

HISTORY OF TEXTILE INDUSTRY IN INDIA

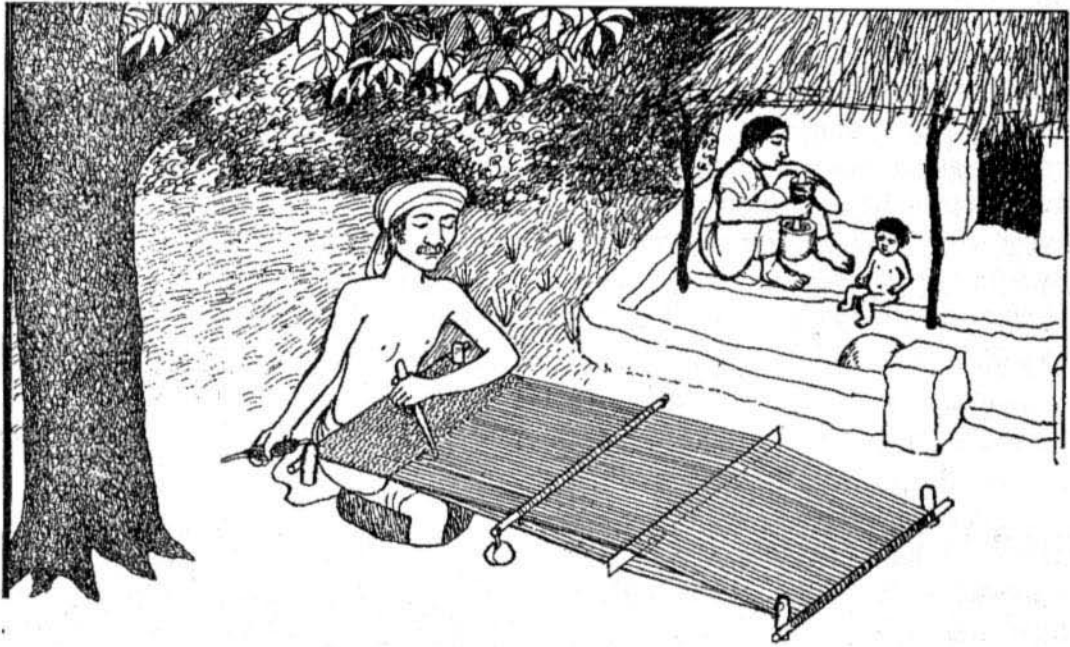


Fig. 1 A weaver working at his pit loom

You have seen different ways of producing things: Some make things at home with their own tools and then sell what they made. Some work at home for contractors but still using their own tools. Some go to factories to run machines owned by others. In this lesson we shall see how ways of production can change. Over time the nature of people's work has changed drastically and yet there are several things which continue like before.

WEAVERS OF EARLY TIMES

India has been making cotton cloth since time immemorial. The entire process of manufacture of cloth was initially done by weavers at their own homes with the help of their family members. Cotton was bought directly from farmers. The weaver and his family would gin the cotton to separate the fibre from the seeds, card it to make it fluffy and then spin it into thread or yarn on their spinning

wheels. The yarn was woven into cloth on a loom and then dyed to give it beautiful colours. All this was done at home.

The weaver and his family would work at whatever time suited them. When it became very hot and the yarn began to snap because of the heat they would stop working. They could also take a break if they had some other work like going to the market. When the cloth was ready the weaver sold it to a merchant who came to the village or himself took it to the town or the weekly village market to sell. He would sell it wherever he got the best price and thus the family earned its living.

- *What work was done at the weaver's home?*
- *How did the weaver get cotton?*
- *Who owned the spinning wheel, the loom and the other tools?*
- *What did the weaver do with the cloth made by him?*

INCREASE IN DEMAND FOR CLOTH

How to Increase Production?

Most weavers used to make coarse cloth for everyday use by ordinary folk. However some weavers became skilled at making fine cloth. The rich began to buy good quality cloth of a variety of designs. Indian weavers became so expert at making superior cloth that their fame spread across the seas. Indian cloth was much sought after in China, Iran, the Middle-East and Africa. Traders reaped huge profits by selling Indian cloth in these countries.

With the increase in demand in India as well as abroad several problems emerged. Till then all cloth was being made at the homes of weavers. When it was ready the weavers often had to spend days carrying it all the way to the market. However hard they worked they still could not make as much cloth as the buyers were demanding.

