



Handicrafts in India

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In a number of articles published in this Review during the last few years¹ descriptions have been given of the place of handicrafts in the economy of various countries, the effects on traditional handicrafts of the development of factory industries and of the importation of manufactured goods, and the measures taken to protect and modernise handicraft industries.

The following article continues this series. It does not pretend to be more than a short preliminary study of a question which, in such a vast country as India, presents very different aspects in different regions and a multiplicity of special problems. It has, however, been thought that a general survey of the situation of handicrafts in India would be of particular interest at a time when that country is entering a new phase of its constitutional history and when increasing importance is being attached to rural reconstruction and the conservation and renovation of national handicraft industries.

THE PRINCIPAL HANDICRAFTS

THE HANDICRAFTS of India may be roughly divided into three categories : (a) those carried on by families whose principal occupation is agriculture, (b) those of the professional village craftsmen, and (c) those of the more highly skilled craftsmen of the towns. The first category includes not only crafts traditionally practised in the home for the satisfaction of some of the family's primary needs, but also crafts carried on by the agriculturist and his family in order to supplement their meagre income from farming ; the second includes mainly those industries which cater for the needs of a largely self-

¹ Cf. *International Labour Review*, Vol. XXXI, No. 2, Feb. 1935 : "Handicrafts in Turkey", by Mukdim OSMAN ; Vol. XXXIV, Nos. 1 and 2, July and Aug. 1936 : "Handicrafts in Tunisia", by Roger PLISSARD ; Vol. XXXV, No. 1, Jan. 1937 : "Handicrafts in Germany", by E. SCHINDLER.

sufficient village community ; the last class comprises, in addition to more highly developed forms of the village industries, the making of artistic and luxury articles for which there is a large demand from the wealthier urban public.

The number of Indian handicrafts is immense, and their variety is only indicated in the following list of the principal branches : rope-making, basket-making, oil pressing, flour milling, *tatti*¹ weaving, doll and toy manufacture, pottery, glass and bangle industry, tanning, metal industries, gold and silver thread making, handloom weaving, dyeing and printing, sericulture, *bidi*² manufacture, wood-work, ivory carving and other artistic crafts.

Some of these handicrafts have either declined or are surviving with difficulty. Others, and especially those which cater for the village folk, show a remarkable vitality. That such crafts can survive in the machine age is mainly due to two protective factors : the first is the innate conservatism of the village and the religious and traditional customs which bind the social structure of the village community ; the second is the isolation of large tracts of the country from world contact owing to lack of communications.

In the following pages it is proposed to give a short account of a few of the handicrafts which are of more than local importance and which command markets in the different parts of the country. The organisation, the methods of marketing and the needs of all handicrafts are very much the same, and therefore a description of a selected number of the more important crafts will serve to illustrate the situation of Indian handicrafts generally.

Handloom Weaving

The most important of India's cottage industries is handloom weaving. Nearly every province has its professional weavers who are part-time agriculturists. It is roughly estimated that about 2½ million handlooms are engaged in the production of cloth, supporting a population of 10 millions. The number of persons occupied in this industry has, it is said, increased of late, owing to the fact that many of the depressed classes and a number of unemployed middle-class people have taken to weaving.³

¹ *Tatti* = a screen made of a special kind of grass.

² *Bidi* = a kind of cigarette.

³ *Indian Textile Journal*, Oct. 1935.

Complete figures of the number of handlooms and of the number of people employed are not available, but information published in 1936, and relating apparently to enquiries made in 1934-1935, gives for the provinces of Madras, Bombay, Punjab, Central Provinces, Bihar and Orissa, and Assam a total of 1,298,430 handlooms, and 1,091,100 whole-time and 554,600 part-time weavers.¹

As regards the comparative output of the cotton mills and the handlooms, figures published in 1931 and relating to 1929-30 show that the mills produced 2,418 million yards of cloth, while the handlooms produced 1,404 million yards; about 1,919 million yards of cloth were imported from abroad.² Thus about 25 per cent. of the total quantity of cloth consumed in the country in 1929-30 was supplied by handloom weavers.

Other indications of the importance of the handloom industry are furnished by the following estimates of the annual value of the cloth produced in various provinces: Bombay, Rs. 45,000,000; United Provinces (Benares only), Rs. 12,500,000; Assam, Rs. 20,000,000.

