

# THE ECONOMIC CONDITION OF HANDLOOM WEAVERS\*

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## IX

### STANDARD OF LIFE OF THE HANDWEAVER

**A**N attempt was made to study the standard of life of the weavers, particularly of the Telugu Padmasale community in Sholapur, Poona and Ahmednagar. A few family budgets were collected ; but it is not claimed that they were studied either intensively or extensively. Students of economics can easily realise that a study of family budgets of a community can by itself form the subject matter of an independent thesis. The budgets here presented, however, are illustrative rather than representative of the standard of life of the weaving community. And their main purpose is to give a sense of completeness to the present study of the economic condition of the weaver.

A word of explanation in regard to the nature and scope of the study is not out of place. The actual expenditure incurred by a few families for about a period of a month is ascertained. The amount spent on rice, jowari, and meat among the food articles, and on firewood, kerosene, drink, house-rent and interest on loans among others are specifically noted. The total weekly or monthly expense on the rest of the foodstuffs as a whole is also obtained. Wherever possible the quantity and value of each item are ascertained from the weaver and his wife. The prices of commodities as given by the weaver are subjected to the verification of the provision dealers in the neighbourhood. Regarding expenditure on clothing, it is an estimate based on the inventory of the clothes worn and the purchases actually made during the preceding half-year and their

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\* The previous part appeared in the January (1942) issue of this Journal.

average prices.<sup>1</sup> Silk cloth like *sari*, *rumal* etc., is very occasionally purchased. Sheets and bed-covers are not included in these estimates as the expenditure under this head is negligible.<sup>2</sup> It must further be noted that the expenses on medical aid, travels, pilgrimages, marriage and other ceremonies being uncertain and irregular are not noted in the family budgets; for it is feared that there will be a very large element of error if these items are included without a detailed investigation.

Another small fact is also to be noted. In Sholapur the karkhanadars provide weavers with free lodgings; they charge them only two annas per month per adult male worker to cover municipal and other taxes. Therefore to both the incomes and expenses of the weavers in Sholapur must be added the price that they would have to pay for the lodging if it is not freely provided. It is learned that a four-room tenement in the weavers' locality (big enough for residential and industrial purposes) can be had for an annual rent varying from Rs. 60 to 75 according to the facilities it has. This unit is usually occupied by four families; and this works out at the rate of Rs. 1½ or Rs. 1¼ per month per family. Besides free lodgings, the Sholapur weavers are given an anna a week for oil for the loom and tobacco for smoking. These items are to be included in the estimates of the real incomes of weavers at Sholapur in order to make them comparable with those of the weavers in other centres.

#### THE FAMILY BUDGETS OF HANDLOOM WEAVERS AT SHOLAPUR

The expenditure noted here accounts for nearly 81% of the family income. Expenses on such items like medicines, travel, education etc., are excluded. In the table below each item of expenditure is given as a percentage of the total income and again of the total expenditure specifically ascertained:—

<sup>1</sup> For instance, the expenditure on clothing incurred by the families whose budgets are the subject matter of the present note is based on the following data:—

Annual requirements and expenditure	Family (A)	Family (B)	Family (C)
<i>Men's</i>			
Dhotis	2 pairs Rs. 4	2 pairs Rs. 4	3 pairs Rs. 6
Shirts and bunyans	6 units Rs. 3½	6 pairs Rs. 3½	8 units Rs. 5
Rumals	2 units Rs. 3	2 units Rs. 3	3 units Rs. 4½
<i>Women's</i>			
Saris	2 units Rs. 4	2 units Rs. 4	3 units Rs. 7
Chadis	4 units Rs. 6	nil	2 units Rs. 4
Cholis	12 units Rs. 2½	4 units Rs. ½	12 units Rs. 2½
<i>Clothes for children</i>	Nil	Nil	Rs. 2
Total expenses for a year	Rs. 23	Rs. 15½	Rs. 30½
Average weekly expenditure	Re. 0-7-1	Re. 0-4-5½	Re. 0-9-5½

<sup>2</sup> Expenditure on bedsheets and other household linen in the family budgets of Sholapur millhands amounts to Rs. 4½ per annum, where the total expenditure is nearly Rs. 440, which is hardly one per cent of the total expenditure.

Table showing the average monthly expenditure of some weaving families at Sholapur

Items of expenses	Average expenditure of all families	As a percentage to the total	
		Expenditure	Incomes
	Rs. as. ps.		
Rice .. ..	2 12 0	29.2	23.6
Jowari .. ..	0 13 4	8.8	7.1
Other food items .. ..	2 9 3	27.1	22.2
All food items .. ..	6 2 7	65.1	52.9
Fuel and light .. ..	0 11 4	7.5	6.1
House taxes* .. ..	0 1 2	0.8	0.6
Clothing .. ..	0 14 0	9.2	7.5
Drink and tobacco .. ..	1 0 8	11.1	8.9
Interest charges .. ..	0 9 6	6.3	5.1
Total ascertained expenditure .. ..	9 7 3	100.0	81.1
Total income .. ..	11 11 1	....	100.0

\* Lodgings are freely provided by the employers; hence only the taxes, which are paid by the weavers are noted.

This leaves a margin of Rs. 2-3-10 per month which is 19% of the total income. There are innumerable other items of expenses which a family has to incur. We are not in a position to state from the data collected whether the weaver has a deficit or a surplus after meeting all his ordinary expenses. Evidently the low margin that is left and the fact that most of the weavers are in debt point to the conclusion that the income in the majority of cases is insufficient.

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### THE STANDARD OF LIFE OF THE HANDLOOM WEAVER : A COMPARATIVE STUDY

We shall just attempt to make a comparative study of the standard of life of the handloom weaver with that of workers in other occupations. At the outset it must be said that all comparative studies of family budgets and incomes will have to be made with great caution; for the differences in the environment, in the character of the industries, in the social customs and manners of the people working therein are great and they will have to be carefully noted. A comparison can be (a) *regional*, (i.e., it can relate to handloom weavers at different centres) or (b) *vocational*, (i.e., it can pertain to workers in different industries, handicrafts and trades in the same centre) or (c) *communal*, (i.e., it may cover workers in the hand weaving industry belonging to different social groupings like the Decanis, the Telugu Padmasales, the Tamil Kakkolars and other communities. Interesting as this study is, it cannot be done satisfactorily by the present writer, for the obvious reason that his time and resources are strictly limited. However, an attempt is made to compare the condition of the Telugu Padmasales in Sholapur with that of (1) the handloom

workers in Poona and in some centres in the Madras Presidency, (2) the skilled and unskilled labourers in other occupations in and around Sholapur and (3) the workers in cotton weaving mills in Sholapur, Bombay and other centres.

## (A) REGIONAL COMPARISON

The comparison of the standard of life of the handloom workers in the Bombay-Deccan, and in the Tamil and Telugu districts in the Madras Presidency, is attempted on the basis of the data collected by the author of this note in Sholapur in 1936 and in the Tamil districts in the Madras Presidency in 1927-28. For information regarding the weavers in the Telugu districts he has solely depended on the facts noted by Prof. N. G. Ranga. These data are given in separate statements. (*Vide* the following tables.) As the data were collected at different periods with no common basis, the comparison of money incomes and expenditure on each item will not be of use. However, the expenditure on each group of commodities as a percentage to the total incomes can be compared with some advantage.<sup>1</sup> Hence the accompanying tables.

*Table indicating the Family Budgets of Handloom Weavers in the Tamil Districts, Madras Presidency (1927-28)\**

	Tirunirmalai Chingleput Dt. A Kaili Weaver (1928)	Arisipalayam Salem Dt. (1927)	Coimbatore (1928)	Kumbakonam Tanjore Dt. (1928)
Size of the family	1 man 1 woman 2 children	2 men 3 women 2 children	1 man 2 women 2 children	1 man 1 woman 2 children
Consumption units in the family	2.8	5.4	3.6	2.8
Average income per month	Rs. 16 0	Rs. 35 0	Rs. 18 0	Rs. 15 0
<i>Expenditure :</i>	Rs. a. p.	Rs. a. p.	Rs. a. p.	Rs. a. p.
Rice .. .. .	6 2 0	16 0 0	8 0 0	6 8 0
Pulse and gram .. .. .	0 6 0	1 4 0	0 8 0	0 8 0
Other food articles .. .. .	2 7 0	5 2 0	2 12 0	2 4 0
Total expenditure on food .. .. .	8 15 0	22 6 0	11 4 0	9 4 0
Fuel and lighting .. .. .	0 12 0	1 4 0	0 12 0	0 12 0
House rent, repairs etc. .. .. .	0 8 0	1 8 0	1 12 0	0 12 0
Clothing .. .. .	1 8 0	3 8 0	2 0 0	1 4 0
Drink, tobacco etc. .. .. .	1 8 0	2 0 0	1 8 0	0 12 0
Interest on loans .. .. .	0 10 0	nil	0 12 6	0 6 0
Total of ordinary expenses .. .. .	13 13 0	30 10 0	18 0 6	13 2 0

\* These budgets were collected by the author while he was working as a research student of the University of Madras. He does not claim for them any representative character, for they are casual enquiries made in some other connection.

<sup>1</sup> A comparison of the expenditure under each group as a percentage of the total expenditure will be misleading unless all items of expenditure are carefully noted. As the expenses on travel, medical help, pilgrimage etc., are not collected by the writer and as he thinks that these items of expenses are highly conjectural and vary widely, they would, if included, vitiate the accuracy of the other data. Hence the group expenditure is given as a percentage of the total income.

Table indicating the Family Budgets of Handloom Weavers in the Telugu Districts in the Madras Presidency\*\*

Place	Anantapur District	Cuddappa District	Chittoor District
<b>Size of the family :</b>			
Men .. ..	1	2	2
Women .. ..	1	3	2
Children .. ..	1	3	1
Total consumption units .. ..	2.3	4.4	4.1
Average monthly income .. ..	Rs. 13 0 0	Rs. 26 8 0	Rs. 35 10 0
<b>Monthly expenditure :</b>	Rs. a. p.	Rs. a. p.	Rs. a. p.
Rice .. ..	4 0 0	4 0 0	7 0 0
Cholam .. ..	2 0 0	8 0 0	7 0 0
Pulse and gram .. ..	0 12 0	1 0 0	0 12 0
Other food items .. ..	1 14 0	2 12 0	6 0 0
Total expenses on food .. ..	8 10 0	15 12 0	20 12 0
Fuel and lighting .. ..	1 12 0	1 12 0	1 0 0
House rent etc. .. ..	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Not mentioned
Clothing .. ..	1 8 0	5 4 0	6 0 0
Drink and tobacco .. ..	0 8 0	2 0 0	3 0 0
Interest on loans .. ..	nil	nil	1 0 0
Miscellaneous .. ..	1 2 0	1 0 9	1 10 9
Total expenditure .. ..	13 8 0	25 12 0	33 6 9

\*\* These abstracts of family budgets are taken from Prof. N. G. Ranga's "The Economics of the Handloom." For purposes of comparison, they are reduced to a uniform basis of monthly income and expenditure.