- *What should the weavers have done? Can you give some ideas?*

Come let us see what the weavers of that time did to solve this problem.

Weaver Settlements

A large number of weavers came to live

together in some villages and towns after 1200 AD. Until then only a few weavers had lived in the towns. Now settlements of hundreds and thousands of weavers came up in certain towns. Some such towns are Kanchipuram (Tamil Nadu), Cambay (Gujarat), Daulatabad (Maharashtra) and Varanasi (Uttar Pradesh).

- *What must have been the advantage of living in such settlements?*

In these places there were big markets where it was easy to buy and sell things. Now these weavers no longer had to go to distant places to sell their produce. They could sell their cloth in their town itself. This saved a lot of time which could now be used to produce more cloth. This way colonies of weavers came up in several towns and villages.

- *How did this help traders who were buying cloth and selling it in far-off lands?*

Division of Work

Another change that took place was that the weavers stopped making yarn at home. The demand for cloth was much greater than what they could produce. The whole family now preferred to concentrate only on the weaving of cloth.

Fig. 2 A weavers' settlement



Where could they get the yarn from? Did they have to go from village to village buying cotton thread from farmers? No. With the increase in the demand for cloth, the prices of yarn, too, went up. Some people in villages and towns found it profitable to just make yarn. They left farming and their other vocations and began to devote themselves entirely to this. They came and settled near the weavers. They would buy cotton from the market and then spin it into thread to be sold to the weavers.

In the beginning yarn makers would do everything – clean the cotton, cardit and then spin out yarn. But gradually different groups of people began to do different things. One would clean the cotton and another would whip it and a third would buy it from them to spin into yarn.

Over time all the various steps of cloth making began to be done in a specialised way by different families. Ginning (removing seeds), carding (whipping to make the cotton fluffy), spinning, weaving and dyeing were all earlier done by the weavers themselves. Now each of these was done by a separate craftsman. Thus the settling of weavers in towns led to many changes. Each aspect of the cloth making process became specialised and was done by different groups of craftsmen.

- *Once colonies of weavers emerged -*
 - i. *What was the work done at the weaver's house?*
 - ii. *Where did they get the yarn from?*
- *You read about artisans in previous chapters. Why are weavers called artisans?*
- *Apart from the family of a weaver, who were the people who participated in the making of cloth?*
- *What were the major changes which came about after weavers began to live in urban settlements?*

THE PUTTING OUT SYSTEM

From 1500 onwards traders from several European countries also began to come to India to buy cloth. Besides, you know there was also a demand for this cloth in Africa, the Middle-East, Iran, China and Indonesia. The market for Indian cloth expanded across the world.

It was the trader who took the cloth to distant places. So only the trader knew which cloth was in demand and where. The weaver did not know about such things because it wasn't a familiar local market. This led to a problem for the weaver. If he made a large quantity of a certain kind of cloth and it was left unsold then the weaver's family would have to bear the risk of losing a lot of money. How could he know which kind of cloth was in demand and which was not?

The traders bought cloth from weavers in several villages and towns and loaded it onto ships at ports to be sent to other places. But any individual trader could not come himself to each of these villages and towns to gather cloth. A partial solution to these problems was found through the putting out system.

The traders began to keep several agents to buy cloth from the weavers. The traders would give money to the agents. The agents would use this money to buy cloth from the weavers. And they would then send that cloth to the traders. The traders paid the agents a commission for this work.

- *Have you read about this kind of system in the previous chapters? In which chapter did you read about it?*

The traders, too, faced a problem. Traders from many countries competed with each other to buy Indian cloth. Every trader wanted to buy the greatest amount of cloth so that he could make a greater profit by selling it. Each desired to somehow bind the weaver to himself so that only he was sold that cloth and no one else.



Fig. 3 Agent collecting cloth from the weavers



Fig. 4 Agent giving cloth to the trader

The trader's agent would go to the weavers and say, "Brother, I want so much cloth of this design. You take this money as an advance. With this you can buy the yarn and the other things you need. When the cloth is ready you sell it to us and to nobody else. Then we will give you the rest of the money."

This was the 'putting out system' also called *dadan pratha* in Hindi.

- **How did the traders buy cloth from a large number of villages and towns?**

On the one hand the putting out system was quite good for the weavers. They got a part of the price of the cloth even before it had been woven. With this they could buy yarn and other necessary things. Similarly the problem of selling the finished cloth had also been taken care of. They would know from the outset which cloth they should make and how much of it should be woven.