The types of cloth produced include plain woven materials such as bed-sheets, *dhoties*³, and *chadar*⁴, which are woven of coarse-count yarn, and coloured fabrics such as *saris*⁵ and turban cloths. Besides these, artistic cloths are woven out of very fine counts. Most of the yarn of the coarser variety is obtained from the Indian mills, while yarn of the finer counts is imported from abroad. In 1931 it was estimated that the handloom industry used about 307 million lb. of yarn produced by the Indian mills and 44 million lb. of imported yarn.⁶

The coarser varieties of cloth are mostly for local consumption and are sold by the weaver direct to the consumer or through the intermediary of a dealer. Goods made of finer counts find sales in inter-provincial markets; thus, special kinds of fabrics woven in the Central Provinces are sold in Bombay and Indore. Some types of goods are also marketed in foreign countries. With the migration of Indian workers and other classes of the population to countries like South Africa, Burma, Malaya, etc., a market was created in these territories

¹ Bulletins of Indian Industries and Labour, 1936, No. 56.

² D. M. AMALSAD: *Cotton Cloth Impasse*. 1931.

³ *Dhoti* = loin cloth worn by men.

⁴ *Chadar* = a sheet worn as a shawl by men and sometimes by women.

⁵ *Sari* = a long piece of cloth worn by women.

⁶ D. M. AMALSAD: *op. cit.*

for the kind of goods that the emigrants were accustomed to use at home.¹ Madras has a considerable share in this branch of production, and it has been estimated that about 40,000 looms are engaged in producing goods for the export trade. *Lungis*², for instance, are exported from this Presidency in large quantities to the Straits Settlements, Ceylon, Federated Malay States, Java, Sumatra, Burma, etc., cheap coloured *saris* are exported to Malaya and Rangoon, and special kinds of handkerchiefs popularly known as Madras handkerchiefs are sent to South Africa. However, the trade in all these articles has shown a decline in recent years, due partly to a falling off in the demand of Indian workers abroad, and partly to Japanese competition. Thus, in 1924-1925, the value of the Madras handkerchiefs exported was about Rs.4,300,000, while in 1934-1935 it had fallen to Rs.1,200,000.

The earnings of hand weavers vary from province to province and depend on the type of cloth produced. In Bombay a weaver who did not work on his own account was reported in 1930 to earn about Rs.15 to Rs.20 per month; the skilled fine worker received about Rs.30 per month.³ According to the Report of the Central Provinces Provincial Banking Inquiry Committee, published in 1930, "the average net monthly income of a weaver, which is the return for the labour of the weaver and at least two other members of his family working at processes preliminary to weaving, varies from Rs.15 to Rs.20. The weavers turning out finer *saris* earn up to Rs.35 or Rs.40 a month." In Madras the Report of the Survey of Cottage Industries (1929) estimated the average earnings of a weaver at 6 to 8 annas a day; skilled workers engaged in the production of cloth of finer counts earned from 8 to 12 annas a day.

Metal Industry

Metal working is a widespread handicraft industry. Practically every Hindu family uses metallic utensils, and it is therefore usual to find in each village braziers and copper-smiths who repair old articles. The skilled artisans who make brass and copper vessels are mainly concentrated in towns and centres of pilgrimage.

¹ Report of the Survey of Cottage Industries in the Madras Presidency.

² *Lungi* = a kind of cloth mostly worn by Mohammedans.

³ Report of the Bombay Provincial Banking Inquiry Committee, Vol. 1. 1930.

No statistics are available regarding the number of persons employed in this industry ; but it has been estimated that in Bombay about 20,862 persons earn their livelihood through the manufacture of brass and copper vessels, in Bengal about 36,000, in the Central Provinces about 13,600, and in the United Provinces about 14,000. A few factories using mechanical power have been started in Bombay, but the industry is mainly of the cottage type. The chief wares manufactured include, in addition to the larger copper and brass vessels, brass cups, spoons, trays, lampstands, locks and cutlery. In some places, e.g. in the Central Provinces, idols are cast. Benares has for a long time past specialised in repoussé work on sheet and hollow ware, generally of brass and copper, and Moradabad in the same Province is still noted for its artistic brass ware. Both the Moradabad and the Benares industries used to cater for oversea markets, but this trade is said to be declining.

It is reported that the industry, in spite of its firm hold on rural life, is slowly succumbing to the penetration of aluminium ware.

