

## **THE TEXTILE SECTOR OF COROMANDEL AND THE FRENCH TRADE, 1750-1800**

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Several sources refer to the brisk trade that existed between the European companies and the Coromandel Coast the eastern sea coast of southern India during the eighteenth century. Textiles formed the bulk of exports from India. The European ships showed keen interest in them as these items rendered huge profit to the Europeans in the markets of Europe, Africa and the New World. As this coast produced a rich variety of textiles that was much in demand outside India, the English, the French and the Dutch loaded their ships with numerous variety of textiles for the European markets. Apart from the English, the French remained actively involved in this trade till the last decade of the eighteenth century.

The long coastline of the Coromandel portrayed certain feature of its external trade. In the absence of natural harbour, anchoring of big ships was fairly difficult. Yet, a large number of European factories and comptoirs developed, mainly those of the English and the French in chose proximity to each other. Unlike Bengal, the coast of Coromandel had several small ports that enabled the French to survive the intense competition and political debacle. The presence of numerous ports with pockets of manufacture adjacent to them, the habitation of several communities dependent on manufacturing and trading activities, brought a unique element of competition and cooperation between the English and the French.

The districts of Ganjan, Vizagapatnam, Guntur, Chicacol, Rjamundry and Mustafanager formed the most fertile coastal strip of the Nizam's dominion in north Coromandel. Known for its dye-woods and thick forests, this region furnished some of the most beautiful cotton-goods of white and painted varieties. The French and the English were well aware of its commercial importance and vied with each other to take possession of this rich tract. One of the oldest ports of Coromandel coast was Masulipatnam but it had lost advantages to Madras and Pondicherry by the mid-eighteenth century. However, the French traders remained active and continued trading operation from here. The rapid rise of Madras, the English domination of this region and the dwindling fortune of the Nizam of Hyderabad, restricted the French trade. The region surrounding Masulipatnam still survived as a centre of cotton manufacture. The French clung to their limited trade rights and persisted with their purchases of cotton and *chay* goods (cotton cloth of deep red shade obtained from the roots of Chaya plants, mainly found in Nizam's territory). The problem of English presence and control over a small port of Ingeram in northern Coromandel did not allow the French port of Yanaon to grow, despite having several advantages Yanaon was primarily used by the French as a feeder port for Pondicheery. It consisted of about 8000 inhabitants and a good proportion of them were involved in the manufacture and commerce of trade.

<sup>i</sup> The cotton manufactures were concentrated in considerable number in this region and could offer goods of the value of 400,000 to 500,000 livers.<sup>ii</sup>

Pondicherry, Yanon and Karikar were the three comptoirs that served the French trade on the Coromandel Coast. Pondicherry was the French seat of power in the Indian Ocean. It was fairly well-developed and highly populated. The prominence of Pondicherry was chiefly due to its manufacturers. This port town and its environs produced some of the best textiles- white and painted. In the mid-eighteenth century, Duplex, the French younger, arranged to invite various classes of weavers such as Kaikolars, Sedars and Seniyars to settle at Villiyannullur in the vicinity of the town build houses and constructed looms for them.<sup>iii</sup> However, the French trade was badly hit during the wars with the English, e.g. The seven years' war (1756-1763), the American war in 1770s and the Revolutionary war from 1792. These wars acted as deterrent and dislocated the economic and demographic pattern of trade. According to Gentil's estimate, the population of Pondicherry in 1769 was about 60,000.<sup>iv</sup> It came down to 28,000 in 1778, the period of the American war.<sup>v</sup> Yet, the French trade survived despite wild fluctuations till the beginning of the revolutionary war.

In the eighteenth century we notice a discernible shift in the trade zone, called 'a revolution' by Holden Furber.<sup>vi</sup> There was a swift turn from the intra-Asian to Indo-European trade. It also marked the gradual ouster of the local merchants from external trade, except some Chulias. The Marakkayars (a sub-division of Chulia merchants) of Porto Novo had close relations with the French at Pondicherry. The latter also issued passes at Pondicherry to the Marakkayars.<sup>vii</sup>

The French competed with the English during the eighteenth century to control the textile producing regions of the Coromandel Coast. The French, like some other Europeans, carried the Indian textiles to far-flung regions. According to Jean Terrade, the Indian cloths constituted 54 per cent of the total value of goods in French trade with Africa in 1775 which went up to 57 per cent in 1788 and offered sufficient profits from which slaves were purchased.<sup>viii</sup> The bulk of these textiles was of coarse variety from Coromandel. Even in the case of British trade with Africa, Indian goods constituted a high proportion of the total trade- 40 per cent of the total exports of textiles. The French, like the English showed their preference for those products which rendered them profits in the markets of Europe, Africa and the New World.

For centuries, textile manufacturing in India was an important occupation. Thousands of families spun and wove, dyed and painted cloths and produced cheap and coarse textures for everyday use. However, as the use of cloths increased for diverse purposes and long distance demand developed with the coming of foreign traders, regional or caste-based specializations appeared. Orissa, became an *ikat* centre, locally known as 'bandha' and for patola (beautifully designed textile), and Andhra for 'Kalamkari' hangings (painted textiles) while some areas achieved far-flung reputation for particular type of handkerchiefs.

