

HANDLOOM WEAVING IN TIRUNELVELI, 1800 – 1850

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ABSTRACT

Indian textiles figured prominently in the trade with Rome and muslins were exported to Egypt and Greece too. Large exports of such cloth were made to Malaya and Ceylon. In modern period it was Portuguese who first began sending Indian textiles to Europe. The Dutch who had started independent commercial activity towards the close of the sixteenth century had emerged as an important power in south India by the seventeenth century. The English had established a well founded network of trading factories centered on Fort. St. George. The city of Madras was chief centre from which the Company rule expanded. In 1684 the English Company's export was the highest in the history of textile exports from the Coramandal. In the seventeenth century, the Dutch and English East India Companies imported Indian muslins, chintzes and calicoes in large quantities. The East India Company which had established itself as a commercial enterprise could emerge as a territorial power in the beginning of the 19th century. Because of revolution in the sphere of textile production, England could now, using its political power, import factory-made cotton textiles into India. The objective of the study is to make a detailed study of how the indigenous weaving industry was affected by the onslaught of British colonialism unleashing a new socio-economic dynamics or distress in the district. There are studies at the regional or presidency level. But studies on sub-regional situations have not been, to my knowledge, attempted so far. Tirunelveli, being an important centre of cotton cultivation and trade covering in its district profile then, the present day Virudhunagar and Tuticorin districts, two other prominent cotton growing and cotton fabric producing centres, has not been studied intensively. Hence this research.

Keywords: Textile Export, Weaving Industry, Cotton Cultivation