Leather Industry

The leather industry is divided into two classes : (a) leather tanning, (b) making of leather articles such as boots, shoes, water-bags, harness, saddlery, etc. Tanning as a cottage industry is perhaps in its declining stage, since tanning is well suited for organisation as a factory industry. The making of leather articles, especially boots and shoes, is however still found everywhere as a cottage industry. There is an increasing demand for boots and shoes from the middle classes who have taken to dressing after the western fashion ; and in almost every town there are one or two workshops solely engaged in the production of boots and shoes after the European pattern.

In the United Provinces more than 100,000 people earn their livelihood by means of this industry. Agra is famous for its footwear, not only in this Province, but throughout the whole of India. In the Central Provinces about 97,000 persons are engaged in leather making and working, of whom about 89,000 are boot- and shoe-makers. According to the latest census the number of tanners and shoemakers in the Punjab is over 200,000, the number of shoemakers being

about 134,000. Hoshiarpur is famous for its artistic shoes ; and its exports are valued at Rs.30,000 annually.¹

Gold and Silver Thread Manufacture

The market for gold and silver thread is spread all over India. This thread is used in most of the silk cloths and to a less extent in cotton cloths produced on handlooms. It has been calculated that the quantity of gold thread consumed in the manufacture of silk *saris* is about 57 per cent., of silk *dhoties* 15 per cent., and of fine cotton cloths 25 per cent.² India used to export gold and silver thread in large quantities, but the competition of other countries has ousted the Indian industries from the continental markets and imports from France and Germany have succeeded in capturing a portion of the Indian market.³

Surat, Bombay, Poona, Benares and Bangalore are the chief centres of the production of gold thread. It is extensively carried on as a cottage industry in Surat and Benares ; in Surat about 13,000 people are employed in this industry. A few factories using power have been started in Bombay and some parts of Surat. Gold thread from Surat is sent to all parts of India, to Singapore, Siam and Japan.

The labourers engaged in this industry in Bombay earn from 10 annas to Rs.1-8-0 per day, the more skilled among them earning up to Rs.2.⁴

Sericulture

The growing of mulberry plants and the rearing of silk-worms is an important cottage industry in certain districts of Bengal and in Mysore, and it is carried on in the Madras Presidency in the district of Kollegal and neighbourhood. Other forms of sericulture, dependent on the *tasar* silkworm, are common in the Central Provinces and Bihar and Orissa, while the rearing of *endi*, *muga*, and *pat* silkworms is common in Assam. There is a good market outside Assam for *endi* and *muga* cloth, the price of which has greatly increased in the last ten years.⁵

¹ *Indian Co-operative Review*, April 1936.

² D. M. AMALSAD : *Prospects of Gold Thread Manufacture in South India*.

³ *Report of the Bombay Provincial Banking Inquiry Committee*.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Report of the Indian Central Banking Inquiry Committee*.

Sericulture is essentially a subsidiary occupation of agriculturists, and women play an important part in the rearing of silkworms. In Madras it is reported that a silkworm rearer with three acres of mulberry plantation is able to make a net income of Rs.320 in a year.¹

THE PROBLEMS OF HANDICRAFTSMEN

It has been observed in the previous paragraphs that handicrafts in India have to face severe competition from organised industries, both within the country and abroad. The brass- and copper-ware industry, for instance, is threatened by cheap aluminium and enamelled ware. As regards the footwear industry, the influx of Japanese shoes is a serious factor to be reckoned with. The handloom industry has to face competition from the power-mills; it is alleged that the mills compete in those varieties of cloth for the production of which they supply the handloom weavers with yarn; and as the price of yarn forms the main item of expenditure in the manufacture of cloth on handlooms, the handloom weaver is at a serious disadvantage in competing with the articles turned out by the mills.

That, in spite of these difficulties, the handloom industry can still sell about 1,400 million yards of cloth per annum shows the strong hold which the handloom product has on the minds of the people.

The progress of handicrafts in India is gravely hampered by the fact that the craftsmen are poor, illiterate and unorganised. They rarely move with the times; and rarely adapt their methods to the changing requirements of the markets. They are in the grip of middlemen, upon whom they depend both for the supply of the raw material and the sale of the product.