Table indicating the Family Budgets of Telugu Padmasale Handloom Weavers in Sholapur : (Average weekly income and expenditure for December 1936)

Name of the head of the family	Sivasamayya Durgam	Balayya Bollu	Laksmayya Adam
Size of the family .. ..	2 men and 3 women	2 men and 1 woman	3 men, 1 woman and 2 children
Consumption units* .. ..	4.4	2.0	4.8
<b>Weekly earnings :</b>			
1. From weaving .. ..	Rs. 3 2 4	Rs. 3 15 0	Rs. 6 11 0
2. From preparatory processes .. ..	Rs. 2 4 0	Rs. 0 12 0	Rs. 0 12 0
3. From other sources .. ..	nil	nil	nil
Total weekly earnings .. ..	Rs. 5 6 4	Rs. 4 11 0	Rs. 7 7 0

\* Consumption units are calculated on the basis as mentioned below: Adult male worker=1; Adult woman=0.8; and child=0.5.

(Table continued on the facing page)

(Table continued from the facing page)

Weekly expenditure : (a) on food	Quantity	Cost	Quantity	Cost	Quantity	Cost
		Rs.a.p.		Rs. a. p.		Rs. a. p.
Rice .. .. .	12½ srs.	1 4 0	12 srs.	1 4 0	16 srs.	1 10 0
Jowari .. .. .	6 srs.	0 6 0	2½ srs.	0 2 6	10 srs.	0 10 0
Pulse and grams .. .. .	1½ srs.	0 3 0	1 srs.	0 1 9	2 srs.	0 3 6
Edible oils .. .. .		0 2 6		0 1 9		0 4 3
Salt .. .. .		0 1 3		0 1 0		0 1 3
Condiments .. .. .		0 3 0		0 3 9		0 4 0
Meat and fish .. .. .	¼ sr.	0 3 0	¼ sr.	0 4 6	1 sr.	0 6 0
Tea .. .. .		0 2 0		0 6 0		0 6 0
Vegetables .. .. .		0 1 0		0 2 0		0 4 0
<b>Total expenditure on food articles (item a) .. .. .</b>		<b>2 9 9</b>		<b>2 11 3</b>		<b>4 1 0</b>
<b>(b) on fuel and lighting :</b>						
Kerosine .. .. .		0 1 0		0 1 0		0 1 6
Firewood .. .. .		0 4 0		0 3 0		0 6 6
<b>Total expenditure on fuel and lighting (item b) .. .. .</b>		<b>0 5 0</b>		<b>0 4 0</b>		<b>0 8 0</b>
<b>(c) on Drink and tobacco :</b>						
Beedi, tobacco, pan etc.		0 2 0		0 2 0		0 3 0
Drink (toddy) .. .. .		0 6 0		0 4 0		0 8 0
<b>Total on item (c) .. .. .</b>		<b>0 8 0</b>		<b>0 6 0</b>		<b>0 11 0</b>
<b>(e) on other items :</b>						
House rent .. .. .		nil		nil		nil
Municipal tax (2 annas per male worker per month) .. .. .		0 1 0		0 1 0		0 1 6
Dress and clothing .. .. .		0 7 1		0 4 6		0 9 6
Interest on loans .. .. .		0 3 6		0 3 6		0 7 3
		(@Rs. 23 a year)		(@ Rs.15½ a year)		(@ Rs. 30½ a year)
<b>Total expenditure excluding that on travel, medical aid and other extraordinary items (Total of items a to d)</b>		<b>4 2 4</b>		<b>3 14 3</b>		<b>6 6 3</b>

Table indicating the Percentage of the Income spent on Different Heads by certain Weaving Families in certain Regions

Families	Sholapur			Tamil Districts				Telugu districts		
	A	B	C	A	B	C	D	A	B	C
Foodstuffs .. .. .	48.6	53.4	55.4	56.0	64.0	62.0	61.5	66.0	59.5	58.0
Fuel and lighting .. .. .	5.8	6.0	6.3	4.5	3.5	4.0	5.0	8.0	7.0	3.0
House rent .. .. .	0.6	0.6	0.6	3.0	4.0	9.5	5.0	Not stated		
Clothing .. .. .	8.2	6.0	8.0	9.0	10.0	11.0	8.0	11.5	20.0	16.0
Drink and tobacco .. .. .	9.3	8.0	9.1	9.0	5.5	8.0	5.0	4.0	7.5	8.0
Interests on loans .. .. .	4.0	4.6	6.3	4.0	..	5.0	2.5	..	..	3.0
<b>Total expenses ascertained</b>	<b>76.5</b>	<b>78.6</b>	<b>85.7</b>	<b>85.5</b>	<b>84.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>87.0</b>	<b>89.5</b>	<b>97.0</b>	<b>90.0</b>

The above statement brings out clearly certain facts. In all cases more than half the income is spent on foodstuffs. The proportion of the income spent on foodstuffs in Tamil and Telugu districts is much higher than in Sholapur. The regional difference on the expenses incurred on individual items is due perhaps to the different periods to which the figures refer. Further, the expenditure of Sholapur weavers on house rent is negligible. This can be explained. Here the lodgings are provided freely by the employers to workers; and their costs are not included in the table. In Telugu districts there is no mention of the house rent, repairs or taxes. Workers in the Madras Province seem to spend more on clothing than the weavers in Sholapur. This is rather surprising; for one would expect persons in the Bombay-Deccan, a much colder tract than the south, to use more clothing. The expenditure on clothing in Telugu districts is relatively high; it is due to the inclusion of expenditure on bedding, sheets etc. The percentage of the income spent on drink seems to be greater among weavers of the Bombay-Deccan than among the other weavers.

*The diet of the weaver* :—It is characteristic that more than half the income of the weaver is spent on foodstuffs. This shows his extreme poverty. Cereals account for the bulk of the food he consumes. Vegetables, milk-products, non-vegetarian foods are seldom consumed. In Tamil districts rice with a little mixture of gram and pulses is the staple food of the weaver. In Telugu districts there is a greater variety of cereals in the food consumed. Rice is substituted by jowari or ragi. But the volume of cereal consumption seems to be the same in all centres. In Sholapur the three families having 7 men, 5 women and 2 children consume 62 seers of cereals and pulses per week, *i.e.*, about 18 lbs. per day. This works out at the rate of  $1\frac{1}{2}$  lbs. per head per diem. This is insufficient even as compared to the rations for prisoners in jails. Besides, there is an undue predominance of cereals in the diet of the Indian handloom weaver. This is so even in the case of other classes of workers. It is wrong to assume that this cereal diet is adopted mainly for reasons of climate or religious scruples. The Indian labourer prefers a cereal dietary out of economic necessity; for his first concern is to fill his stomach and satisfy his hunger in the cheapest possible way. For instance, in Sholapur the weaver can get a pound of meat for three annas; for the same amount of money he can get six pounds of jowari or three pounds of rice. The expenditure on meat and mutton to meet his full requirements is beyond his capacity. They are still a great luxury to him. At present he spends hardly 3% of his income on non-vegetarian food. He consumes very little of milk-products. Tea with very little milk in it and diluted butter milk comprise his consumption of milk-products. Similarly, he consumes the cheapest of vegetables like garlic, onion and some greens.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The diet of the mill workers is no better. Refer *Family Budgets of the working classes* by the Bombay Labour Office.



## XI

## (B) VOCATIONAL COMPARISON

(i) *The Handloom Worker and the Urban and Rural Labourer: A Comparison of their Economic Condition*

In the wage census conducted by the Bombay Labour Office in 1935 the average wage rates of different classes of workers are noted.<sup>1</sup> The rates are not uniform in the different areas. This is as it should be ; for their conditions of life, traditions, customs and manners are different. The southern and central parts of the Bombay-Deccan form a homogeneous area and the working conditions and earning capacities of weavers which we are now studying are with reference to the weavers in this area. Therefore it will be useful to compare the incomes of weavers and of other classes of labour in this tract. The average daily earnings of different groups of urban and rural workers and the average daily earnings of handloom weavers in the Deccan circle are ascertained from the Bombay Labour Gazette and from the author's personal investigation respectively ; and the following table is prepared :

*Table indicating the Average Daily Wages per Adult Male Worker in Different Occupations in the Deccan Circle*

	1933		1934		1936	
	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural
Handweaver (cotton)*—						
Sholapur .. ..	6½ as.	..	6½ as.	..	5½ as.	..
Poona .. ..	10 as.	..	9 as.	..	8 as.	..
Agriculture—						
Field worker .. ..	0 5 4	0 4 11	0 5 6	0 4 9	Not available	
Unskilled labourer .. ..	0 6 11	0 5 11	0 6 8	0 5 7	do.	
Skilled labourer .. ..	1 2 11	0 15 10	1 3 4	0 15 6	do.	

\* N.B.—The average daily earnings of weavers are based on the actual incomes of weavers as ascertained for 1936 ; but their daily rates of wages for 1933 and 1934 are arrived at on the basis of the changes in the rates for weaving.

It is difficult to say how far these figures are exactly comparable. Besides, these wage-rates are by no means a reliable indicator of the average monthly or annual income, as nothing is known about the regularity and the extent of employment actually secured. The figures of daily earnings as given in the Bombay Labour Gazette will have therefore to be used with great caution. The average earnings of weavers, on the other hand, are worked out after ascertaining their actual incomes during

<sup>1</sup> Refer pages 285-292, *Labour Gazette*, Bombay.

a sufficiently long period, allowing for the incidence of their unemployment and absence from work.<sup>1</sup>

Further, the average daily earnings of Sholapur handloom weavers, noted above, have to be increased by one anna which roughly represents the cost of lodgings provided freely to them. Even without including it, the average earnings of Sholapur weavers are higher than, or at least as high as, those of the other classes of workers (skilled artisans like masons, carpenters, smiths and others being excluded). The earnings of Poona weavers are still higher.

As against these points in favour of the handloom weavers there are some unfavourable factors which must be noted. Similar money incomes in rural areas and even the smaller money incomes of agricultural workers can go much farther than the incomes of urban labourers and artisans like the handloom workers. The conditions of life of the rural population are easier. The housing condition in the rural areas is distinctly superior to that of the towns. It is safe not to make any sweeping generalisation in the absence of comparative intensive studies. But taking all factors into consideration, it is to be noted that the handloom weavers both in the urban and rural parts do not seem, (as it is generally believed), to have a real income lower than that of the other classes of rural workers, nor even than that of the ordinary labourers in urban places. Perhaps it may be true that the weavers as a class often indulge in unproductive or wasteful consumption, like drink and tobacco; and this offsets the advantage of having a greater income. It is characteristic that liquor and toddy shops are generally located in the vicinity of places where handloom weavers reside. The dope shops in these areas usually fetch very high rentals in abkari auction. Their customers are mainly drawn from the weaving community.<sup>2</sup> It must however be borne in mind that the handloom weavers are not specially to blame. The condition of other craftsmen and of the cotton factory hands is in no way better. If the total per capita rental yield is taken as a criterion it is much greater in regard to toddy and liquor shops situated in the cotton mill areas of Bombay, Sholapur etc. Besides, the incidence of indebtedness to the Pathans is also much greater among cotton mill-hands. So higher money incomes of mill hands or urban skilled workers do not necessarily mean a better standard of life. But this much is certain; neither the income from handloom weaving nor the standard of life of the handloom worker is so low as to deserve a specially severe condemnation. This becomes clear if we compare the income and condition of life of the handweavers with those of the bulk of the working classes in rural and urban areas. Levels of incomes and standards of

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<sup>1</sup> According to information obtained the field worker in this area is hired for an annual payment of Rs. 80 to Rs. 100, which comes to  $3\frac{1}{2}$  to  $4\frac{1}{2}$  annas a day. In the adjoining districts belonging to the Hyderabad State, the wage rate according to the economic enquiry conducted by Prof. Kesava Aiyengar of the Hyderabad University, ranges from 2 to 4 annas per adult male worker and it varies from 1 to 3 measures of grain in Raichur district, and  $2\frac{1}{2}$  to 5 annas in Warangal district lying just east of Sholapur and south east of Ahmednagar districts.

