov. 1934 to Nov. 1935 ..	9½	72	12½	68	73 (1935)
Nov. 1935 to Nov. 1936 ..	9	67	12	65	70 (1936)
March 1936 to Nov. 1936 ..	8½	63	10½	61	70 (1936)
Dec. 1936 to Jan. 1937 ..	6½	46	8	44	72 (Jan. 1937)

This table indicates that the weaver has benefited by a relatively greater fall in the cost of living till 1934 ; but this gain has been obviously to some extent offset by a decrease in the volume of output. The reduced purchasing power of the agriculturists due to a precipitous fall in the agricultural commodities has affected the demand for cloth including the handloom products. From 1934 onwards the economic condition of the hand-weaver has been worse because the wage rates have declined much more than the cost of living. The disparity between the two shows the extent of the misery he has been suffering, and he has attempted to offset the decline in his real earnings by increasing his output to some extent. The condition of the weaver at Poona has been no better. The table below indicates the ruling weaving rates in Poona for certain standard handloom goods in 1920, 1925, 1930 and 1935.

*Weaving rates per unit of the garment mentioned*

Year	Cotton Sari	Sari with mercerised yarn	Sari of Japan spun silk	Sari of pure silk with jari	Silk "kans"	Silk "salu"	Silk "kad"
	Rs. a.	Rs. a.	Rs. a.	Rs.	Rs. a.	Rs. a.	Rs. a.
1920 .. ..	Not ascertained	Not manufactured then		Not ascertained	1 0	30 0	15 0
1925 .. ..	1 5	do.	do.	do.	0 14	25 0	12 0
1930-31 ..	0 15	1 0	8 0	23 to 28	0 12	20 0	10 0
1933-34 ..	0 12	0 14	4 8	19 to 22	0 9	15 0	8 0

The rates were again reduced in 1936-37 by 10 to 15%. As compared to these wage reductions in the handloom industry, the wage cuts in cotton mills, where labour is better organised, have been both less frequent and less steep in extent. According to the wage censuses conducted by the Bombay Labour Office, the wages in the cotton mills were reduced in 1924-25 and again in 1933-34. Compared with July 1926 the wages in cotton mills in April 1934 were 21% lower in Bombay and 17% lower in Sholapur, whereas in the handloom industry they have been reduced by over 40% in the case of cotton goods and by 25 to 30% in the case of silk goods.

(h) *Absenteeism*:—The question of the extent of absenteeism of hand-weavers in Sholapur has also received attention. The number of workers employed permanently and working in each week is noted. The weavers generally stay away from work during the monsoon months. Slackness in trade commences with Jeshta. Feasts, fasts and fairs during the succeeding three or four months account for the absence of workers from work. This also synchronises with the advent of the rains which render sizing in the streets difficult. Now therefore begins the usual annual exodus of weavers to their native villages or their pilgrimage to Pandharpur and other holy places. The monsoon months are usually the season for general ill-health. The frequency of absenteeism in each month of workers in the karkhanas studied is given below :

*Absenteeism of handloom weavers in Sholapur*

Month	No. of permanent weavers	No. of weavers absent	Percentage of absenteeism
1857 Kartik .. ..	51	1	2
Margasersha .. ..	49	3	6
Pousha .. ..	48	1	2
Magha .. ..	47	2	4
Paḡun .. ..	46	3	6
1858 Chaitra .. ..	45	1	2.2
Vaisak .. ..	44	1	2.2
Jeshta .. ..	45	3	6.6
Ashada .. ..	45	2	4.4
Adhika Masa .. ..	43	3	6.9
Shravan .. ..	42	3	7.1
Bhadrapad .. ..	41	5	12.2
Aswin .. ..	41	6	14.6



The number of workers has continued steadily to decline during the year under review mostly due to the deep depression then prevailing in the industry. From 53 at the beginning of the year in Kartik the number fell down to 41 in the end of the year. It is calculated that 132 out of 2,328 working weeks have been lost which represents an average absenteeism of 5.67%. The period from Jeshta to Aswin, corresponding to June-October, records abnormal absenteeism. The frequency of absence of or the number of weeks lost by each worker is given in the margin :

Number of weavers	Number of weeks lost by each
16	nil
7	1
4	2
2	4
1	6
1	7
1	8
2	9
10	10 and above

Loss of working days on account of communal feasts and festivals like Amavasya, Deepavali, etc., are not included here. The causes for the absence from work are mentioned below in their order of importance : (1) marriage or other domestic engagements necessitating the weaver's absence from work, (2) ill-health of the weaver or of a member of his family, (3) idleness of the worker, (4) slack trade and unemployment. The incidence of the last two items is not

ascertained, but it is calculated that 60 out of 132 weeks lost by weavers are due to ill-health. In the ten cases of weavers who have lost more than 10 weeks each, their absence is due to their persistent illness. About 30% of absenteeism is due to other domestic circumstances.