The part played by the middleman can best be illustrated by the situation in the handloom industry. The weaver at first works on the raw material supplied to him by the customer. He then begins to weave coarse cloths on his own account and sell them direct to the consumer. As he acquires more skill he tries his hand at finer fabrics. Because the price of

¹ *Report of the Survey of Cottage Industries in the Madras Presidency.*

yarn of fine counts is high and he has no capital he is forced to go to a yarn dealer, buy yarn on credit and agree to repay the cost of the yarn when his product is sold. Soon he finds it difficult to market his products because the demand for finer materials is seasonal. The yarn dealer is therefore obliged to purchase them for sale. The dealer has thus not only to supply the yarn but to sell the manufactured cloth as well. This procedure places him in an advantageous position. He stipulates the price of the cloth beforehand, and leaves very little margin of profit to the weaver. The result of this arrangement is that, in course of time, the weaver becomes indebted to the dealer ; and, when the debt amounts to a sum beyond his means to repay, he pledges his loom to the dealer and works under him for piece wages.

The circumstances which led to the rise of the middleman in the handloom industry were present in other cottage industries also ; so that, in most of the cottage industries, there are three types of artisans : (1) independent artisans who work at home ; (2) master workmen (*karkhanadars*) with assistants working under their supervision ; (3) dependent workmen perpetually in debt to a dealer.

However, the independent craftsman and the master workman have also to depend on the local dealer for financial assistance. They receive the raw material from him on credit at a high price and on condition that the manufactured goods are sold through him. Where the cost of the raw material is high, it is rare to find independent workmen buying their own material and marketing their products without the aid of the middleman. In the metal industry, for example, the prevailing form of organisation is that of the master workman with a few assistants, working on material supplied to him by the dealer. In some branches of metal work, where the processes of manufacture are so specialised that they cannot be undertaken by the same set of artisans, the dealer who supplies the artisans with the raw materials co-ordinates the different branches of production.

The export trade is also conducted through a series of middlemen. In Madras, for instance, the weaver who weaves *lungis*, Madras handkerchiefs, etc., hands over the finished product to the local dealer who sends it to the exporting firm, generally through the medium of contractors. The article is

then consigned to a cloth merchant in England, and from there it finds its way to the place of consumption ; for example, South Africa, Malaya, etc.¹

The middlemen thus perform useful services, though at prohibitive rates. As a general rule, however, they are as illiterate as the handicraftsmen ; they do not study the market, nor do they indicate to the artisans changes in design, etc. Further, as the artisans cannot be relied upon to manufacture up to specification, the dealers consider their purchases as a gamble ; they cover themselves from risks by cutting down the prices paid to the producers, who in turn are led to tamper with the materials, with the result that the quality of the product declines.

The artisans thus require help and guidance, not only as regards the marketing of their products but even in the initial stages of production. As the Industrial Reorganisation Committee of the United Provinces stated : " Sale and production are closely interlinked, and sales cannot be developed unless production is also organised. "

THE STATE AND HANDICRAFTS

The Departments of Industries in the various provinces have until recently mainly devoted their attention to improving the quality of the products of handicraft industries. Efforts have been directed towards the improvement of the designs, technique and hereditary methods of work of the artisans.

As handloom weaving is the premier cottage industry in India, it has received the greatest attention from the provincial Governments. The methods employed have included the training of weavers' children in schools and the demonstrating to adults of the efficacy of improved appliances. In Bombay, in 1934-1935 there were seven weaving schools for *bona-fide* weavers, ten cottage weaving demonstrations, one cottage sizing-set demonstration and two dyeing and printing demonstrations.² Bengal had in the same year nine district weaving schools and twenty-seven travelling weaving schools (these latter gave instruction in the houses of the weavers).³ In the Central Provinces a travelling staff, consisting of two weaving teachers

¹ *Report of the Survey of Cottage Industries in the Madras Presidency.*

² *Annual Report of the Department of Industries in Bombay, 1934-1935.*

³ *Annual Administration Report of the Department of Industries in Bengal, 1934-1935.*

and twelve cottage weavers, visit all the weaving centres and popularise the new appliances.¹ In Madras weaving is taught to weavers' children in a number of State-aided industrial schools.

The introduction of the fly-shuttle in place of the primitive hand-thrown shuttle has been the chief aim of all the demonstration parties. Though its introduction met with much opposition it may be safely asserted that the fly-shuttle has now made its appearance nearly everywhere.²

In order to improve the quality of the output, the weaving of new patterns is being taught in various provinces; with this end in view, dobbies, which enable the weaver to weave cloth with patterned borders, have been introduced.

