

Editorial

The idea of starting factory production of cotton cloth and yarn in India took shape during the first two decades of the 19th century. The first cotton mill in India was established in Kolkata in 1818. The second cotton mill came into existence in 1830 in Bengal. The industry however found its most generous home in western India and especially in Mumbai. The first cotton textile mill called the Bombay Spinning and Weaving mill came into existence in Mumbai in February 1856. The Indian textile industry consists of traditional handloom sector with primitive technology, power loom sector which is a technologically improved form of handlooms and composite mill sector with its advanced technology. All the three handloom sector is more scattered and spread throughout the country, and is seen in the villages, power loom sector is decentralized-scattered in and around some identifiable centers and the mill sector which is well organized and integrated to a large extent, a part of which is composite having spinning, weaving, and processing under the same roof. There was a change in the fortunes of the industry when yarn and cloth began to be produced on a mass scale on power-driven machine. The household enterprise handlooms could not face the changing situation. From sunrise to sundown a handloom weaver could not turn out four yards of cloth, while a power loom on the same hour produces ten times the quality and quantity. The advent of the mill industry in the country was in the great interest of the situation. Indian mills slowly replaced imported yarn and started supplying yarn to the handloom sector; the use of mill yarn by handloom weavers has brought a profound change in the social and economic status of the handloom weavers. The traditional handlooms and textile mills were trying to fix their places in the industry. Handlooms at the one hand have the least speedy production at higher cost and mills on the other hand require huge capital investments and scientific advanced technology. For speedy production on a small scale at distant places, the weavers started installing power loom as 'decentralized' units. After independence many units in the mill sector started facing the problems. The technological changes were the need of the time and the mill sector could not meet this requirement. The labour problem also got multiplied due to the non-availability of skilled and trained workers. This resulted in a high cost of production and heavy losses to many units and finally closer to the mills. This adverse situation of mills also helped power looms to prosper fast. The factors like the wars, failure of mills, and the reservation for the handlooms helped power loom units to prosper very fast. The very nature of the decentralized power looms is such that it has reduced strain of operations, less expensive, instalments are very easy because these are very small units, and no labour laws are applicable. All these favourable factors led the power loom sector to develop in small villages in the hands of small entrepreneurs and in scattered and far off areas. But this development is entirely unplanned. Though current growth of this sector has been restricted by technological obsolescence, fragmented structure, low productivity, and low-end quality products, in future technology would play a lead role in this sector and will improve quality and productivity levels. To reap benefits Indian power loom industry has to prepare itself for drastic technological changes and will have to focus on areas such as technology up-gradation: modernization of power loom service centres and testing facilities; clustering of facilities to achieve optimum levels of production; welfare schemes for ensuring a healthy and safe working environment for the workers in future.

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