## VIII

### SOME ASPECTS OF THE HAND-WEAVERS' ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL LIFE

Special attention has been devoted to the study of the following aspects of the conditions of work and living of the handloom weavers : (1) labour turnover, (2) methods of wage payment, (3) housing, (4) their indebtedness, (5) the drink evil and (6) their family budgets.

Enquiry made regarding *labour turnover* in the handweaving industry, *i.e.*, the average period of the employment of the weaver under each of his employers reveals that most of the weavers in Ahmednagar have been working under their present employers for over 5 years and many of them have been working under the same employer for over ten years. This does not however mean that there has been no break in their work. They often leave for their villages but they rarely change their masters. The conditions in Sholapur are almost similar to those in Ahmednagar. Most of the weavers have been working for their present masters for several years. But of late under the stress of depression many of them are leaving for their villages or are abandoning their traditional occupation for employment in mills. In Poona on the other hand the turnover of labour is great. It is found that hardly 10% of the Poona weavers have been in the service of their present employers for over three years. Also absenteeism is more characteristic of the workers in Poona than their fellow workers in Ahmednagar or Sholapur. It is said that the employers in Poona are for this reason compelled to import weavers from villages in Malegaon District and the Nizam State. But these weavers usually find their new surroundings strange and uncongenial and their earnings insufficient and so after a time they often go back to their

villages. This accounts for the abnormal rate of labour turnover in Poona. The unwillingness of these weavers to remain in towns, though better money wages are paid, needs notice.

*Methods of Wage Payment:*—There is no recognised system in regard to the payment of wages to workers in the handloom industry. Out-workers are paid sometimes in advance, at least a part of their wages is advanced, but usually they are paid when the finished products are delivered to the merchant-employers. The workers in the handloom factories in South India and in the karkhanas in the Bombay-Deccan are generally paid monthly. Production accounts in Poona are settled every month and the wages are paid. In Sholapur the weavers are paid every week on Tuesdays. This weekly payment perhaps accounts for their comparative freedom from debts; and they are not driven to the necessity of borrowing frequently from outside money lenders, though they may take some advances from the karkhanadars.

In most cases the rates for warping, sizing and weaving are arranged on a sliding scale. Generally they rise progressively with the fineness of the yarn used. Weaving rates are based not merely on the count of yarn used but also on the nature of the weave, the type of the cloth woven, and the closeness of the texture particularly the number of picks per inch. The 1936 rates for the different processes in weaving at Sholapur are given below :

(i) *Wage rates in Sholapur handweaving industry (Dec. 1936)*

Description	Wages per bundle of 10 pounds			Wages per sari for weft winding
	Sizing	Warping	Bobbin winding	
30s coloured single .. ..	9 annas	4 annas	5½ annas	1½ annas
40s do. .. ..	14 „	6 „	6½ „	1½ „
60s do. .. ..	20 „	8 „	15 „	2 „
2/84s mercerised .. ..	nil	6 „	6½ „	2 „
2/42s do. .. ..	nil	4 „	5½ „	1½ „

(ii) *Weaving rates per sari*

Specifications of the sari	Yarns used	Wages for Weaving
42" × 9 yds.	20s × 20s	7 annas
46" × 9 yds.	30s × 30s	8 to 9 annas
48" × 9 yds.	40s × 40s	9 annas
48" × 9 yds.	40s × 60s	9 to 10 annas
46" × 9 yds.	40s × 60s	9 to 10 annas
50" × 9 yds.	2/84s × 60s	10 to 11 annas