Many provinces have a central institute to co-ordinate the work of the weaving schools and other organisations and to aid the growth of allied cottage industries.

A few provincial Governments have devoted funds to the development of the tanning industry, and have opened institutes for giving training in tanning. In Bombay, out of the subsidy for rural development received from the Government of India in 1936, a sum of Rs.25,000 has been set apart to secure improvements in the preserving and tanning of hides.³ The Punjab Government have assigned Rs.75,920 for the development of this industry; a Central Training Institute established at Jullundur will give instruction to tanners in up-to-date methods of tanning.

Sericulture has also received its due share of attention in provinces where it is important. Efforts in this direction have been confined to the supply of improved qualities of seed to the rearer and the introduction of modern methods of preparing improved silk yarn. The Government of India established in 1934 an Imperial Sericultural Committee, and decided to give annual subventions of Rs.100,000 to the provincial Governments for a period of five years (1935-1940) to improve the sericultural industry. This sum is to be devoted principally to the increased production of disease-free "cellular" seed and such research as may be possible in connection therewith.

The Departments of Industries in the various provinces,

¹ *Report of the Working of the Department of Industries. Central Provinces, 1935.*

² A. G. CLOW : *State and Industry.*

³ *The Bombay Co-operative Quarterly, June 1936.*

besides helping the existing industries, are studying the possibilities of introducing or resuscitating other cottage industries. In Madras a survey has been made of the ceramic industry, and steps are being taken to introduce the manufacture of gold thread as a cottage industry. In Bombay the possibility of introducing the manufacture of glass bangles as a cottage industry is being studied; research is also being conducted into pottery glazing and vegetable oil production. Bengal has successfully started the making of umbrellas, and training is given in the manufacture of parasols, fancy umbrella handles, walking sticks, etc.

Many of the provinces have dépôts for exhibiting and selling the products of cottage workers, some of which are subsidised by the Government. The United Provinces has an emporium for the development of the art ware of the Province. It has established agencies in different parts of India, and goods from the emporium are being exhibited free of charge at the museums of Allahabad, Ahmedabad and Poona. As a selling organisation, the emporium has, in spite of the widespread depression, not only maintained its trading position but extended its total business. Its total sales, both in foreign and local markets, amounted in 1928-1929 to Rs.24,773 and in 1932-1933 to Rs.48,940.¹

The Central Provinces started an emporium in the museum at Nagpur "to stock, sell and display products of the local industries". The sales during 1934 amounted only to Rs.708, but "the utility of the emporium is not to be judged merely by sales. Its most important function is to bring the manufacturers into touch with merchants and the consumers and to display indigenous products at one central dépôt for the benefit both of manufacturers and buyers."²

The Madras Government sanctioned in 1934 an annual grant of Rs.3,000 for a period of three years to the Victoria Technical Institute (a museum in Madras for the products of cottage industries) to enable them to arrange for the sale of Madras industrial products in European markets through an agent in London.

The emporium in Bihar and Orissa has also an agent in London who is transacting a satisfactory volume of business.

¹ *Report of the Industrial Reorganisation Committee. United Provinces, 1935.*

² *Report on the Working of the Department of Industries. Central Provinces, 1935.*

The Punjab has a sales dépôt at Lahore, and in Assam an emporium was opened in 1920 at Gauhati.

An important part in the development of cottage industries is being played by exhibitions organised by Government departments. These exhibitions bring the producer and the buyer into contact and thus help the marketing of the product. The Government of India made a grant of Rs.10,000 to the All-India hand-weaving exhibition held at Patna in February 1936. The provincial Governments take part also in exhibitions held abroad. Thus Madras made arrangements in 1934 for the display of a representative range of articles at the British Industries Fair, at the Milan Fair and at the Canadian National Exhibition at Toronto.¹ In Bihar and Orissa it is reported that the European trade in art textiles has practically been built up by regular participation in the British Industries Fair and other selected exhibitions in Great Britain and other European countries. By the publicity thereby given, the volume of business, which began to develop after the British Empire Exhibition of 1924 but was only of the value of £176 in 1925-1926, has increased to about £7,000-£8,000 annually in spite of the trade depression.²

The Government of India has also taken an active interest in the problem of cottage industries. By reviving the Industries Conference in 1933, it has provided an annual opportunity for discussion of the means whereby small industries may be encouraged. Moreover, the Indian Stores Department purchases cutlery, locks, stable gear, uniforms, crockery, postal bags, etc. from cottage handicraftsmen. The cutlery industry of Wazirabad and Sialkot has thus received some stimulus from the orders placed by the Department, and similar assistance has been given to the metal workers in Aligarh.³ The Industrial Research Bureau, established in 1935, is investigating industries like vegetable oil production, glass and soap making. The Government of India has also, as noted above, given grants to provincial Governments for the development of sericulture, and in 1934 a sum of Rs.500,000 was allotted for the better organisation of the handloom weaving industry.

