

HANDLOOM WEAVING INDUSTRY IN INDIA—

(ITS PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE)

BY

Shri M. P. GANDHI,

Proprietor, Bombay Commercial Corporation; Bombay Agent, Gujarat Paper Mills Ltd.; Editor, Indian Cotton Textile Industry Annual and Indian Sugar Industry Annual; Honorary Professor in Cotton Economics, Sydenham College of Commerce & Economics, Government of Bombay.

WITH A FOREWORD BY

SHRI VAIKUNTH L. MEHTA,

Finance Minister, Bombay Government.

"I am indeed very glad that Mr. M. P. Gandhi has been able to bring the information relating to the handloom weaving industry of India up-to-date with such commendable promptitude in this brochure. In view of this, I feel that it should serve as a valuable handbook for all who are interested in the growth of the handloom weaving industry.

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September, 1946

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AUTHOR'S PREFACE

In my preface last year to the brochure entitled the "Handloom Industry in India", I stressed the part played by the handloom industry during 1941-45 in relieving the shortage of textiles in India. Reference was also made to the steps taken by the authorities to ensure adequate supplies of yarn to the industry, and to keep its vitality as unimpaired as possible. Since then, the problems of the industry have been in the charge of the All-India Handloom Board which promises to be a good caretaker of the industry. Through its various sub-committees which are noticed in the succeeding pages, the Board has been able to get a good deal of spade work done so as to enable the Government to tackle the problems of the industry, chronic as well as present, in an adequate manner. A proper scheme for consolidating and improving this national small-scale industry is an indispensable pre-requisite to any plan for the economic betterment of India to which Government is committed. In that perspective, the attention so far given to the cottage industry encourages great hopes, the realisation of which must necessarily be a slow process. We have to be thankful now for the recognition of the importance of the industry in national planning. As I stated last year, "A vigorous cottage industry can go far to transform the face of rural India and infuse new life into the old bones. The weaver in the cottage is as indissoluble a part of the rural landscape as the tiller of the soil is. It would be a matter of pride if the weaver could be made to prosper and recapture once more the glories of ancient India".

This is not to say that everyone is agreed upon the *modus operandi* in which the industry should be stabilised. The Post-war Planning Committee (Textiles) has recognised the need for ensuring supplies of yarn from the mills by imposing the condition that new spindles under the post-war plan shall not be allotted unless the mill concerned agrees to give a part of the yarn to the handloom industry. I am not sure that this condition will be a sufficient safeguard. The attitude of the mills towards handlooms cannot always be expected to be as favourable and disinterested as one would expect. The Bombay Mill-owners' Association was opposed to the setting up of the All-India Handloom Board and Mr. J. C. Lancashire who was the Deputy Chairman in 1945 frankly stated that the policy of the Board "seems to tend more towards hostility to the cotton textile industry in India than anything else". He was referring to the recommendation that one half of the total new spindles sanctioned for post-war erection should be given only to those mills who agree not to install looms but to spin yarn for a period of five years at least from erection. In his opinion, "the handloom industry's affairs always seem to be bound up with extraneous matters which tend to rule out any dispassionate consideration of the circumstances having a direct bearing on the subject". I am only citing that as an instance of the other school of thought, according to which the handloom industry should receive no more help than it deserves, in contrast to what I may call the proletarian view that everything should be done to help the industry.

It is not easy to strike the balance between these opposite schools of thought, but I am gratified to note that the Handloom Board has shown a high degree of sympathy with the industry. Going through the minutes of discussions in the various committees of the Board, I notice that the provinces are making a strong bid to revive the industry and help it as much as possible. The stage has not come when a concrete plan for that purpose could be evolved, but it is on the anvil. It must, however, be remembered that the Handloom Board cannot make any direct recommendations to the Government except through the Textile Control Board, in matters affecting the mills (e.g. yarn).

The industry is exempt from the operations of many of the controls which apply to mill-made goods. In spite of some clamour and outcry against the high prices of handloom goods, so far no price control has been enforced. There is a vigorous export trade in handlooms, particularly to countries like Malaya and Burma.

In addition to the usual collection of facts about the handloom industry, a brief synopsis of the trend of recent discussions is also given in this year's edition. I trust it will help readers to obtain a proper perspective of what the industry is, and what it is going to be (as I hope) in the near future under a regime which is prepared to extend every solicitude to this oldest national industry.

If India is to live, this celebrated and largest indigenous industry must be made to live, and, therefore, it becomes the duty of every well-wisher of the country to devise, in his own way, measures which would lead to its orderly development and growth.

The accompanying few pages give a few striking characteristics of this industry, the causes of its decline, the methods in which the problems besetting the industry can be tackled, and indicate a few practical lines along which the industry may be resuscitated or developed.

I have no doubt that the Congress Governments in the various Provinces will render maximum help to the industry by giving it suitable facilities, and by exempting it from taxes, like the Bombay Sales Tax, as has already been done by the Bombay Government.

If these pages succeed in their aim of educating public opinion for an improvement in the position of this industry and the 2½ million workers engaged therein (as compared with 6 lakhs workers in the Cotton Mill Industry*), I would consider my labour amply rewarded.

M. P. GANDHI

"Giri Kunj", 11, Hughes Road, Bombay.

Dated 30th August, 1946.

* For details, vide Mr. M. P. Gandhi's "Indian Cotton Textile Industry Annual, 1945-46", published in July 1946. Price Rs. 5.

FOREWORD

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POONA,

12th September, 1946.

VAIKUNTH L. MEHTA.

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[Formerly, Controller of Supplies, Bengal Circle, Supply Department, Government of India ; Secretary, Indian Chamber of Commerce, Calcutta ; Secretary, Indian Colliery Owners' Association ; Secretary, Indian Sugar Mills Association ; Secretary, Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce & Industry ; Secretary, Indian National Committee, International Chamber of Commerce ; Chief Commercial Manager, Dalmia Cement Ltd. & Rohtas Industries Ltd. ; Head of Credit Department, National City Bank of New York, Calcutta ; Director, Indian Sugar Syndicate Ltd. ; Member, Bihar Government Labour Enquiry Committee ; Member, U. P. & Bihar Joint Power Alcohol Committee ; Member, U. P. & Bihar Sugar Control Board ; Member, Cottage & Rural Industries Sub-Committee of the National Planning Committee ; Member, Advisory Committee, East Indian Railway ; Member, Executive Committee, Bengal Textile Institute ; Ashburner Prizeman, Bombay University ; Examiner in B.Com. Examination of the University of Allahabad, Lucknow, and Bombay.]



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