<sup>2</sup> It was noted by the author that in 1927-28 more than half the abkari revenue in Salem district, Madras Province, came from the shops in some 30 weaving centres. The per-capita rental yield was also the highest in those villages where there are settlements of weavers.

life which we regard as desirable cannot be absolute ; to be of value in formulating a social policy they must be obviously related to the present economic condition and the reasonable possibilities of economic development of the country in the immediate future. If standards unrelated to concrete realities of life are evolved with the fervour of an idealist or imported blindly from abroad and applied to countries with different conditions, they cannot survive long.

## XII

## (B) VOCATIONAL COMPARISON—(contd.)

(ii) *A Comparison of the Economic Condition of the Workers in Cotton Mills and the Handloom Weavers*

A comparative study of the economic condition of workers in cotton mills and in the handloom industry will now be made. Their economic condition can be compared in terms of (a) their earnings and (b) their standard of life. We shall first compare the estimated daily earnings of handloom weavers and the earnings of certain classes of workers in cotton mills in the different parts of the country. From the data furnished by the Provincial Departments of Industries to the Indian Tariff Board in 1932, it is possible to have an idea of the *daily earnings of the handloom weavers*. Their average earnings vary according to the nature of the cloth woven. The following table of the maximum, minimum and average daily earnings of hand-weavers in different provinces is compiled from *The Report of the Indian Tariff Board, Volume II (1933)*.

*Daily Earnings of Handloom Workers*

Province	Maximum	Minimum	Average
	Rs. as. ps.	Rs. as. ps.	Rs. as. ps.
Madras .. .. .	0 15 4	0 7 6	0 10 3
Bombay .. .. .	0 15 0	0 6 6	0 10 2
Pengal .. .. .	1 4 0	0 8 0	0 13 3
Bihar and Orissa .. .. .	1 0 3	0 8 6	0 12 3
United Provinces .. .. .	1 0 0	0 12 6	0 14 3

During the same period the *average daily earnings of workers in cotton mills* in certain centres in the Bombay Province are noted below. They are taken from the "Report of the Departmental Enquiry into Wages and Unemployment in Cotton Mills" conducted by the Bombay Labour Office (1933-34).

*Table indicating the Average Daily Earnings of Workers in Cotton Mills  
(December 1933)*

Centres	Two-loom weavers (men only)		Ring siders (men only)		Winders (mainly women and children)	
	Average daily earnings	Average monthly earnings*	Average daily earnings	Average monthly earnings*	Average daily earnings	Average monthly earnings*
	Rs. as. ps.	Rs. as. ps.	Rs. as. ps.	Rs. as. ps.	Rs. as. ps.	Rs. as. ps.
Bombay ..	1 8 10	38 1 1	0 14 10	21 3 3	0 11 9	16 14 7
Ahmedabad ..	1 14 4	49 4 8	1 1 0	27 10 0	0 11 11	19 15 0
Gujarat Area ..	1 10 6	..	0 12 9	..	0 8 6	..
Sholapur ..	1 8 0	31 14 8	0 10 7	15 8 0	0 5 6	7 11 6
Khandesh area *	1 4 2	31 0 7	0 10 4	15 4 0	0 7 2	9 15 5
S. Maratha ..	0 15 3	21 5 1	0 8 1	11 2 0	0 6 3	8 8 6

\*Monthly averages are calculated on the basis of 26 working days in a month.

Mr. Arno Pearse in his book on '*Indian Cotton Industry*' has collected useful information regarding the average earnings of cotton mill operatives in certain centres in the Bombay Presidency.

*Table showing the Daily Average Wages in Cotton Mills in Some Centres of  
Bombay Presidency during 1930 (Arno Pearse)*

	Men	Women	Big lads	All workers
	Rs. as. p.	Rs. as. ps.	Rs. as. ps.	Rs. as. ps.
Bombay city ..	1 7 2	0 12 5	0 12 5	1 4 2
Ahmedabad ..	1 6 2	0 12 9	0 11 4	1 3 10
Sholapur ..	1 0 0	0 6 4	0 9 1	0 12 9
Baroda ..	1 0 6	0 10 10	0 8 0	0 15 3
Other centres ..	1 0 1	0 8 2	0 8 8	0 14 0
Average for Bombay Presidency ..	1 5 9	0 11 7	0 11 4	1 3 0

A few observations regarding the difference in the daily average earnings of mill operatives and of workers in the handloom industry can be

made. (1) The average daily earnings of mill workers as a class are undoubtedly higher than those of the handloom weavers. (2) This difference, however, is really great when the handloom weavers' wages are compared with those of the mill workers in Ahmedabad and Bombay; it tends to be narrowed down when the earnings of workers in mills in Gujarat, Sholapur, Khandesh and Southern Maratha districts are compared with those of the handloom workers. The mill workers in the Southern Maratha districts do not seem to earn much more than the handloom weavers in that tract. (3) If the earnings in different vocational groups are considered, the average earnings of the handloom weavers compare least favourably with those of the weavers proper in cotton mills. In the up-country mills the average daily income of the weaver is twice as much as that of the handloom weavers; while that of the weaver in mills in Ahmedabad or Bombay is easily thrice as much. But it deserves to be noted that persons with large average daily money incomes form less than a fourth of the total number of persons working in cotton mills. The earnings of other operatives in cotton mills are higher than those of handloom weavers but not very much; they are hardly 25% higher. (4) But these higher incomes in mills do not necessarily mean easier conditions of life. (5) Women and children in cotton mills, as a rule, earn more than what they do in the handloom industry. But the scope for their employment in cotton mills is limited by the present laws governing employment in factories.

*The average daily income of the Sholapur millhands and handloom workers compared :—*The above comparison and observations must be understood in the light of the limitation of the statistical data. The limitation to be first taken note of is that due to the variety of the local conditions, traditions etc., relating to employment. With a view to eliminate the error arising from regional differences, a comparison is now made between the earnings of handloom weavers and those of the mill operatives in Sholapur. The earnings of the latter in 1932-34 are noted from the Report of the Bombay Labour Office. The earnings of the handloom weavers are ascertained by personal enquiry. In 1933-34 the rates for weaving saris of a certain pattern on handlooms varied between  $10\frac{1}{2}$  and  $11\frac{1}{4}$  annas per piece; the corresponding rates in 1936 ranged from  $6\frac{3}{4}$  to  $8\frac{3}{4}$  annas. The actual average monthly earnings of handloom weavers in Sholapur were Rs. 11-2-9 in 1933 excluding the value of the lodgings provided freely by employers, or Rs. 12-10-9 including it. This works out at the rate of  $7\frac{3}{4}$  annas per day. To earn this amount the weaver in Sholapur has to prepare 3 to 4 saris a week which he can do if he works for 9 to 10 hours a day and uses the fly-shuttle in weaving.

In cotton mills most operatives are paid piece-wages. The standard rates depend on the nature of the work to be done. Weavers proper, who usually make attractive earnings, form hardly a fourth of the total number of the operatives in mills. A third of the mill hands are women and big lads. The rest are adult male workers. It is in the light of this composition of the workers in cotton mills that the following table of the average daily earnings of the different groups of full-time workers in cotton mills is to be read.

*Table indicating the Average Daily and Monthly Earnings of Workers in the Cotton Industry (Powerloom and Handloom) in Sholapur in December 1933*

	Average daily earnings	Average monthly earnings
(A) <i>Mill workers at Sholapur :</i>	Rs. as. ps.	Rs. as. ps.
1. Slubbing tenders—Men(P) .. .. .	0 14 8	18 2 0
2. Inter tenders—Men (P) .. .. .	0 13 2	17 13 0
3. Drawing tenders—Men(P) .. .. .	0 12 11	16 9 0
4. Roving tenders—Men(P) .. .. .	0 12 3	13 6 0
5. Siders (single)—Men(T) .. .. .	0 10 9	15 8 0
6. Tarwallas—Men (T) .. .. .	0 8 0	12 1 0
7. Doffers—Men, women and children (T) .. .. .	0 7 3	10 0 0
8. Weavers (one-loom)—Men(P) .. .. .	0 12 5	17 2 0
9. Weavers (two-loom)—Men(P) .. .. .	1 8 0	31 14 8
10. Winders (Grey yarn)—Women (P) .. .. .	0 4 11	
11. Winders (Coloured yarn)—Women(P) .. .. .	0 6 4	7 11 0
12. Reelers—Women(P) .. .. .	0 6 9	
(B) <i>Handloom workers at Sholapur :</i>		
1. Weavers—Men(P) .. .. .	0 7 9	12 10 9
2. Winders—Women .. .. .	..	3 6 9
3. Winders—Women and boys (machine)(T) .. .. .	..	6 0 0
4. Sizers—Women(P) .. .. .	..	7 8 0

(N. B.) P=Piece-Wages ; T=Time Wages.

*A comparison of the earnings of handloom weavers and mill workers in Poona:—* Similar comparison is made between the earnings of handloom workers and the workers in the Lakshmi Silk (Power Loom) Weaving Factory in Poona. The data refer to the year 1936. This comparison is much more appropriate, as both of them manufacture more or less the same type of cloth. In the powerloom factory the weaving rate (for labour alone) is Rs. 0-3-6 per sari ; other charges are excluded. On the handloom the rate is 12½ annas. But the earning of the powerloom weaver is about 14 annas a day ; or it comes to Rs. 22 per month of about 25 working days. The corresponding earnings of the handloom weaver in Poona are about 8 annas per day or Rs. 12-14-0 per month. (This is the average of the earnings of 56 weavers in Poona.) But the maximum monthly average earning of some individual handloom workers has been over Rs. 20, some of them earning Rs. 23 or so ; and the minimum earnings have also been as low as Rs. 7½.

This comparison of the incomes of handloom workers and mill operatives shows unmistakably that the latter earn more than the former. In Sholapur mills adult male workers (even if weavers having two looms to attend to are excluded) earn at least 50% more than the Sholapur handloom weavers. Similarly, women in mills earn twice as much as those in handloom industry, (the sizers and the machine winders and warpers excepted). In Poona the powerloom weaver gets 80% more than the average handloom weaver.

