



SMALL SCALE INDUSTRIES IN THANJAVUR DISTRICT: 1858-1967

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Abstract:

Small-scale industry is a project or firm created on a small budget or for a small group of people. A small-scale industry produces its goods using small machines, less power and hired labour. It is located within a single place and produces goods meant for few people. In Indian economy small-scale industries occupy an important place, because of their employment potential and their contribution to total industrial output and exports. The present study Thanjavur district has been from early days a flourishing centre of small-scale industries. Handloom industry occupies an important place in the economy of Thanjavur district as it provides livelihood to more than 72,000 people in the district. Thanjavur is a noted centre for cottage industries, and handicrafts, mats made of korai, screw pine, palm, and coconut leaves are the important cottage industries. Mat weaving is an important traditional handicraft of the Thanjavur district. Thanjavur is famous for its metal industry which gives employment for a few thousand people. The themes of the famous Thanjavur Art Plates are the deities, birds, flowers, and geometric patterns. Swamimalai is known for image-making in stone and bronze or both. The leadware industry of Kumbakonam enjoys a good reputation in South-India.

Key Words: Craft Industries, Handloom Industries, Mat Industries, Metal Industries, Leadware Industries & Rice Milling Industries

Introduction:

Small-scale industry is a project or firm created on a small budget or for a small group of people. A small-scale industry produces its goods using small machines, less power and hired labour. It is located within a single place and produces goods meant for few people. The most governments implement policies that strengthen the small-scale industry sector because of the role the industries play in economical development. The industries help in alleviating poverty through provision of employment and other products. In Indian economy small-scale industries occupy an important place, because of their employment potential and their contribution to total industrial output and exports. The present study Thanjavur district has been from early days a flourishing centre of small-scale industries. After independence congress government took various measures taken by the promotion of small – scale industries in Tamilnadu as well as Thanjavur district.

Handloom Industries:

Handloom industry occupies an important place in the economy of Thanjavur district as it provides livelihood to more than 72,000 people in the district. The number of handlooms has increased substantially during the recent years, and in 1981, it is reported that the number of looms in Thanjavur district stood at 12,110. Of these, about 54 per cent are in the Co-operative fold, and the rest are in the private sector. Handloom goods, worth more than four crores, are marketed through Co-optex units annually. The district even today stands foremost in the varieties of the handloom fabrics woven in silk, cotton, and lace in the designs of the patterns and the artistic workmanship exhibited. Silk weaving is mainly carried on in Thanjavur, Kumbakonam, and Koranad. The well known pure silk sarees of Koranad known as "Kattadi" saris with decorative lace borders and squares in the body are now gradually being replaced by cheap pattern of saris manufactured out of a mixture of Sun and silk fabrics. The indigenous dyes well-known for fast, sober, and pleasing colours have also given place too cheap, gaudy foreign dyes.

The Government of Tamil Nadu extends liberal financial and technical support to promote the industry under various schemes. Special efforts have also been taken to introduce new designs of cloth, and for this purpose, a design centre has been opened. With a view to improve the conditions of the weavers, various welfare measures have also been initiated by the State Government like housing schemes, introduction of group insurance etc.

The Government has also established two industrial training institutes, one at Nagapattinam and the other at Thanjavur to foster and promote small scale industries in this district. Further, the State Industries Promotion Corporation of Tamil Nadu Limited (SIPCOT) was set up in 1971 as a public limited company wholly owned by the Government of Tamil Nadu with the object of developing medium and major industries in the backward and under developed districts of the state.1

The handloom industry flourished chiefly in Kumbakonam, Thanjavur, Koranad, Ammapet, Ayyampet, Thugili, and Mannargudi. The castes engaged and employed in weaving are the Pattunulkkarars, the Kaikolars, Seniyans, Saliyans, and Sedans. They are all professional weaving castes. Other than these classes, pallis and chettis are also employed in this profession in Koranadu. Balijas, Paraiyahs, and Agamudaiyars are also found engaged in this profession.2

Cottage Industry:

Thanjavur is a noted centre for cottage industries, and handicrafts, mats made of korai, screw pine, palm, and coconut leaves are the important cottage industries. The mat weaving is spread over a number of places such as Chakkarapalli, Pakkirthaikkal, and Mudukkur. Ornamental fans are made out of Palmyra leaves; they are artistically painted and decorated with gold foils and silk threads. The district is also famous for Thanjavur bells, metal plates, bronze images, bowls, napkins and powder boxes etc made of copper and brass. The district is equally well known for its pith articles consisting of beautiful models of Hindu idols, temples, mosques, flower garlands, bouquets, parrots, and peacocks. The making of musical instruments of jack wood like the veena, the tambura, the violin, the mridangam, the tabla, and the Kanjara are of excellent taste. Thanjavur, Kumbakonam and Thiruvarur are known places for the manufacture of musical instruments.³

Silk Weaving:

Before Kanchipuram became known for silk weaving, Kumbakonam and its surrounding areas were regarded as the traditional silk weaving centres. The district is famous for silk-weaving, which is carried on in Thanjavur, Kumbakonam, and Koranadu. The Gujarati caste of Pattunulkkarars are mainly engaged in silk-weaving. The Koranad sarees are called as Kottadi sarees. These sarees are also manufactured in Kumbakonam, Thanjavur, Valangaiman, and Ammapettai. In Koranadu, Thanjavur, and Kumbakonam, silk cloth of a superior kind with abundance of lace in the borders and edges with striped and artistic designs are manufactured, mainly for the use of richer classes like Chettinad women.

The silk cloth most frequently made in Kumbakonam is a woman's cloth called pittambaram the name of the pattern. Fine lace cloth with 100 count yarn is woven by a large number of Harijans and Kaikolars at Thugili and Mannargudi. The local capitalists controlling the weaving establishments exported a part of the manufacture to Madras and the Straits Settlements. All these are partly consumed in Thanjavur but largely exported to other districts and places like Madras, Bombay, and the strait settlements.⁴

Carpets:

Ayyampettai in Thanjavur district was once an important centre for the manufacture of the woollen mats or small carpets for which the district is famous. The Thanjavur district was also well known for silk carpets of remarkable beauty. Ayyampettai was also famous for its silk and woollen carpets. The weavers say that the cheaper jailmade woollen had destroyed these industries. Woollen carpets are rarely made and silk carpets weaving industry seems to have disappeared entirely. E.B. Havell says that the Ayyampettai cotton carpets are good both in design and colour. Country cotton has always been used for this manufacture.⁵

Dyeing and Printing:

Dyeing was an important industry in Thanjavur district. The dyes used were indigenous dyes, and the various colours produced have been unanimously pronounced by lovers of all tastes as being sober and pleasing to the eye. This industry declined due to the importation of cheap foreign dyes. Silk is dyed largely by the weavers at Thanjavur, Kumbakonam, and Ayyampettai, by Pattunulkkarar and Saliyans at Ayyampettai and Mayiladuthurai. Silk dyeing was also done at Pulavanattam in the Thanjavur taluk and at Swamimalai and Thirumankkudi. Kumbakonam was the largest of these centres. Cotton dyeing was done in a large number of places like Kumbakonam, Ayyampettai, and Mayiladuthurai. With regard to printing, there were two distinct classes of work, the hand-painted or block printed cloth used either for personal wear or as bed covers. The hands painted subjects were used for adorning the Hindu cars and temples or for wall hangings on festive occasions. At Kumbakonam and Nagore, the cloth was all hand-painted.⁶ In the library of Thanjavur palace, quantities of Indian manuscripts are preserved in cloth covers forming envelopes for the loose pages of manuscripts. At Nagapattinam, figures on cotton, resembling those of Kumbakonam, are done with a pen instead of blocks.

Mat Industry:

Mat weaving is an important traditional handicraft of the Thanjavur district. The materials used are korai grass, screw pine, palm leaf, and coconut leaf. Korai grass grows all over the district. The places best known for grass mats are Sirkali and Ayyampettai. The weavers are mostly Harijans, Muslims, and Valaiyars. Superior varieties are made in Chakkarapalli and Madukkur. The mats are in great demand not only in the district, but also in other places, outside the district.

Metal Industry:

Thanjavur is famous for its metal industry which gives employment for a few thousand people. Vessels of brass, copper, lead, and bell are manufactured for export. Its chief centres are Kumbakonam, Nachiarkoil, Kivalur, Karaimangalam, Swamimalai, Daraswaram, and Valayapet. The deepam or lamp is known of Thanjavur's metalware. They are generally grouped under arati lamps hand lamps and chain lamps.