Wages in the handloom industry are almost everywhere paid on piece-work basis.<sup>1</sup> Except in the case of dyeing experts and managers in certain handloom factories on the West Coast (Madras Presidency) and in the case of children operating the drawboy devices in pattern weaving and in very rare cases of women doing some preparatory processes in karkhanas, nowhere is the worker in this industry paid time-wages. The basic rates are determined from time to time in relation to the condition of the market. But it should not be inferred that these rates are fixed on any system of collective bargaining. There is often some kind of joint action on the part of the employers but none to speak of on the part of the weavers. Sporadic efforts have been made to get together the weavers in a locality to resist a reduction in wages ; but there is no permanence in such distress organisations. The absence of a trade union of weavers accounts for the constant reductions in the basic wage rates effected by employers. In Sholapur, for instance, since 1928 wages in the handloom industry have been subject to a cut eight times, in Poona 4 times, while in Sholapur cotton mills wages have been reduced during the period only twice and in some cases thrice. When workers have no organisation to effectively protect their interests, the one obvious method of economising that appeals to employers is a resort to a wage cut. This tendency is more common at the time of falling prices. Wages are also similarly raised at a period of rising prices and expanding markets, *e.g.*, in war time. But the awkward and slow adjustment of wages to rising prices often makes it necessary for weavers

<sup>1</sup> Wage rates are similarly fixed on piece scale in Madras Presidency. The following rates prevailed in certain centres mentioned below. They show how they differ according to the specifications of the cloths manufactured:—

- Weaving wages :* (1) *Madura*—Coating—27" width—18s single—1½ as. per yard.  
do. —24s single—2½ as. per yard.  
do. 30s single—2½ as. per yard.
- (2) *Salem*—Cotton carpet—48" wide—8½s weft—5½ as. per yard.  
do. 36" wide—8½s weft—3½ as. per yard
- (3) *Chingleput*—Silk sari with gold lace and solid border—Rs. 2 per yard.
- (4) *Calicut*—Coating—28" wide—14½s × 6½s—1 anna per yard.  
Shirting—32" wide—2/64s × rayon—2 annas per yard.
- (5) *Madura*—Upavastram—52" × 3 yds—2/64s mercerised and rayon—3½ as. per yard.
- (6) *Tirumangalam*—Honeycomb towels—  
36" wide × 1½ yds.—2/20s × 24s—1½ as. per yd.  
Bleached towels—  
42" wide × 2½ yds.—24s × 24s—1½ as. per yd.  
Dhotis—54" × 4 yds. (56 to 60 picks and ends per inch.)—60s × 60s—3½ as. per yd.

*Winding charges at Cannanore :*

8 pies for 2/42s, 2/24s, 14½s, 20½s, and 32s	}	per 10 hanks.
12 pies for twisted yarn		
3 pies for all counts of white yarn		
4 pies for all counts of coloured yarn		
5 pies for all gummed warp yarn		
4 annas per pound of white rayon.		
5 annas per pound of coloured rayon.		

to give up work under their employers and work on their own account ; but this they cannot carry on for long due to their limited financial resources. This is what happened in 1917-21 in many weaving centres and why weavers left the Co-operative Sales Society at Itchapur in 1918-19.<sup>1</sup>

*Housing* :—The condition of housing of the weavers is deplorable. 'Khan' is the unit of accommodation which is roughly equal to 10 ft. by 5 ft. The most common form is the single room tenement of about two khans. The room rent in Poona is usually Rs. 2 per month, while in Ahmednagar it is Re. 1. The bachelor weavers or those living alone are often taken as boarders in some families but they practically live in the karkhanas. Some weavers hire a hall and live together using it both as their working and living place. For example in Poona in a hall measuring 25 ft. by 30 ft. seven families (comprising 7 men, 6 women and 9 children) and 7 looms are accommodated. In Ahmednagar and Poona some employers provide for their weavers residential facilities at concessional rates.

The boarding system is a convenient arrangement both to the weaver who stays as a boarder and the family which takes him up as one. To the former it is a source of economy ; he finds that his income is not sufficient for maintaining his family in the city and this arrangement enables him to maintain himself cheaply and remit a part of his income to his family staying in the village. To the family which takes the boarder it is a source of income. Usually women who have no male supporters supplement their income by taking boarders. Each boarder pays Rs. 5 per month in Sholapur and Rs. 6½ in Poona.