*Is the individual income or group income the true criterion?*—But these comparisons of the individual daily and monthly average earnings of workers in different industries and centres or even in the same centre do not convey much; they are in fact fallacious. For, individual income unrelated to the share that a particular group of workers obtains in the total income has a limited validity as a basis for economic judgment and social policy. To be more precise, it is asserted here that the fact that the individual earnings of mill workers are greater than those of the handloom weavers does not mean that the cotton mill industry is more economical than, or socially to be preferred to, the handloom industry; for the aggregate income of the group of workers is very much less and the number of people having the good fortune to have this income is fewer in the case of powerloom weaving. Further, this income in cotton mills is also unevenly distributed. But in the handloom industry the facts are different. For the same volume of production both the income accruing to the weavers as a whole and the number of workers sharing in that income are much larger. For instance, seven weavers in the silk factory at Poona producing 700 saris a month earn Rs. 153 or about Rs. 22 per head. Another dozen workers employed in other processes earn about Rs. 110. To produce the same number of saris on the handloom 40 weavers (excluding sizers, warpers and other workers) will have to be employed for a month. And their aggregate income on the present wage rate will amount to Rs. 525 or about Rs. 13 per head. This matter should not be treated as a simple problem in arithmetic; but we must try to understand its great significance in the present day Indian Social Economy. It is undeniable that there is grinding poverty in India; that the national income is very low and that a large part of it is absorbed by foreign financial interests; and this poverty is further aggravated by the unequal distribution of the national income. And it is now realised by a school of writers that certain types of capitalist enterprises in India are developing without a plan or proper social control which endanger individual economic security and impair social stability.

### XIII

#### MILLHANDS AND HANDLOOM WORKERS : A COMPARISON OF THEIR STANDARD OF LIFE

The money incomes as the basis of comparison have to be used with caution and have to be supplemented by other criteria. The line that will now be adopted as a supplement to the other is to compare the standard of life of the workers in the two branches of the industry on the basis of the proportions of their incomes spent on certain groups

of commodities which are usually consumed by them. In the Labour Gazette published by the Bombay Labour Office weights are assigned to the groups of commodities consumed by the working classes in Bombay. Similarly, the writer has ascertained the economic weights of the similar groups of commodities consumed by handloom weavers. He has also obtained similar data regarding the consumption of handloom weavers and millhands in Madras. It is on the basis of these data that the following table is prepared.

*Table indicating the Percentage of Income spent on Certain Heads by Handloom Weavers and Millhands in Sholapur and Madras*

Items of expenditure	Handloom weaver at Sholapur	Millhand at Sholapur	Millhand at Ahmedabad	Hand-weaver at Madras	Millhand at Madras
Food .. ..	52.9	49	58	61	68.1
Fuel and lighting	6.1	10	7	4.5	7.7
Clothing .. ..	7.5	12	10	9.5	10.0
House rent ..	0.6	6	12	5.5	9.8
Miscellaneous ..	14.0	6	4	9.5	4.4
<b>Total .. ..</b>	<b>81.1</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>90.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Though these percentages of expenditure of different classes of workers in different centres are not quite comparable, it is evident that both the handloom weavers and mill workers spend on food more or less the same proportion of their income. On fuel and lighting and clothing the handweaver spends less. But there is nothing in the data collected to warrant the conclusion that the standard of life of the worker in cotton mills is as much better as his earnings are higher.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The advantage of higher incomes of urban factory workers is often offset by other factors, e.g., higher cost of living, larger family etc. The following table of the percentage expenditure on different groups by families of Sholapur millhands with different incomes and composition will show that the percentage expenditure as representing their standard of life is not very different from that of the handloom weaver.

The following table is abstracted from the "Family Budgets of Sholapur Millhands (1925)" published by the Bombay Labour Office. It refers to the income groups and their expenditure on various items. (Footnote continued on the facing page.)



### A FURTHER DETAILED ANALYSIS OF THE FAMILY BUDGETS OF HANDLOOM WEAVERS AND COTTON MILL WORKERS

The following comparison of the daily consumption of food articles by an adult male worker in the handloom industry and in the cotton mill industry is based on the enquiries made by the author in Sholapur in 1936 and on Prof. N. G. Ranga's studies, and the "Family Budgets" of Prof. Findlay Shirras. And the consumption units are calculated on the same basis as that adopted by Prof. Shirras in his books.

*Table indicating the Daily Average Consumption of Food Articles per Adult Male Worker*

Food items	Handloom weavers		Bombay working class lb.	Bombay hand labour lb.	Jails : light labour lb.	'Diggers' (Famine code) lb.
	Sholapur lb.	Telugu Dts. lb.				
Cereals ..	1.34	1.05	1.29	1.5	1.38	1.29
Pulses ..	0.11	1.04	0.09	0.27	0.21	..
Beef, mutton, fish etc. ..	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.04	0.04	..
Salt ..	0.03	..	0.04	0.03	0.03	..
Oils ..	not ascertained	0.035	0.02	0.03	0.03	..
Others ..	..	0.23	0.07	..	..	..
Total ..	1.51	1.435	1.54	1.87	1.69	1.29

*Footnote continued from the facing page :-*

Income groups	% of families	Equivalent adult males	Income per adult male (estimate)	Percentage of income spent on				
				Food	Fuel & lighting	Clothing	House rent	Miscellaneous
Below Rs. 20 ..	8.3	2.56	Rs. 7	48.8	12.1	11.7	7.5	19.9
Between								
Rs. 21—30 ..	23.0	3.04	8	49.8	10.6	11.8	7.3	20.5
Rs. 31—40 ..	25.6	3.63	9	49.6	10.0	11.9	6.5	22.0
Rs. 41—50 ..	20.5	3.98	11	48.8	9.3	12.0	6.2	23.7
Rs. 51—60 ..	11.0	4.52	12	49.8	9.0	11.8	5.4	24.0
Rs. 61—70 ..	5.4	5.65	12	49.3	9.2	12.5	6.0	23.0
Rs. 71—80 ..	3.1	5.49	13	47.8	8.3	11.4	5.2	27.3
Rs. 81—90 ..	3.1	6.46	13	48.6	7.8	11.4	5.3	26.9
All incomes ..	100	3.83	9	49.3	9.6	11.9	6.3	22.9

It is evident from the table that the size of the income of the working classes has very little bearing on their family budgets. The ratio of the income spent on food is more or less the same in all income groups. Further, the income per head (column 4 in the table) does not increase in proportion to the increase in the family income. Where the income of the family is trebled, the per capita income has increased only by 50%. Again, it is to be noted that the average per capita income in this case is Rs. 9 as against the income of Rs. 6 to 7 of the Sholapur handweaver.

This table indicates that both handloom weavers and Bombay mill workers do not get as much food as even the convicts in jails. It further shows that the handloom weaver in Sholapur does not certainly occupy any position inferior to the Bombay mill operative in respect of his average daily consumption of food articles, though the estimates of Prof. Ranga tell a different tale. Whatever may be the other defects in the consumption schedule of the handweaver, it can be said that the handloom weaver in Sholapur, as compared to the mill worker in Bombay, is not certainly underfed. The standard of consumption of the necessaries of life is almost the same ; if there is any difference in respect of the foodstuff consumed in some cases the comparison will be favourable to the handloom worker. Perhaps the mill worker at Bombay has a greater variety in consumption and enjoys a number of social amenities.

#### XIV

#### GENERAL OBSERVATIONS ON THE FAMILY BUDGETS OF THE HANDLOOM WEAVERS

Family budgets enable us to understand the standard of life of the groups concerned. They attempt to measure the extent to which the communities in question are able to command the fullness of life ; and this measurement is made in terms of their income and the proportions of that income spent on different heads, like necessaries of life, necessaries for efficiency, conventional necessaries, comforts and luxuries. It is difficult to precisely define these terms ; but this much is obvious. In spite of the great changes in the social and economic environment, the standard of life of the working classes in cottage as well as organised industries in India is low. It may be that the position of the individual family has improved, or even that the position of the workers as a whole has improved on account of the general progress of science, but there is no doubt that the present standard of life of the workers in India has not appreciably changed for the better.

The analysis of the budgets of the handloom weavers shows that four items namely food, fuel and lighting, and house rent and clothing account for 65% of their total income or 88% of the ascertained expenditure ; *i.e.*, nearly two-thirds of the income is spent on barest necessaries for existence ; yet necessaries for efficiency, like good housing facilities, are not what they are desired to be. Squalid poverty is writ large everywhere. Even the expenditure on food is not adequate in some cases. There is some

expenditure on conventional necessities which are the target of critics ; though they may be aggravating factors of the primary poverty of the weavers, their curtailment cannot appreciably improve their economic conditions. The expenditure on education is next to nothing. Neither is the worker literate, able to read and write ; nor do his children receive any general or special craft-education on the lines the children of the working classes in other countries are trained. In Sholapur with a hand-weaving population of over 15,000 there are hardly fifty boys and a few girls in the primary schools located in the area occupied by the weaving communities. There is much evidence of indebtedness which accounts for 7 to 8% of the weaver's income and in some individual cases for 15% of their income. The common prevalence of indebtedness shows unmistakably that the weavers are not as a rule able to make both ends meet and to support themselves in their sickness or other periods of unemployment. Expenses on unhealthy items like drink, tobacco are a defect in their consumption. The interest paid on unproductive debts also makes a great hole in the weaver's pockets. There is nothing to indicate that the present standard of consumption of the workers is conducive to greater efficiency.

All this, however, does not mean that the weaver is to be specially blamed. It must be noted that this unproductive consumption is not in any sense peculiar to the weaver or the handicraftsman in general. As we have noticed before, the conditions of mill hands receiving money incomes twice or even thrice as much as the handloom workers are not in any way better. For instance, the mill operatives in Bombay spend 34% of their income on cereals, 2.2% on pulses, 20.8% on other articles of food, 7.5% on fuel and lighting, 9% on clothing, 8.9% on house rent and 17.6% on miscellaneous items.<sup>1</sup> The percentage of expenditure under these heads is not altogether different in the case of mill workers in Ahmedabad or Sholapur. This distribution of expenditure of the mill operative is not appreciably superior to that of the handloom weaver, who spends 30% on cereals, 2% on pulses, 25% on other foodstuffs, 6% on rent, 8% on clothing, 6% on fuel and lighting and 33% on miscellaneous items. Yet there is more evidence of the existence of primary poverty among handloom weavers than among factory workers and they are afflicted by a greater feeling of helplessness perhaps due to the absence of trade unions or other organisations.

<sup>1</sup> Findlay Shirras : *Working Class Budgets in Bombay.*

The accompanying table gives in brief the relative position of the handloom weavers and the mill operatives in respect of the size and composition of their families, their incomes, the extent of their indebtedness, their expenditure on drink and tobacco and on housing :—

*Table indicating the Relative Position of the Cotton Mill Workers and the Handloom Weavers*

	Mill operatives in			Handloom weavers in		
	Sholapur 1925	Ahmedabad 1924	Bombay 1935	Poona 1936	Ahmednagar 1936	Sholapur 1936
<b>(a) Composition of the family :</b>						
Its average size ..	4.68	4.07	4.35	3.39	3.93	2.79
Average number of workers in each family ..	1.96	1.66	1.53	1.97	2.26	2.08
Average number of dependents per family ..	2.72	2.41	2.82	1.42	1.67	0.71
<b>(b) Income :</b>						
Average monthly income per family Rs. ..	39 14 10	44 7 25	50 1 7	14 3 5	17 3 10	12 8 0**
<b>(c) Indebtedness :</b>						
Percentage of families in debt .. ..	61	not known	74	93*	61*	74*
Average debt per family (of all families) .. Rs.	..	..	130 7 9	81	52	22
Average debt per family (of families in debt only).Rs.	..	..	174 9 2	92	80	34
<b>(d) Drink, opium etc :</b>						
Percentage of families addicted to drink etc. ..	64.3	..	71.6	68	nil	70
Amount spent per family on toddy, liquor, beedi, bhang etc. (of all families) Rs. ..	1 10 7	1 13 10	3 3 8	0 15 5	nil	not known
<b>(e) Percentage of absenteeism ..</b>						
	12 to 15	3 to 4	7 to 9	7 to 8	9	5 to 6
<b>(f) House rent per room : per month Rs. ..</b>						
	1½ to 3	3 to 6	5 to 8	2	1 0 0	1½**

\*Small advances from employers are treated as debts.