Thanjavur Art Plate:

The themes of the famous Thanjavur Art Plates are the deities, birds, flowers, and geometric patterns. Formerly, these are used as ritual objects. But now people use them as wall hangings. Most of the workers are Visva Brahmins though there are other castes engaged in the industry. Articles manufactured here are a large variety of household utensils commonly used by all classes of people. The principal raw material is brass in

sheets, circles, and scrapes and the auxiliary raw materials are other metals (aluminum, zinc, and the like) and chemicals used are borax, sulphuric acid, and the like. As per the record of 1952, 17 or 26.6% of merchants were engaged in direct production. In Kumbakonam, there were 600 households employed in metal work in 1906, and in Nachiyarkoil it was said to be 200 households. The annual output for the entire Kumbakonam firka was estimated at 27 lakhs seers valued at Rs. 31 lakhs.

Idol Manufacturing Industry:

The manufacturing of idols is an ancient handicraft. It requires skill of a high order and a long period of apprenticeship. The art is confined to a particular community, and outsiders have now taken to it. In previous decades, they were patronised by Maharajas, Zamindars, and temple authorities. But now, the industry is far from paying, and some of the families have moved to other places in search of employment. Swamimalai is known for image-making in stone and bronze or both. The Nataraja image made in Swamimalai is world-famous. The staphathis are specialized in making dancing figures. A very popular one is "Kannadi Amman," a lady with a mirror.⁷

Leadware Industry:

The leadware industry of Kumbakonam enjoys a good reputation in South-India. It provided employment to 39 families and the total output is estimated at 105,000 seers, valid at Rs. 4,32,000. Unlike the brassware industry, it is localised, and is run on a small scale. Since people like to use silver utensils and aluminum or stainless steel vessels, the demand for the lead ware products is limited and the cost of the raw materials is also costly.

Pith Work:

Pith articles consist of models of Hindu idols, temples, mosques, and flower garlands. The pith is obtained from Thanjavur, Mannargudi, Sirkali, and Mayiladuthurai taluks.

Toys:

Dolls are made out of paper with rounded bottom of clay, which makes them always to maintain an erect position, whatever way they are pushed. They are more in the neighbouring taluks of Kumbakonam and Mayiladuthurai.⁶²

Jewellery and Painting on Wood:

Thanjavur is one of the oldest seats of civilization in the presidency and it is reputed for arts of luxury and refinement. There are goldsmith painters and wood carvers. In the large town, fine work is done by the native jewellers. Jewellery worn on the head, the elaborate Thalaisaman, is a bridal decoration. Since the devadasis or temple dancers considered themselves brides of the temple deity, they wore a bride's jewels while dancing. This tradition still continues, and has resulted in South Indian bridal jewellery being mistakenly called Bharathanatyam dance jewellery.⁸ Goldsnuff boxes are made by a few goldsmiths which were largely sold to other districts. Linga Balijas in Nagore procure pearls from the Gulf of Mannar and rubies from Burma and polish them. Wood carving is generally done by workmen called car carpenters. They usually carve images on temple cars. They also execute designs on door frames, and sometimes make dolls and idols. Large stone and marble figures of gods on ivory and metals are made by the Visva Brahmins.

Thanjavur Paintings:

In Thanjavur, the Maratha Kings developed a distinct style of painting and established a separate school known as the "Thanjavur School of Paintings." Thanjavur paintings date from the middle of the eighteenth to the middle of the nineteenth century. They were painted on wood, glass, mica, ivory, and on walls. The paintings are characterised by the use of primary colours, avoiding mixtures. The painting was no longer meant for the beautification of the temple and the place, but it was also found in the houses of the middle class people. Even today, a large number of these paintings are under worship in pooja room not only in Thanjavur but also all over south India.⁹

Oil-Pressing Industry:

In Thanjavur district, oil-pressing is done in nearly 600 establishments. Gingelly, coconut, groundnut, iluppai, margosa, and pinnai oils are prepared in the district. The Vanniyars are the oil mongers. Oil pressing is done in the ordinary wooden mills called chekkus. The chekkus have been gradually replaced by power-driven oil mills. But it is believed that the oil produced in the chekku has better flavour and better nutrition than the oil extracted in the mills.

Rice Milling Industry:

Rice mill industry, is the only large scale industry existing in Thanjavur. There are more than 700 rice mills with 2820 workers in all over the district.¹⁰ In 1936, a steel rolling mill was established at Nagapattinam giving employment to over 500 workers.

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