The conditions of living of the hand-weavers in Poona, Ahmednagar and Sholapur are as deplorable as they are everywhere else. They live in dilapidated buildings standing in the most crowded part of the city. Their place of residence is often their place of work. This means that there is very little privacy or peace. These quarters are often dingy, ill-ventilated and invariably over-crowded. In Sholapur there is for instance one building where about 40 families having over 170 members live, and this is not peculiar to Sholapur ; in Poona the conditions are no better. Rooms are often improvised with shabby screens of torn sacking or rags. 3 or 4 persons huddle together in a space of about 100 sq. ft. Their surroundings are no better. The areas occupied by the weavers are veritable slums ; the streets are winding, narrow and stinking, and full of small pools of stagnant water. Few houses have independent water supply, and still fewer have independent bathrooms and latrines. For instance in a colony of about 200 families in Bhavanipeth in Poona there are only two common lavatories and two water pipes. In Ahmednagar the streets are broader ; the houses have more open space, and there is more light and air. The rent is also lower and the living conditions are a shade better. There is also less crowding. Usually these tenements used by the weavers are good rent-yielding properties. In Sholapur the living conditions are as bad as in Poona ; but the rents are somewhat lower. It must, however, be borne in mind that the housing conditions of handloom workers are not in any way worse than those of the mill operatives or other working

<sup>1</sup> Refer to "The Handloom Industry in South India" by K. S. Venkâtraman.

classes in towns. Excepting the few housing colonies maintained by enlightened employers or by the Government in cities like Bombay and Madras, the housing and living conditions of mill hands are as deplorable as those of the handweavers.

*The Drink Evil:*—This part of the investigation has to be conducted with great caution. The monthly family expenditure on alcohol is estimated after ascertaining the number of members of the family addicted to drink, the frequency of their visits to the drinkshop, and the extent of expenditure on each occasion.

Among the weaving communities there is usually no taboo on drinking. But in Ahmednagar, due to the efforts made by the leaders of the Padmasale community, the drink habit seems to have been rooted out at least for the time being. Cheap toddy not being available in Ahmednagar, the weavers in the pre-prohibition days used to frequent country liquor shops and consequently the drink bill used to be very heavy. In Poona 41 out of 62 families studied are found to be addicted to drinking. 21 are teetotallers. In 12 families drinking is indulged in only occasionally; their average monthly expenditure does not exceed a rupee. In 16 families it is moderate, the monthly expenditure amounting to Rs. 2. In 13 cases the expenditure on drink must be considered to be excessive, being over Rs. 2. One very depressing fact is the growing habit of the women folk of the weaving communities in certain centres to drink. Community opinion not being in favour of women openly visiting the drinkshops, vendors arrange to deliver toddy at home in just the same way as milk is distributed by dairies. Being a very delicate question, the drink habit among women cannot be fully investigated. Incidentally it may be mentioned that this fact points to a very serious defect in the Excise Administration of the Province. Restrictions in regard to the hours during which toddy and liquor shops can be kept open are often circumvented by distributing toddy to consumers at their homes. On a moderate estimate the monthly expenditure on drink by the Poona families amounts to Rs. 60, i.e.,  $7\frac{1}{2}\%$  of their incomes. Most probably it is more. In Sholapur the condition is no better. 37 out of 54 families are addicted to drink, though no case of women addicted to this evil has been noted. It is said that the toddy shops in the vicinity of the handloom workers in Sholapur yield as high a rental as the shops in the area of cotton mill workers. This is not surprising. It is everywhere the case that the liquor and toddy shops in weaving centres fetch good prices at auctions.

*Indebtedness of Weavers:*—This question has been studied with particular care. Weavers are generally indebted to their employers and in some cases to others. Information in regard to the former is ascertained from their employers and later verified by the weavers concerned. Information in regard to the indebtedness of weavers to outside agencies can be obtained only from the weavers and their friends; naturally the information under this head is less reliable.

In 'Nagar 14 out of the 15 weavers are in debt. They have received as advances from their employers without interest a sum amounting to Rs. 1,007. Four weavers have incurred debts from other agencies to the extent of Rs. 275. In Poona 40 out of the 62 families are found to be in debt. In regard to 36 persons who furnished detailed informa-

tion, the total of their debts amounts to Rs. 3,213 of which a sum of Rs. 723 alone is from their employers, the rest being from others. It is to be noted that when the employers advance loans to the weavers they do not generally permit the weavers to take loans from others. It is mostly under the put-out system that the weavers have resorted to borrowing from outside agencies. It is found that about a dozen weavers are in debt, each to an extent of Rs. 100 and over. They have either suffered heavy losses in trade as cloth merchants or have borrowed for the purpose of building houses or purchasing lands or for marriage and other conventional expenses. In all other cases they are taken either to repay old debts or to meet current expenses at times when their incomes are reduced due to ill-health or slack season.

Interest is not charged (except on large amounts) on loans taken from employers. But where the sowcars or others lend, interest is paid at rates varying from 15 to 25% per annum. The rates are high because the loans are unsecured.