On the other hand they could no longer decide by themselves what they were to weave and in what quantity. Now the designs and quantities of cloth were fixed by the traders. The traders also began to supply the raw materials to the weavers themselves. This made the weaver even more dependent upon the

traders. With this, the trader's power to set the price of the cloth, too, began to increase. The trader and agent would always try to pay the weavers as little as possible so that they could keep increasing amounts of profit for themselves.

At several places, especially in Bengal, the traders began to pressurise the weavers with the help of the local rulers. The power of the traders and their agents increased. They started dictating the price. The advance payments for weavers became a necessity. They were unable to support their families without this and the traders' agents took full advantage of their weak position. Thus the putting out system led to a decrease in the income of the weavers. By 1700 AD the weavers were in very bad shape. They were having to borrow money even for their daily food.

- **How did the putting out system begin?**
- **How did the putting out system change the way the weavers worked?**
- **Fill in the blanks by choosing the right option:**
- **In the putting out system –**
 - The trader would give the weaver**

before the cloth was woven. (an advance / no advance).

ii. The weaver could sell the finished cloth to ... (anybody he pleased / only to the trader who had given the advance).

iii. The yarn and other raw materials were ... (given by the trader / bought by the weaver himself).

iv. The loom and other tools were owned by the ... (weaver / trader).

vi. The ... (weaver / trader) decided how much cloth and of which quality should be woven.

textile mills in India, too?

• *What is required to set up a factory? (Recollect what you have learned in the previous chapters)*

i. Land

ii.

iii.

iv.

A lot of money is needed for all this. No ordinary weaver or craftsman could possibly raise so much money. Only big traders and moneylenders could have it.

The first textile mill was set up in Mumbai in 1854 by C.N. Dawar. Seth Ranchhodmal Chotalal set up the first cotton spinning mill in Ahmedabad in 1861. The machines for this had to be brought from England. To build this mill he had to borrow money from several other traders. In 1867 he started weaving cloth on new machines in the same mill.

After this gradually more textile mills began to come up in places like Mumbai (Maharashtra), Ahmedabad (Gujarat), Chennai (Tamil Nadu) and Indore (Madhya Pradesh).

THE FIRST TEXTILE MILLS IN INDIA

In 1725 AD approximately 300 lakh meters of cloth was being exported from India to Europe. By 1850 AD this trade had completely dried up. How did this happen?

Between 1700 and 1800 when the putting out system was being practiced in India big textile mills were being set up in Europe. The British would buy cotton from India, send it to their mills in England and then sell their factory-made cloth all over the world. That was the time when the British established their rule over large parts of India. Cloth made in mills was cheaper and many people of India began to buy this instead of the more expensive hand-made cloth. Soon there were few people left who bought the cloth made by weavers. As a result the weavers had to give up their work and find some other way of making a living.

Later several big traders in India thought – why shouldn't we set up

Fig. 6 Trader loading cloth onto a ship

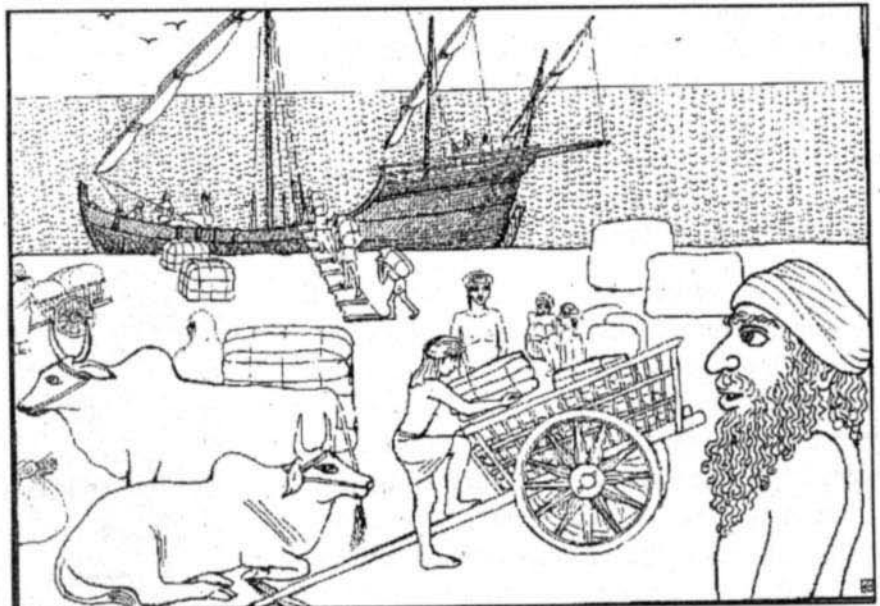




Fig.7 Workers managing a loom-machine in a mill
 Cloth was not made on the old hand-operated looms in these mills. They had many machines for spinning yarn and weaving cloth. These machines first ran on steam and then on electricity, just like the machines in the mills in Europe.