¹ *Report of the Department of Industries*. Madras, 1935.

² *Proceedings of the Seventh Industries Conference*. 1935.

³ *State Action in Respect of Industries* (Bulletins of Indian Industries and Labour, No. 57, 1936).

CO-OPERATION AND HANDICRAFTS

The efforts of the Co-operative Departments in the various provinces to develop co-operation among handicraftsmen have not yet been attended with any very high degree of success. Thus in Bombay, in 1933-1934 there were forty-nine weavers' societies catering for 1,957 members; their working capital amounted to Rs.234,042 and their sales to Rs.104,602.¹ In 1934-1935 Madras had twenty-nine societies exclusively for weavers; of these, fifteen societies remained dormant, while the others bought raw materials to the value of Rs.18,537 and purchased from members goods worth Rs.44,807; the total working capital of the societies was Rs.99,770 and the value of the finished products sold to the public was Rs.49,340.² The Punjab had, in 1935-1936, 177 weavers' societies with 3,099 members. In Bengal there were in 1934-1935 about 325 weavers' societies with a total membership of 5,908. These figures, although incomplete, show that only a small proportion of the total number of handloom weavers are members of co-operative societies, and even the few societies in existence do not function very efficiently nor do they conduct a considerable volume of business.

An impetus to the co-operative movement has, however, been given by the Government of India grant of Rs.500,000 per annum, to which reference was made in an earlier paragraph. The funds placed at the disposal of the local Governments are being used to develop the handloom industry through co-operative organisations.³ The methods adopted in each province differ widely, but one common feature is the establishment of a central co-operative organisation (called either a Provincial Co-operative Society or a District Association or a Co-operative Union) to finance and supply raw materials to the primary weavers' societies affiliated to it. In Bombay, the United Provinces and Bengal, the central organisation markets the products of its affiliated members; in Madras and the Central Provinces the primary societies sell their output with the help of marketing agents.⁴

¹ *Annual Report on the Working of Co-operative Societies in the Bombay Presidency*. 1935.

² *Report of the Registrar of Co-operative Societies*. Madras, 1935.

³ *Proceedings of the Seventh Industries Conference*. 1935.

⁴ *Indian Co-operative Review*, April 1936.

A few co-operative societies of leather workers exist in the United Provinces and in the Punjab : in the Punjab there are fifty-nine societies with 960 members ; in the United Provinces there were, in 1934-1935, forty-nine societies. Further, there were reported to be eight bell-metal co-operative societies in Orissa in 1926 ; in 1929 their total working capital amounted to Rs.165,000.

Originally, most handicraft co-operative societies were started with the intention of buying raw material in bulk and supplying it on credit to the members, who would deliver the finished products to the societies for sale. In actual practice, however, they encountered numerous difficulties in competing with the local suppliers of raw material, and the disloyalty of the members further weakened their position. They were thus led to give up the supply of raw materials and marketing of produce, and became purely credit societies.¹

The primary obstacle to the progress of the co-operative movement is the indebtedness of the artisan and his consequent inability to free himself from the grip of the master-workman or the dealer. This leads him to be disloyal to his society and to sell his products for ready cash to the local dealer. From Madras it is reported that the value of raw material sold by a society to its members was on an average Rs.1,884 while the value of the finished goods purchased from them was Rs.418 per society.² This illustrates the apathy shown by the members towards their societies.

Another obstacle to development is the lack of a true co-operative spirit among the artisans. It is said that in many cases the well-to-do members use their influence to secure for themselves a more than proportionate share of the raw materials or the loans. The artisans generally are too individualistic and look upon the co-operative society merely as "a station for the distribution of public largess".³

Difficulties are also encountered in securing the right type of man for the management of co-operative societies. The managers, whether paid or honorary, have no special training ; and owing to their lack of technical knowledge they rarely study the market.