\*\*Includes the cost of lodgings provided freely by employers.

It is clear from the above table that the average money income of the mill operative is greater than that of the handweaver. But this advantage is offset by many unfavourable factors such as (1) the larger composition of the family of the mill worker, (2) the higher costs of food, fuel, house

rent in large industrial centres where the cotton mills are located, (3) the greater incidence of unemployment and absenteeism due to sickness, strikes, lock-outs and other factors over which the worker has no control, (4) the greater chances for unproductive consumption in urban centres, and (5) the greater burden of indebtedness of industrial workers in cities.

But against all these shortcomings in the conditions of life of mill operatives, there is one factor which is undoubtedly the greatest advantage which they possess and the handloom workers do not ; and that is the workers in organised industries can easily evolve a protective organisation and improve their bargaining power and economic status. Trade unions which can insist on standards of employment can be fostered and through them the workers can make their just demands effective. This spirit of the craft, this consciousness of their place in the economic system, this organisation and unity will be very difficult to develop among handloom workers. They are dispersed over a vast area ; they lack political instinct, the spirit of collective action is not yet developed amongst them ; and in most cases they have not even an employer to blame. But in regard to their economic status, it is wrong to believe that the handloom weavers are unlike their fellow workers in cotton mills, that they cannot be saved from their present deplorable condition by any protective measure and that nothing can be done to enable them to enjoy a reasonable standard of life. It is equally wrong to conclude that the handloom industry is so hopelessly depressed and disorganised that there is no chance of its survival, and that it is foolish to strive for its revival. It is the view of the author of this note that at any rate the position of the handloom industry and the handweavers is not by any means more depressed than that of other industries and industrial workers in India ; and that it is neither wisdom nor expediency to allow the weavers and their industry to die by our callous indifference and to neglect them as the survival of the primitive past. On the contrary, the handloom industry, as it is said elsewhere, will have a place in the Indian national economy for some time to come.

## XV

### THE CHANGES IN THE ECONOMIC CONDITION OF THE HANDLOOM WEAVER

We shall now trace in broad outline the changes in the economic condition of the weaver since the middle of the last century. The decline in his economic condition first set in during the second quarter of the 19th century when the revolution in the Lancashire cotton industry was completed and when the Indian markets were flooded with the imports of cotton goods from England. At first the wages in hand-spinning and later in handweaving declined rapidly ; and in course of time this decline was further aggravated by the development of cotton mills in India. Also there was a steady fall in the number of persons depending on cotton handicrafts. One cannot say to what extent the volume of handloom production declined during the period of 1800-75. But the Indian export trade in cotton manufactures was practically reduced to nothing ; and the earnings of the weavers fell miserably low. This tendency continued evidently throughout the last century. The decline in wage rates and the earnings of weavers, the fall in the number of weavers, the shrinking of the export trade in hand woven goods (partly

due to the development of the powerloom weaving in England and later in India, and partly due to the policy of Imperial protection at first and of free trade later)—these are the main features of the history of this industry during the greater part of the 19th century. It is better to avoid sweeping generalisations regarding the position of the handloom industry, as no reliable and comparable data relating to the industry are available. But from 1870 the statistical intelligence was slowly improved. The decennial censuses, the systematic recording of the volume and value of India's foreign trade, the collection of price statistics, the inland trade returns, and the statistics of production in cotton mills were introduced. With the progressive improvement in the quality of the data furnished we are in a position to study the changes in the economic condition of the weaver and his trade.

*The change in the economic condition of the handloom weaver* :—We can study the changes in the prosperity of the weaver and his trade in the following aspects—1. the changes in the number of persons supported by handloom weaving and allied trades ; 2. the relation between weaving and agriculture ; 3. the changes in the volume of handloom production in relation to the total consumption of cloth in India ; 4. the changes in the status of the weaver ; 5. the trend towards concentration and urbanisation of the industry; and 6. the changes in the real income of the weaver. It is difficult to get precise data under all these heads ; but some broad generalisations are possible. We shall now deal with these aspects of the question.

(i) *Changes in the number of workers in the industry and of those supported by it* :—The number of handloom workers declined in every province during this period. Though the rate of decline is not uniform, there is no doubt that there was both a relative and absolute decline in their numbers. Further the improvement in the technique of the industry accounted for a greater decline in the number of persons engaged in the preparatory processes than in the weaving section proper. The decline in the number of women actually working in the industries connected with handweaving was much more pronounced than that of male workers.<sup>1</sup> This means a great fall in the income of the weaver's family from weaving. While his income from weaving is tending to fall as a result of the powerloom competition, the members of his family are driven to other sources of livelihood. The need to augment the shrinking income of his family accounts in part for the weaving family to migrate to towns where some subsidiary occupations like beedi manufacture can be secured.

(ii) *The tendency for handloom weaving to be divorced from the rural economy and agriculture* is becoming more and more pronounced. During the period under review there has been a steady fall in the number of weavers depending on agriculture. For instance, in the Madras Presidency the number of weavers partially dependent on agriculture declined from 21,176 in 1901 to 9,453 in 1921. Similar data are not available in the 1931 census. In Bombay the decline was more rapid. This means that agriculture was fast ceasing to be a source of supplementary income to weavers and the connection between weaving and agriculture was

<sup>1</sup> Refer K. S. Venkatraman : *The Handloom Industry in South India*, pp. 51—54.

fast disappearing. Taking other facts into consideration, this implies that the handloom weaver is hard pressed.

(iii) *The changes in the relative position of the handloom output to the total domestic production and consumption of cloth* :—The change in the economic condition of the weaver can be noted from the total production on the handloom, the proportion of the handloom manufactures to the total cloth consumed in India and the outturn per weaver employed in the handloom industry. Changes in all these respects are noted below :—

Year	Quinquennial average of yarn available for handlooms (in million lbs.)	Number of persons supported by cotton weaving (in 1000s)	Number of male workers (in 1000s)	Outturn in pounds	
				Per person supported	Per male worker
1901	220	5504	1850	40	119
1911	250	5966	1922	42	130
1921	265	4708	1539	57	172
1931	340	..	1678	..	201
1941	422*	..	....	..	..

\* Average for 1936-40.

It is clear from the above table that the total consumption of yarn, and the total consumption per worker and per person supported by the industry are increasing. This is an evidence of how the hand-weaving industry is maintaining its own, nay expanding by adopting such small technical improvements like the flyshuttle. This is often cited as a sign of the growing prosperity of the weaver. But an increase in production does not necessarily mean by itself corresponding improvement in the economic condition of the weaver. Production is, of course, one of the many criteria of the economic progress of the weaver and his trade. Extent and regularity of employment, wages and income of the weaver, the proportion of the handloom output to the total cloth production in India are, to mention a few, other tests. Regarding the extent of employment there is a definite absolute fall both in the number supported by the industry and in the number of actual workers therein. Allowing for the abnormal factors like influenza which affected the census of 1921, there is a fall in 1931 as compared to 1901 to the extent of 12%. And even allowing for errors of the census enumeration and methods, it cannot be claimed that the extent of employment in the handloom industry has remained even stationary. This is significant if it is remembered that the production on the handloom and the population of India have increased tremendously during the period. Further, a study of the handloom output from year to years reveals the violent fluctuations in employment and output. The years 1900, 1903, 1904, 1909, 1916, 1917, 1923 and 1928 witnessed a great distress of the handloom weavers.<sup>1</sup> Nine out of forty years have been very bad ones, and this means very serious consequences to the weaver. Even though the level and scope of employment

<sup>1</sup> Refer: *The Handloom Industry in South India*, by the Author, pp. 24-25.

have not changed during the last four decades, it is maintained with great difficulties. Increased production does not mean more employment nor more money incomes to the weavers; for other conditions have changed; the wage rate is falling; the cost of living is rising; the Indian powerloom competition is increasing; and the present war begotten prosperity is bound to be short-lived. Under these circumstances, it will suffice to mention here that there has been an improvement in the efficiency of the weaver; but his real income has not perhaps appreciably and permanently advanced.

Regarding the relative position of the handloom output to the total cloth consumed in India, it must be noted that the handloom output has increased absolutely; but it has not increased to the same extent as the consumption of cloth in India. From 28% in 1901-06 it declined to 23.4% in 1911-15; then it went up to 26.3% in the post-war period of 1921-25; and again it fell to 25.4% in 1926-30; and again it recovered to 27.6%. During the period of the present war which has given the handloom a great stimulus its share has increased considerably. But it is very difficult to say how far it will be in a position to maintain its present output. Howsoever, it seems that on the whole the handloom weaver has been successfully struggling to maintain his position against great odds.

As regards the number of persons depending on the weaver, a study of the censuses shows that the average size of the weaving family is increasing. In other words, the ratio of dependants to workers has increased. This may be due to changes in the basis of the census classification. But with women and young lads thrown out of the preparatory processes, and with their difficulty in finding new avenues of employment elsewhere, the dependence of the family on the weaver and his income must have increased. This is a sign, therefore, of deterioration in the economic condition of the weaver.

(iv) *The change in the status of the weaver* :—It is noticed everywhere that he has already ceased to be the independent handicraftsman that he was, having his own capital, labour, market, and making his own purchases and sales. But with the increasing complexity of the industrial and commercial organisation of modern times he is now depending for his work on a merchant employer, a middleman-financier, a karkhanadar or a factory owner. He has to depend on others for the purchase of his raw materials, for the marketing of his products, and for the finance he requires. This trend in the status of the weaver is often deplored; and it is pointed out as a symptom of the decline in his position. It is not necessarily so. A change in the structure and organisation is not a change for the worse if it comes in as a result of the change in the scale on which we live, or as a result of our scientific and social advancement, provided that it does not result in a permanent unemployment and lowering of the level of production and consumption of the classes of workers concerned, that it does not promote the exploitation of one class of workers by another, and that it does not intensify poverty and inequalities in the distribution of incomes of the community. But these 'ifs' are conspicuous by their absence in this case; and hence the change in the status is taken as an evidence of the straitened condition of the weavers.