The total indebtedness of all the Poona and Ahmednagar weavers studied amounts to Rs. 4,500, which works out, if all families are taken, at the rate of Rs. 58½ per family; and if the families in debt are alone taken, it works out at the rate of Rs. 90 per family. Below is given a detailed analysis of 29 cases of interest-bearing loans :

#### *Interest-bearing Loans*

	Ahmednagar	Poona
(1) <i>Loans taken at 12% per annum :</i>		
The no. of families paying this rate of interest	2	8
The extent of their indebtedness .. ..	Rs. 47 0 0	Rs. 660 0 0
Monthly interest payments .. ..	Rs. 0 7 9	Rs. 6 9 6
Monthly incomes of the indebted families ..	Rs. 18 4 5	Rs. 139 1 9
The interest amount as a percentage of their incomes : 4. 7.		
(2) <i>Loans taken at 15% per annum :</i>		
The no. of families paying this rate of interest	4	9
The extent of their indebtedness .. ..	Rs. 295 0 0	Rs. 1265 0 0
Monthly interest payments .. ..	Rs. 3 11 6	Rs. 15 13 6
Monthly incomes of the indebted families ..	Rs. 59 6 0	Rs. 190 13 6
The interest amount as a percentage of their incomes : 8. 3.		
(3) <i>Loans taken at 18% per annum :</i>		
The no. of families paying this rate of interest	<i>Nil</i>	6
The extent of their indebtedness .. ..	.. ..	Rs. 795 0 0
Monthly interest payments .. ..	.. ..	Rs. 11 15 6
Monthly incomes of the indebted families ..	.. ..	Rs. 84 4 9
The interest amount as a percentage of their incomes : 14.		
(4) <i>The number of all indebted families paying interest :</i>	6+23=29	
The extent of their indebtedness .. ..	.. ..	Rs. 3062 0 0
The amount of the monthly interest payments .. ..	.. ..	Rs. 38 10 0
The amount of the monthly incomes of the families paying interest .. ..	.. ..	Rs. 491 14 3
The interest amount as a percentage of their incomes : 7½.		

The total monthly interest charges on debts of the capital value of Rs. 3,062 of the 29 families amount to Rs. 38-10-0. This is about 7½% of their incomes.

The advances from employers are more or less retaining fees ; for during the period these advances are not returned, the weavers have no free market for their labour, and they must work only for their creditor-employers. These advances are adjusted by recovering a part from the monthly earnings of the weavers, but as a rule they are more or less constant, for these advances are often renewed. It is said that attempts to recover these advances when the weavers change their masters are only partially successful. This kind of employers' advances to weavers are more common in Ahmednagar than in Poona. This perhaps explains partly why the weaving rates are lower in Ahmednagar than in Poona and why the rate of labour turnover in Poona is greater than in Ahmednagar.

*Indebtedness of Hand-weavers at Sholapur*:—25 out of the 34 families investigated are in debt. 16 of them are indebted to their employers, 3 to outsiders only and of the rest 6 are under obligation to both. The total of the debts in the form of advances received from their employers amounts to about Rs. 760 and the amount due to outsiders is nearly Rs. 280. The former bears no interest but the rate of interest on loans from sowcars and others is usually 6 ps. per rupee per month, *i.e.*, 37½% per annum. Thus the total debt amounting to Rs. 1,040 forms about 25% of their annual income from weaving. The annual interest charges on the loans of Rs. 280 from sowcars and other outsiders comes to nearly Rs. 100. This payment of interest may not appear as an alarming percentage to the total incomes of all the 34 families, but it is as high as 13% of the annual incomes of the families paying the interest charges. Now to note the significance of these debts and the incidence of these charges to individual families with varying income: Only in 11 out of 25 cases of the indebted families is the debt above Rs. 50 each, but as a percentage to their annual incomes it is large; in 6 cases the debt is over 30% of their annual incomes; in 12 cases it is above 21% but below 30% and in 5 cases it is between 11 and 20% and only in 2 cases are the debts below 10% of their annual income from weaving.

The causes of indebtedness as given by the weavers themselves are: (1) unemployment due to depression and therefore insufficiency of their incomes, (2) extra expenses for marriage and other social conventions and (3) extra expenditure due to and the loss of income from ill health.

The weavers in Poona seem to be more steeped in debt than weavers of Ahmednagar or Sholapur. For this no special cause can be assigned.

(To be continued)