¹ *Report of the Bengal Provincial Banking Inquiry Committee.*

² *Report of the Survey of Cottage Industries in the Madras Presidency.*

³ N. M. JOSHI : "Handicrafts and Co-operation in the Bombay Deccan" in *The Bombay Co-operative Quarterly*, June 1936.

A further difficulty is that the societies are generally unable to absorb the entire output of their members, even if it is delivered to them. That societies can work well, if there is a big and continued demand to be met, is shown in the case of some of the weavers' societies in the Punjab. About fourteen weavers' societies in this Province are engaged in the making of mosquito nets for which there is a large demand, thanks to the anti-malaria campaign conducted by the Government; and it is reported that about 21,000 nets, at an average cost of Rs.1-8-0, were sold in 1935 by these societies.¹

THE FUTURE OF HANDICRAFTS

The industrial evolution of a country is conditioned by its social structure. Where, as in India, the rural type of economy predominates, the traditional industries are carried on in small units and are generally combined with agricultural work. The separation of industry from agriculture, due to the increasing specialisation of industry, results in a change from rural to urban economy; but such a change is not easy, neither can it be rapidly achieved. The rigidities of the social structure will not allow a sudden depopulation of rural areas and a rapid growth of the urban population, and it becomes necessary therefore for the large-scale industries concentrated in towns to depend to a large extent for their labour supply on the villages. Much of this labour continues, however, to be migratory because of its stake in agriculture; consequently, the development of its efficiency is impeded. Further, the factory industries have a large turnover of labour, with the result that their labour costs are increased and they are at a disadvantage in competition with highly industrialised countries. These phenomena seem inevitably associated with the super-imposition on an agricultural country of modern forms of industrial organisation.

It has therefore frequently been argued that handicraft industries, apart from other reasons for their maintenance, are more economical than large-scale industries in predominantly agricultural countries. The requisite stable supply of skilled labour is more readily available; and the labour

¹ "Co-operation and Cottage Industries in the Punjab", by Khan Mohd. Bashir AHMAD KHAN, in *Indian Co-operative Review*, April 1936.

costs are lower because the rural worker can subsist largely on the produce of his own strip of land.¹

The existence and efficiency of handicraft industries depends, however, on their adaptation to modern economic conditions. In order to survive they must be able to command a high standard of technical knowledge and skill, suitable machinery and commercial organisation. Among the methods of organisation suggested is that of co-operative societies, with a central co-ordinating agency for one or more handicraft industries. As already stated, a beginning has been made in this direction in India with the handloom industry.

It has been further suggested that, instead of forming separate co-operative societies for handicraftsmen, the existing credit societies might take up the additional functions of financing the artisans and marketing their products. This idea is based on the experience of other countries, where it has been found that a society with multiple functions offers a greater resiliency in periods of stress and strain than a specialised society. Where there is a scarcity of capital and want of proper management it is more economical and advantageous to have, in any one area, one credit society with additional functions such as purchasing, marketing, etc., than to have two or more societies, each with a different object.² In this regard the Committee on Co-operation in Mysore observed that, with certain reservations, "there is no objection to credit societies undertaking non-credit activities as additional or secondary functions, the transactions and accounts of the two sides of activity being kept distinct."³ It has also been suggested that credit societies with commercial functions might affiliate themselves, in respect of their secondary activity, to a central society whose main object is to market the products of handicraftsmen.

Other proposals for the development of handicrafts in India include that of organising production in small rural factories using the best machinery available and, wherever possible, electric power. That this is practicable is shown in the case of Mysore, where the weavers are being organised

¹ Cf. BOWLEY and ROBERTSON : *A Scheme for an Economic Census of India*.

² Cf. *Review of International Co-operation*, July 1936, pp. 259-264.

³ *Report of the Committee on Co-operation in Mysore*, p. 45. 1936.

in small workshops using power looms.¹ In the metal industry also there are some workshops, e.g. in Nasik and Poona, which use mechanical power and operate as small-scale undertakings. A complementary proposal is that, in this scheme of mechanisation, a central co-ordinating agency should take up the preparatory and finishing processes.

Finally, it is being urged in India that the methods that are being applied by the provincial Governments to improve the conditions of the handloom industry could with advantage be extended to other handicraft industries.

¹ *Indian Co-operative Review*, April 1936.