(v) *The urbanisation of the industry*:—A similar argument applies equally to the trend of the migration of the handloom industry from the rural to the urban area. Concentration of the industry in towns and the recent trends towards its organisation on a factory basis and the loss of the independent status of the weaver are to be deplored, for they have brought to him some evil consequences. But it must be admitted that but for these changes the weaver would have been no where. While they reveal the remarkable adaptability of the weaver to the changing conditions of economic strife, they have also strengthened the weaver against powerloom competition for defence though not for attack. It must also be noted that these changes by themselves are amoral ; and they are to be judged by their consequences to the individual worker and the society. It is difficult to maintain that the present depressed condition of the handloom weaver or his industry is entirely due to the tendency for the industry to be urbanised and for the weaver to depend on the financier and the merchant. These changes are not the causes and need not necessarily be the symptoms of the decline of the weaver and his craft. On the other hand, as far as one can see, the lot of the handweaver in rural parts is not enviable. This explains why the weaver from the distant villages in the Nizam Dominions, for instance, is leaving his home and migrating to cities and why he is seeking employment in karkhanas at Poona, Sholapur and other places. The loss of his independent status brings to him greater material gains in the form of regularity of work and better income and enables him to survive in the struggle for existence. But conditions independent of the efficiency of the weaver and the economic vitality of his trade, and many other factors beyond the control of the weaver, account for a great deal of the depression in his economic condition. But the existence of these conditions and the consequent helplessness of the weaver have led to his exploitation by other interests. It is in this sense that these changes indicate a change for the worse in the economic position of the weaver.

(vi) *The changes in the real income of the weaver*:—The facts so far examined indicate only indirectly the trends in the economic condition of the weaver. However, the most dependable index of the prosperity of the weaver is his real income. This is to be measured by prices and cost of living on the one hand, the wage rate and the average production per head on the other. This does not however mean that other factors have no influence on the weaver's prosperity. We shall now attempt to ascertain the changes in the real income of the handweaver during the period for which data are available.

## XVI

### THE REAL INCOME FROM WEAVING IS THE TRUE CRITERION OF THE PROSPERITY OF THE WEAVER

The difficulties in the study of the changes in the real income of the workers in an industry like handloom weaving can be appreciated by the readers of this note. Necessary data can not be had at all. Even in the few centres where an intensive investigation was made it was not possible to get dependable data regarding the average earnings of weavers from year to year for a fairly long period. Even for the post-war period comparable figures are not available. And even where

they are available, one cannot state how far the results of the random investigations conducted in one or two centres can be applied to the weaving population of the country as a whole. India is a vast continent. When conditions in the different districts of a province are not comparable, it will be wrong to assume that the conditions of weavers in Sholapur or Poona or of those in some centres in the Madras or in any other Indian Provinces can be taken to reflect or represent the conditions of weavers in other parts of India. For these reasons a method is adopted with a view to noticing the general trend in the changing economic condition of the weaving population of the country as a whole.<sup>1</sup>

The index number of handloom production, the weaving margin in Indian cotton mill industry, and the retail prices of food grains and the general level of prices for the period for which statistical data are available are taken for the purpose.<sup>2</sup> One of the assumptions made is that the earnings of the weaver per unit of work will bear a certain relation (maybe a remote one) to the margin of weaving profits in cotton mills as measured by the difference in the prices of the standard cloth and the yarn used therein. It is realised that there can be no close correspondence between the weaving margin in mills and the handweavers' earnings, as the products are different, and the conditions governing their prices are not at all identical. Yet it is noticed that the trends in the movement of the weaving margins in the handloom and in the powerloom and also in the movement of the prices of handwoven and mill-made cloths are more or less in the same direction. This assumption is supported by the correspondence noticed in the movement of weaving rates in the handloom industry at Sholapur and the margin of weaving profits in Bombay mills,<sup>3</sup> and the movement of the prices of handwoven cloth and mill cloth in the Central Provinces.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> None is more conscious of the slender basis on which this part of this note is prepared than its author.

<sup>2</sup> This section of the note is an amplification of the data and their interpretation contained in the author's book, *The Handloom Industry in South India*, pp. 184-189.

<sup>3</sup> Though the handwoven cloth and the mill cloth are unlike each other, the long-period correspondence in the movement of the weaving margin (of profits) in mills measured by the differences in the prices of yarn and cloth published by the Bombay Mill-owners' Association and of the weaving rates for handwoven saris in Sholapur, can be noted from the following index numbers of the two weaving margins obtained for the period 1921-1935.

Year	Index numbers of the weaving margin in	
	Handlooms (Sholapur)	Mills (Bombay)
1921 .. ..	102	173
1922 .. ..	109	163
1923 .. ..	112	108
1924 .. ..	119	89
1925 .. ..	102	94
1926 .. ..	100	100
1927 .. ..	98	75
1928 .. ..	91	68
1929 .. ..	91	78
1930 .. ..	88	76
1931 .. ..	83	74
1932 .. ..	83	63
1933 .. ..	75	63
1934 .. ..	69	58
1935 .. ..	65	56

Footnote No. 4 on the facing page.

THE METHOD ADOPTED FOR MEASURING THE CHANGES IN THE  
INCOME OF THE WEAVER EXPLAINED

The method adopted in this note for indicating the changes in the real income of the weaver over a period can now be briefly explained. First of all, it is assumed that there is a correspondence between the weaving rates of the handwoven cloth and the weaving rate of the mill cloth, (called the weaving margin in this note). It is to be noted that this correspondence to some extent can obtain only over a long period; it does not state that this correspondence prevails in a short period market. Secondly, regarding the average money income of the handloom weaver during any unit of time it will depend on the then prevailing average wage rate per unit of production (as indicated above) and the average outturn per worker during that period. The annual extra-mill consumption of yarn given by the Millowners' Association, which it is usually assumed, is consumed by handlooms, can indicate the handloom production. But in regard to the average output per weaver, there are no dependable data even for rough estimation. The census figures are not comparable as there are no common bases of enumeration and classification in the successive censuses. Further, the figures relate to the particular year in which the census was carried on and there is no means by which it is possible to ascertain the actual number of workers in the handloom industry from year to year. Finding that the total number supported by the industry in 1900 differs from that in 1931 only by 11%, it is assumed for the present purpose that the number has remained the same over the period. It is otherwise possible to know the actual number of workers in each year. It is therefore taken that the index number of the handloom production will represent the average output per worker. Thirdly, there are no serial indices of cost of living of the workers in the districts or similar indices that are applicable to the handloom weavers in different parts of India. It is not possible to construct one like this. The retail prices of the staple articles of food in each local area can be made to measure the changes in the cost of living of workers in that area, for foodstuffs represent the bulk of the expenditure of the working classes. But as different food articles predominate in the budgets of workers in different

*Footnote from the facing page.*

<sup>4</sup> The correspondence between the movement of prices of mill cloth and handwoven cloth can also be noted from the index numbers of the average of the prices of six kinds of cloths produced on the handloom in the Central Provinces (ref. the Report of the Indian Tariff Board, 1933) and the average prices of mill goods (noted in the Report of the Bombay Millowners' Association).

Year	Index number of the prices of	
	Handwoven goods	Mill-cloths
1926	100	100
1927	90	91
1928	93	94
1929	94	96
1930	99	80
1931	87	71
1932	76	69

areas, and as the prices of each individual article varies widely, it is taken that the Bombay cost of living index can indicate the cost of living of weavers in the whole of India. It is on the basis of these facts that three sets of curves representing the changes in the weavers' economic condition are here presented. The fact that all the data are not available for the same period has compelled the writer to prepare different sets of indices and curves indicating the changes in the real income of the weaver based on the correlations of different data. Some data can be had from 1874, though the continuity of their quality over the period is disputable. The estimate of output of the handloom can be made only from 1896. The Bombay cost of living index is available only from 1914. The prices of yarn and cloth given in the Government of India publications relate to those prevailing on the 1st of January of the year in question till 1914, and after that year they refer to the average prices during the year. All these facts can explain why the writer is almost apologetic in presenting this part of his note and he believes that this explanation will caution his readers in regard to the interpretation of and inference from the data given here.

In the light of these difficulties it is considered proper to prepare three independent sets of indices of the real income or the prosperity of the weaver. The first set of index numbers correlates the weaving margin in mills with the general price level during the period covering 1874-1935 (*Graph I*).<sup>1</sup> Here a rise in the weaving margin or a fall in the general price level or both will imply economic betterment of the weaver; a change in the opposite direction will be indicated by a fall in the weaving margin or a rise in prices or both. In the second case, the index refers to the period 1897-35 (*Graph I: Dotted Curve*).<sup>1</sup> It combines the volume of production on the handloom as estimated from the extra-mill consumption of yarn in India, the margin of weaving profit per unit of output, and the general price level (which is taken to represent the purchasing power of his nominal income). A rise in the volume of production or in the weaving margin or a fall in the general level of prices or both will mean an improvement (other conditions remaining the same) in the real income of the weaver. Changes in the other direction regarding production, weaving margin and prices will mean a decline in his economic position. In the third case handloom production, weaving margin in mills and Bombay working class cost of living—these three are combined. It covers the period 1914-40.<sup>2</sup> (*Graph II*).<sup>1</sup> These indices are represented in graph.

<sup>1</sup> These Graphs appear on page 136.

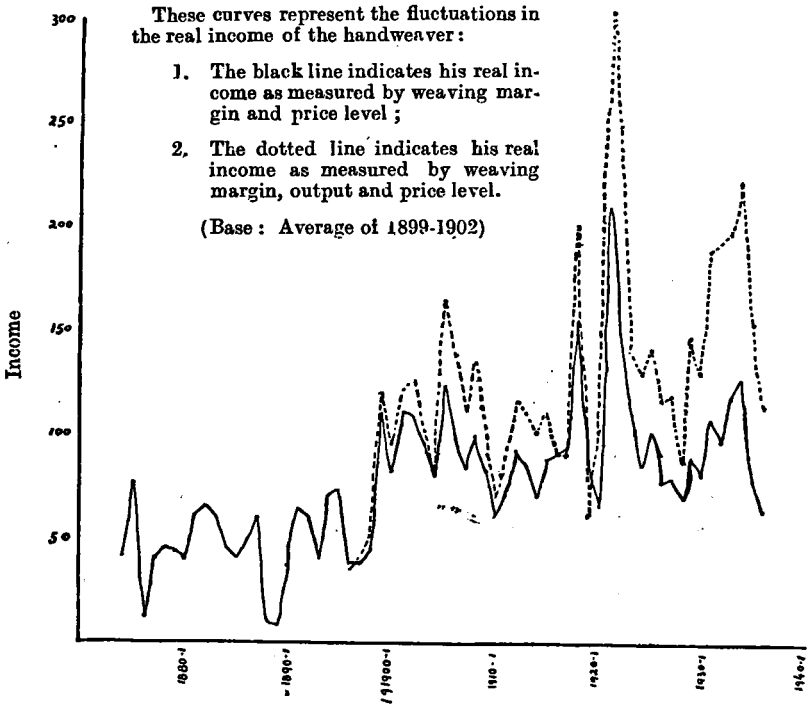
<sup>2</sup> The manner of computing the changes in the prosperity of the handloom weaver that is adopted here can be illustrated by the accompanying table (*on the facing page*):—

*What the Graphs indicate* :—Now certain inferences are deducible from a study of these graphs. First of all three distinct periods in the prosperity of the weaver can be noticed. The first one is roughly up to 1900 when the real income of the weaver was perhaps very low and when his whole annual income was widely and frequently fluctuating. The second period