Work in the Mills

The owner of the mill would buy huge quantities of cotton from the cotton *mandi* and stock it in his godowns. The mills had machines which cleaned the cotton, carded it, made yarn out of it and even wove it into cloth. Some workers would operate the cotton cleaning machines while some would run the cotton carding machines. Some workers would attend to the spinning machines while others oversaw the mechanical looms.

As the mills in India started making cloth the demand for the weavers' cloth dropped even lower. Of the few remaining weavers still more had to give up their ancestral profession. The yarn makers were in no better condition. These were the people who were now hired as workers in the new mills. Similarly the small farmers who could not make a living out of their small land holdings also began to work in factories.

The mill owners paid the mill workers wages. In return they expected the workers to come on time every day and do whatever they were told. Workers could not decide for themselves what work they wanted to do or how and when they wanted to do it.

They had to work from 12 to 14 hours every day. When they got tired they could not stop by themselves to rest. A

supervisor kept a close eye on them to make sure that they were doing just as they had been told. The machines worked very fast. The workers had to follow the speed of the machines. That was how a large amount of cloth could be made in a small amount of time. Even today this is how work is done in the mills. But there is a law now that no worker can be made to work more than 8 hours a day. The cloth made in the mills is sold by the owners of the mills. It is they who fix its prices and all the profit, too, is theirs.

- *Fill in the blanks:*

When cloth was made on the weaver's loom, it was the weaver who owned his loom and other tools. But when cloth was made in the mills, the machines were owned by the (owner of the mill / worker).

Raw materials like cotton were earlier bought by the weaver himself, but in the mills cotton is bought by

Earlier the used to sell the cloth, but now the sells the cloth.

Earlier the craftsmen made their living from selling the cloth they made. But

now the mill workers make their living by

- *What are the ways in which hand woven cloth is sold in the market? Discuss with your teacher.*

DIFFERENT FORMS OF PRODUCTION

You saw in the textile industry how the ways of producing the same thing (cloth) has changed over time. Earlier the weaver would work at home and sell his own produce. Then weavers began to live in settlements and towns. Each part of the process was done in a specialised way by different groups of families. As the demand for cloth increased further and it began to be supplied to many parts of the world, a system of subcontracting *dadan* was established. And finally as cloth-mills came up there was competition between the cheaper mill cloth and hand woven cloth. A large number of weavers had to give up this occupation. Then the putting out system began and finally cloth mills came up.

The older ways of producing are not totally replaced. There are many special features of hand woven cloth such as design, comfort, etc., which are still in demand. Also more modern forms for marketing, such as weaver co-operatives, help them to sell their cloth.

Even today different industries work in different ways. You had read some examples of these. The brass-smith is an independent craftsman. Beedis are made through the putting out system. You saw how people worked in small and big leather factories. You also saw how the same thing could be made in different ways. Even after the arrival of cloth mills, some weavers continue to work at their homes at many places; or come together to sell their produce by themselves. In the same way blacksmiths continue to make iron products at their own shops while there are also big factories doing the same thing.

- *Find out about things being made around you. Are they made in factories or through the putting out system or by independent craftsmen?*
- *Find out about these goods too: pots, ready-made clothes, paper, cooking oil, bricks, packed masalas, ploughs, chairs, tables, matchboxes, television, papad.*

EXERCISE

1. What did the early weavers do with the cloth made by them?
2. What did the weavers do to increase the production of cloth?
3. What are the different steps in making cloth? Why did different people begin to do different steps?
4. What is the putting out system?
5. What does the trader do in the putting out system? What does the agent do?
6. What is the difference between the putting out system and the work of an independent craftsman?
7. Why did the conditions of weavers become very bad between 1750 and 1850?
8. When were cloth mills set up in India? Who invested the money for these mills?
9. Who were the workers in the mills?
10. What is the difference between the putting out system and working in factories?
11. Discuss with your teacher whether there are any cloth mills in your city or nearabouts which have been closed down. Find out the reasons for the closure.