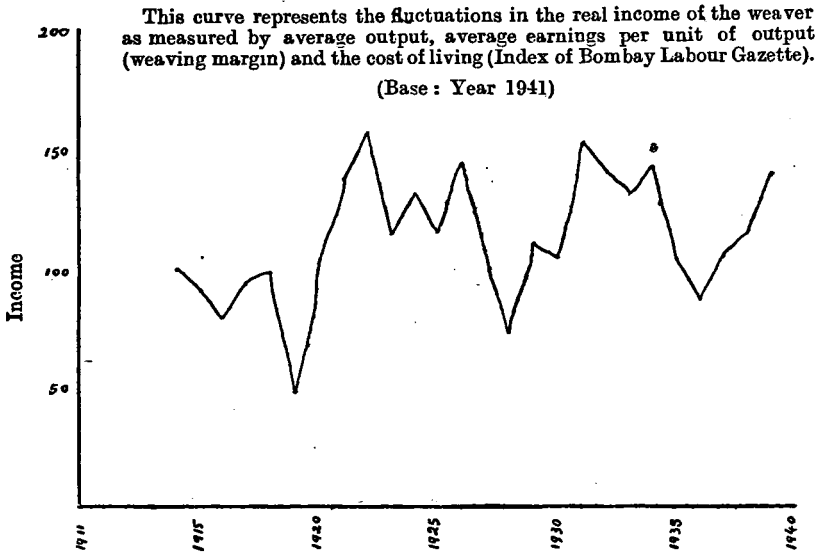
*Table showing the Fluctuations in the Handweavers' Economic Condition since 1914*

Year	Estimated production on the handloom (in million lbs.)	Weaving margin per lb. (in annas)	Estimated earnings of handloom weavers in million annas (2 × 3)	Index No. of estimated earnings	Bombay cost of living index	Index of the real income or the prosperity of the weaver
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
1914 ..	296	2 $\frac{3}{4}$	823	100	100	100
1915 ..	262	3 $\frac{1}{2}$	794	97	104	93
1916 ..	204	3 $\frac{3}{4}$	707	86	108	80
1917 ..	203	4 $\frac{1}{2}$	933	113	118	96
1918 ..	261	8 $\frac{1}{2}$	1225	148	149	99
1919 ..	131	5 $\frac{3}{4}$	732	89	186	48
1920 ..	287	5 $\frac{1}{2}$	1614	196	190	103
1921 ..	298	9 $\frac{1}{4}$	2733	331	177	187✓
1922 ..	335	8 $\frac{1}{2}$	2818	341	165	207✓
1923 ..	251	5 $\frac{3}{4}$	1453	176	154	115✓
1924 ..	314	5 $\frac{1}{2}$	1723	209	157	133
1925 ..	290	5 $\frac{3}{4}$	1532	180	155	116
1926 ..	321	5 $\frac{1}{2}$	1843	223	155	144
1927 ..	318	4 $\frac{1}{2}$	1352	164	154	107✓
1928 ..	258	3 $\frac{1}{2}$	901	109	147	74✓
1929 ..	338	3 $\frac{3}{4}$	1238	165	149	111
1930 ..	334	3 $\frac{1}{2}$	1196	145	137	106
1931 ..	365	5 $\frac{1}{2}$	1400	170	110	154✓
1932 ..	413	3 $\frac{1}{2}$	1311	156	109	142
1933 ..	351	3 $\frac{1}{2}$	1142	138	103	134
1934 ..	357	3 $\frac{1}{2}$	1188	144	100	144
1935 ..	390	2 $\frac{1}{2}$	820	100	101	104
1936 ..	366	1 $\frac{1}{2}$	702	85	96	89
1937 ..	374	2 $\frac{1}{2}$	851	103	97	106
1938 ..	484	2	968	118	102	116
1939 ..	464	2 $\frac{1}{2}$	1199	145	103	141✓
1940 ..	..	3 $\frac{1}{2}$	..	..	..	..

This note is worked out on the lines suggested by the late Dr. Gilbert Slater. The fluctuations in the total annual output from handlooms are pretty accurately indicated by the fluctuations in the amount of yarn annually available for them. And the average annual gross earnings, probably the net earnings too, of handloom weavers per pound of yarn consumed by them must vary with some approximation (not a very close approximation, but nevertheless some approximation) to the differences between the average price of yarn sold to the weavers, and the prices obtained by the mills for the cloth made out of the same quantities of yarn, since the competition of the mills is a major factor in determining the price the handloom weaver can get for his cloth. By multiplying for each year the first set of annual figures by the corresponding figures in the second series, a series of numbers can be obtained which would vary from year to year in approximately the same ratio as the gross money income of the total weaving community. It is assumed that the number of weavers during the period remained constant. So the annual fluctuations in the earnings per head will approximate the fluctuations indicated in column 5. This income is converted with the help of the cost of living index for the working classes in Bombay into a useful indication of the fluctuations in the average economic condition of the weavers (column 7).



Graph I



Graph II

extends from 1901 to 1914 when the index of the weaver's prosperity, tended to remain at a level slightly higher than that prior to 1900. (During this period there is a correspondence in the trends of the two curves, production and general prices curve and the weaving margin and output and general prices curve.) And the third period represents 25 years between 1914 and 1939 whose earlier part comprises the war, the post war boom and depression, and whose later part is characterised by the great depression, protection and the present war. This was a period of prosperity endangered by political and economic uncertainties.

Secondly, on the whole the economic condition of the weaver during the present century has shown a definite improvement ; at any rate it has not deteriorated positively. The condition of the weaver, as judged by certain standards of decent incomes etc., is bad now ; but it must have been distinctly worse in the last century. During the period of 1875-1939 under review his economic condition was at its lowest ebb before 1900. It seems that the worst he had to fear from the powerloom competition had happened in the last century.

Thirdly, since the beginning of this century there has been, excluding transitory setbacks in certain years, an improvement in the economic condition of the weaver. This is due to a number of factors. The weaver improved the efficiency of his production by adopting certain technical improvements, like the flyshuttle. The tendency for the weaving margin in cotton mills to rise is another contributory factor. The growth of trade unionism in England in particular and consequently the increase in labour costs in mills and later the fiscal policy of the Government of India accounted for the rise in the weaving margin. Till 1921 the absence of duty on yarn and the existence of the import duty on cloth which was steadily raised during the war for revenue purposes and the continuance of the excise duty on Indian mill cloth till 1925 gave a kind of protection to the handloom weaver. Later still a policy of protection was definitely adopted. The net result of these factors led to the widening of the weaving margin which more than offset the disadvantage of the rise in the general level of prices.

Fourthly, the improvement in the economic position of the handloom worker was neither uniform nor stable throughout this period. Several ups and downs in his prosperity can be noticed and the circumstances affecting his prosperity in each period can now briefly be reviewed.

*The period before 1895:—*During this period data regarding the handloom output for each year are not available. Yet it is proper to take that the volume of production on the handloom was very small. According to an estimate the average annual production on the handloom was 432 million yards during 1886-90; and it increased to 680 million yards during the next five years. Thus it is evident that during this period the handloom production was less than half of what it is now. The weaving margin, the prices of cloth and yarn, and the general level of prices were at the mercy of a monetary standard based on depreciating silver. Further, the abolition of all duties on the imports of cotton goods in 1878 and the continuance of this policy of free trade should have intensified the competition the handweaver had to face. It is perhaps this state of affairs that was deplored by the writers of this period. But the increasing supply

of yarn from the Indian cotton mills should have given a measure of relief to the handweaver. But on the whole his economic position during this period was relatively very poor.

*The period from 1896 to 1914* :—From the levy of the import duty on cotton piece-goods and the excise duty on the Indian mill cloth since 1895 to the commencement of the war in 1914 is a period of accidental protection of the handloom. It is a period of steady, if not spectacular, expansion of the handloom industry and improvement in the economic condition of the handweaver. Perhaps this is a part of general tone of prosperity which characterised this period ; for it was a period of agricultural expansion, construction of railways and irrigation works, industrial development and improvement in trade. This in part accounted for the improvement in the condition of the handloom production. But the increase in the weaving margin due to the fiscal policy just mentioned which exempted yarn from duties but levied duties on imported as well as Indian mill cloth was mainly responsible for the decided improvement in the economic position of the weaver. (Refer Graph.) Of course there were a number of other fortuitous but contributory factors. The closing of the mint to silver coinage in 1893 and the stabilisation of the foreign exchange value of the rupee, the comparative absence of famines and diseases since the beginning of the century, the relative prosperity of the agriculturists due to better prices realised for their products, the interest evinced by provincial governments in the resuscitation of the handloom industry in particular, the increasing supply of yarn, and the wave of *swadeshim* and a number of other factors accounted in some measure for the development of the handloom industry and for the improvement in the economic position of the weaver.

*The period from 1914 to 1928* :—The war-period (1914-19) records a fall in the handloom production due to the difficulty of getting an adequate supply of yarn from abroad and even from Indian mills. In the years immediately after the war (1918 and 1919) the occurrence of famine and the prevalence of influenza as an epidemic affected handloom production seriously. Yet the weaving margin increased rapidly. It is not known how far the higher profits were actually passed on to the weaver. There was no doubt that the money wages of weavers rose during this period. But prices and cost of living also shot up, perhaps a little faster after 1918, and this should have seriously prejudiced the advantage of a rising wage. The net result is that the economic condition of the weaver slightly deteriorated and this is indicated by the graph.

The next seven years (1921-28) were as chaotic and uncertain as the war period. In the first two years prices of cotton yarn and cloth rose ; so did the weaving margin. The enhancement of the duty on imported cotton goods to 11% led to a rise in the weaving margin in mills, but so far as it concerned the handloom the levy of the import duty on yarn placed the handloom weaver at a disadvantage. And it must be remembered that the weaving margin in the handloom should have been during the period of the import duty on yarn lower than the weaving margin in mills. During this period, production on the handloom increased but not as fast as the mill production expanded. There was a phenomenal fluctuation in prices ; and naturally the condition of the weaver was subjected to great uncertainties. For these reasons his real



income could not have been as high as indicated by the graph. The post-war boom in his trade was short-lived ; it had its uncertainties and brought its natural reaction. In 1923-24 the condition of the weaver began to decline rapidly ; with the fall in prices of agricultural commodities the purchasing power of the people was greatly reduced and this affected the demand for handloom goods. The continuance of the import duty on cotton yarn levied in 1921 should have lowered the weaving margin of the handloom weaver ; but as it was accompanied by the enhancement on the duty on cloth, its fall was arrested. But this fiscal measure along with the abolition of the cotton excise duty in 1925-26 and the retention of the import duty on yarn intensified the competition from Indian mill cloth. And this is indicated by the graph.

*The period from 1928 to 1939* :—For a few years till 1931 the condition of the weaver was better off. The policy of discriminate protection led to a steady expansion of the cotton textile industry as a whole, though the mill industry benefited more than the handloom industry. Further the fall in prices led to a reduction in the cost of living while the weaving margin was kept up by the new tariffs. This accounted in part for the weaver maintaining his prosperity. But soon conditions changed. The desire to protect the spinning branch of the cotton mill industry led to a levy of a specific duty on yarn which placed the handloom industry at a disadvantage ; and it reduced the weaving margin therein. This was followed by the Great Depression. This affected agriculture more than other industries and the impact of agricultural depression was more severe on the handloom industry than on the Indian cotton mills. The dependence of the handloom weaver for his yarn on the Indian mill supply, the increasing burden of the specific duty on account of the fall in the price of yarn and the reduced purchasing power of the people should have worsened the position of the handloom weaver ; but the heightening of the protective tariffs to some extent should have arrested the fall in the weaving margin in the handloom industry. But with the advent of the Imperial Preference and trade agreements the position of the handweaver again (in 1934) tended to suffer ; and this is brought out in the graph.

#### OTHER FACTORS THAT ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE FLUCTUATIONS IN THE PROSPERITY OF THE WEAVER

Though the economic condition of the handloom weaver on the whole has not suffered any positive deterioration during the last 40 years at least, he had often to face new problems arising from a number of factors beyond his control which affected his well-being. Firstly, even a slight change in the prosperity of agriculture affected his own. Famines in particular reduced the demand for his product. They hit him both ways, by reducing his income and increasing his expenditure. Though famines in India have not been as frequent and widespread as they were in the last century and before, they seriously affected his prosperity in the following years : 1896, 1897, 1900, 1904, 1908, 1916, 1919, 1923, and 1928. Another factor which prejudiced the interest of the weaver is economic depression, particularly agricultural depression. The slumps in 1923 and 1929 affected the economic condition of the weaver. A third factor affecting his economic condition relates to the dislocation caused

by the prevalence of epidemics, *e.g.*, plague in 1900, influenza in 1918 and 1919 and cholera and small pox in certain areas in some years. Fourthly, the dependence of the handloom weaver for his supply of yarn on foreign imports and Indian mills makes his position often precarious. Wars, tariffs and exchange fluctuations affect the prices and the supply of foreign yarn. The war and the post-war period of 1914-23 was a great period of stress on this account to the handloom worker. Strikes in the cotton mills in India, which have in recent years become frequent, reduced the supply of yarn to the handloom weaver (*e.g.*, 1928-29). Fifthly, the financial and tariff policy of the Government of India is another determining factor of his prosperity. The financial crisis in 1909-10, the imposition of the duty on cotton yarn in 1921, the suspension of the cotton excise in 1925 and its abolition in 1926, the imposition of the specific duty on yarn in 1928, the adoption of Imperial Preference in regard to textiles in 1930, the depreciation of the yen in 1932 and the recession in trade in 1937 and a number of other factors reacted on the handloom production and reduced the earnings of the poor weavers.<sup>1</sup>

It is not possible to measure exactly the extent to which these factors prejudiced the interest of the weaver ; nor is it possible to incorporate them in the graph so that it can more precisely indicate their influence on the real income of the weaver. Hence the need for a note of caution in interpreting the graph. For instance, the graph does not reveal the full impact of the Great Depression on the prosperity of the weaver. But it is common knowledge that the depression has been as blighting on the prosperity of the handloom weaver as that of agricultural and industrial interests. The weaving wages fell as fast as, and in some cases even faster than, the prices of good grains. To wit, the wage rate per sari in Sholapur declined by over 40% while the Sholapur cost of living declined only by 30%.

Thus during a period of 45 years from 1896-1940 there are 8 years of famine, 3 years of epidemics, seven years of war and post-war uncertainties, 5 years of the Great Depression and several years of ill-conceived tariffs. All these factors are beyond the control of the handweaver and they have accounted for his sufferings and the precariousness of his living. The handloom industry, it can bear repetition, is not economically unsound in the present context of life in India ; the human factor in this industry is no more defective than in other enterprises. Any impartial observer will admit without hesitation that these factors are enough to dislocate any industry however well-established or organised it may be. If other industries have survived and progressed during the period, it was mainly due to the fact that the State gave them such assistance as was appropriate in each case. But the poor handloom weaver has none to look to for help !

<sup>1</sup> Refer Sholapur investigation by the author ; opinions of the Provincial Governments, and the findings of the Indian Tariff Board, 1932.

## XVII

## WHAT THE WEAVER WANTS

It is often said that the crux of the problem of regenerating the handloom industry is the weaver himself, and that he is poor, idle, ignorant, illiterate, addicted to drink and apathetic to take advantage of the efforts made by others to improve his industry and his economic and social life. There is some truth in all that has been said against him ; but the weaver alone is not to blame for it. It can be recognised that he is merely a victim of circumstances. Steeped in ignorance and poverty he cannot appreciate the beneficial measures of other agencies. Even if he does, he finds himself absolutely helpless to free himself from the vicious system he finds himself in. The failure of half-hearted measures and occasional spurts of the benevolence of governments have made the weaver despair of ever improving his economic condition. Persistent poverty has deadened all his initiative and enthusiasm. He is bittered by his experiences of the old oppressive methods of taxing looms and cloth and the indifference of the State in the past as well as in the present to his interests and the miseries he is condemned to by the growth of powerloom competition. And these have made the weaver suspicious of the genuineness of the intentions of the Government and his well-wishers. And his suspicion is not without reason ; for the Government and the public leaders have done much in the past to discredit themselves. In the attempts made in recent years, however, to improve the condition of the weaver, there is not anything to question the *bona fides* of his sympathisers, but the measures have been incomplete in their design and in their execution. For instance, the co-operative credit societies of weavers have not reduced their dependence on the sowcars who supply the raw materials and undertake the marketing of their products. Co-operation at only one stage of production and distribution does not help the weavers in reaping the full advantage of their work and it does not eliminate the middleman's toll. It took twenty years for the Government to realise the inadequacy of their policy. The recent efforts of the Government of India to rehabilitate the industry are again not properly directed ; for the problem has not been looked at as a whole. Hence the difficulties and the fashion to lay the blame at the door of the weavers. They are accused of being apathetic to the adoption of improved methods of production and of being reluctant to adopt themselves to the changing conditions of the industrial system. It must be obvious that this involves finance and organisation. The introduction of fly-shuttles and other mechanical appliances requires capital ; so does a change in the design and the kinds of fabrics woven which requires a new set of healds and reeds. Even if the weavers find the necessary funds, there is the difficulty of securing and stabilising the markets for their goods. The middleman is always there, and he never allows the weavers the full benefits of these changes for a long time. The weavers can do nothing alone ; and usually in their co-operative societies there is the active antagonism of the merchants and sowcars who in fact control in most cases the policy of the societies. And there is no effective outside agency to advise, and guide the weavers in their difficulties. There is also the dearth of intelligent leadership or organising ability among them. They are unable to bear the cost of expert advice, and

non-official agencies are also sceptical about the results of their efforts in the absence of legislative protective measures. With the result the co-operative movement among weavers is more or less stagnant. However, it must be noted that if co-operation among weavers has not made much headway these years it is not the fault of the movement. The defect lies in the principle of its working. The wholesale importation of principles of co-operation to India from countries where conditions were different explains why it has not been successful in inspiring the class of poor weavers. The rules are not suited to the circumstances. The insistence on the principle of management by members themselves is practically impossible in India at this stage. Intelligent leadership of the educated and the active and sustained financial support and protection of the State are the imperative needs of the weavers' co-operative movement in India.

Again, the weavers are accused of extravagance and unproductive expenditure. It is said that the "handloom weaver is improvident, unreliable, lazy and addicted to drink ; and these defects impair the value of his work so that his earnings descend to the level of his achievements. This may very likely be true ; but if any one expects a prudent and thrifty mind, steady work, abstemious habits and artistic merits from a man trying to do the miracle of feeding four persons on an income of six to eight annas a day, with his mind clouded by business anxiety, his temper warped by the selfishness of his masters, and his courage broken by the strain of the irredeemable debt, he is asking for the impossible. Squalid poverty, as it is known, deadens all sense of self-reliance. It is not the peculiar problem of the weaver alone that poverty and the drink evil go together. This is the characteristic of all working classes. Exposed to temptation, the weavers fall an easy prey to the dope habit. A benevolent State, with a firm reliance on its own moral purpose, would have at least removed this temptation placed before the workers by adopting a policy of prohibition or liquor control. The experiment made in Salem district showed a remarkable progress in the condition of life of the weavers ; and this points to the way of right reforms.

It is now asked : 'Should we emancipate the weavers from their present economic and moral depression or should we allow them to perish ?' The choice of the latter is seriously proposed by some whose enthusiasm for industrial development overrides their common regard for humanity. A Director of Industries of Madras once put the question : "Is not the regeneration of the handloom worth attempting independently and at the expense of the hereditary weaver ?" There is much to be said in favour of this attitude from the technical or industrial point of view ; but on the human side it can hardly be defended. It is true that those who talk of humanity should not make a fetish of it ; but there must be a limit to the cult of technical efficiency too. The poverty of the masses is the main problem in India. The solution must be sought through our attempt to eliminate it and not through our callous indifference to the miseries of the poor millions who by our enthusiasm for technical improvement are deprived of their slender means of livelihood and who are driven to perish by the slow process of starvation.

Judging from the sporadic and fitful endeavours made to raise the economic and moral status of the weaver there is very little justification

for this unsympathetic attitude, for there is ample evidence to show that the weaver has done all that he could possibly do.<sup>1</sup> As noted elsewhere thousands of looms are fitted with flyshuttles and dobbies; a large number of warping mills and other improved appliances are in use. The volume of the handloom output has been steadily increasing; and therefore it is obvious that there is very little truth in the statement that the weavers prefer to be idle and do not want to increase their efficiency or their competitive power. If the progress has not been as rapid as it is desired, the weavers have their own difficulties which the sympathy of their countrymen, the co-operation of the other members of their community and the assistance of the State can help them in surmounting. The chief reason for the slow response of the weavers to the policy of the Government and public bodies lies in what Emerson states that "there never was in any man sufficient faith in the power of rectitude to inspire him with the broad design of reconstruction." This is true of the personnel of the Provincial Department of Industries and other public organisations interested in the regeneration of the handloom weaver and his trade as well as in the economic development of this country.

There is no doubt that the weaver earnestly desires to improve his present economic and social position. But the tyranny of his own situation and the conspiracy of the greedy coupled with the indifference of the community are forging new fetters for him. While he is sweated for long hours and struggling to keep on going on starvation returns, it naturally pains him to find that he is deprived of his legitimate share in the wealth he produces either in the form of profits by those who give him work, sell him raw materials and undertake to sell his cloths, or in the form of rates, profession or loom taxes imposed by impecunious local authorities. And it is the view of the author that if the weaver is given the guarantee that he shall have the fruits of his labour, he will with delight submit himself to discipline and training and that he will readily respond to all progressive ideas. With this assurance if he is educated on the principles of co-operation and is trained to depend on co-operative effort from the purchasing of raw materials to the marketing of his products, the weaver will soon overcome many of his difficulties. What men with rectitude and faith in the service of the weak (what Prof. Marshall called 'economic chivalry') and organisations with vision and discipline can achieve is well exemplified by the instance of the All-India Spinners' Association and the All-India Village Industries Association. The weaver like other artisans is crying for charity. If the State can protect him against the powerloom, if the educated and the better-stationed-in-life show him sympathy and love and work for his uplift patiently and persevere along definite lines, there is no doubt that the problem of his betterment can be tackled with success.

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<sup>1</sup> Refer *The Handloom Industry in South India*, by the Author.