Prospering on the produce of their hinterlands, several emporia-ports flourished on the Coromandel during the eighteenth century. The European craze continued to grow for the Indian fabrics consisting of numerous varieties of cloth such as long cloth, muslin, *dorea*, *mooree*, *betteella* or *bettilles*, *chintz*, *palempore*, *bafta* and several types of handkerchief. It is believed that Coromandel Coast produced over 100

varieties of cotton cloth and many of them were exported. With the abolition of the French Company in 1769, many free-traders started participating in the textile trade between India and Europe. Despite the fact that the volume of trade fluctuated in the era of wars, international banking houses collaborated to reap the benefits of this trade. Several bankers like Messrs. Rabaud & Co., Le Ray de Chaumont, Bernier and Gourolade, Bourdieu and Chollet, Selwin & Folery, Robert Herries & Co., Panchaud and many others.<sup>ix</sup>

The Indian textiles may be divided into two major categories – plain and patterned. Within the patterned ones, there were two types a) textiles in which artistic treatment was carried out after completing the weaving, and b) those in which the artistic treatment was carried out on the loom itself.<sup>x</sup> Most of the patterns were borrowed from themes related to nature. Floral designs included different varieties of flowers, petals, trees and creepers as well as animals such as elephants, birds like peacock or swan, fish besides portraying bold geometrical patterns in bright colours.

Among the plain textiles the long cloth was very much in demand by the Europeans and foreign traders. This was the largest single variety exported from India to Europe. It may not have been an important item in international trade but it met the European requirements adequately. On the basis of its texture it was divided into four categories- ordinary, middling, fine and superfine. The long cloth measured 37 yards in length and 1 yard in breadth.<sup>xi</sup> Sometimes, the thread was procured from distant villages. The cloth was made of staple cotton. Its demand based till the end of the eighteenth century and even its inferior quality was sold at considerable profit. However the coming of industrialization affected its fortune.

Indian muslins were known for their quality from time immemorial and fetched fabulous prices. It was a loosely woven cloth spun from a fine yarn. Its advantage was that it could be sold as a manufactured item or semi-finished item for printing, painting or dyeing. Muslin consisted of several assortments and was sorted into numbers. The process of manufacturing and washing muslin was very difficult and cumbersome. Like the English, the French also made advances through brokers or *gomasthas* to the weavers. For each advance, the weavers purchased thread from the open market in small skeins. Muslin preparation needed an elaborate effort. To make a piece of muslin of 34 coud long and 3 coud broad (each coud consisted of 15, 27 or 36 inches varying according to regions). It required 320 small skeins of thread.<sup>xii</sup> It had to be kept moist for four days. It was then placed on the reel and required the labour of eight persons every day. It was then placed upon another reel to examine the texture of the thread and then placed on an instrument called *ansoornany*.<sup>xiii</sup> For the next four days, three men had to work on it to run the thread thrice a day. It needed constant washing before it was put on the loom. Three men worked for eight days to complete the process. Muslim *dorea* was manufactured in the same manner. The washing also required several days of uninterrupted labour. These were transported on bullock carts to Pondicherry and Madras where it was sorted at the warehouses. The payments were finally settled with brokers, who in turn made final settlements. It took 15 days for two workers, ten days for three and eight days for four workers to manufacture a piece of superfine *mooree* and it took another twenty days to complete the washing before it was delivered to the brokers.<sup>xiv</sup>

Another genre of muslin was *betteela* or *bethile* and was an article of some importance in the European trade from the Coromandel. It was prepared in stripes or had flowered designs. It was used for neckclothes and ladies' dresses and the clearest sort was used for bonnets and veilings. It was procured from Warrnagal and Khammanet districts in Andhra and Cuddalore on Tamil Coast. Its trade suffered when the private traders replaced the French Company. It was replaced by the Swiss initiated muslin in the markets of Europe. Before its abolition in 1769, the French company carried this article and it constituted a twelfth of the total exports from India.<sup>xv</sup> At the annual sales at L'Orient, this textile was wholly purchased by the European buyers. The cloth coming from Caranatic, each region specialized in a different type, called fertile organidi that was exported by Pondicherry. It was prepared in the plains of Conjeevaran between Madras and Wandiwash.<sup>xvi</sup> The upper classes in Europe had special fascination for it. It had its own distinctive features such as equal spacing and beautiful netting of threads and beautiful arrangement of ply in the texture. According to M. Legoux dr Flaix, the French Company purchased *organdis* worth Rs. 54,000 in 1769, while English purchases was worth Rs. 52,000.<sup>xvii</sup>

There was another type of muslin called *dorea*. It was a light fabric and usually contained two stripes.<sup>xviii</sup> Among the local people it was called *Karasari*. The *dorea* and the *bettela* were so similar to each other that they were inter-changeable in their sale. Its manufacturing process is described in detail in the French sources. Flaix mentions two varieties of *betteela* – the *parchari* and *dimdisse*.<sup>xix</sup> The first was prepared with two broad stripes with thin stripes of 5-6 threads at the middle. *Bettilla dorea* resembled *dorea* of Bengal, though it was of slightly inferior quality. The region

in the north of Carnatic produced superfine quality while southern parts provided slightly lower quality.<sup>xx</sup> As Pondicherry was situated closer to the southern Carnatic the best variety was not available to the French. Chicacole *muslin* was made of fine thread, prepared in the neighbouring villages of Krishna and Godavari rivers, in the districts of Rajamundry, Vizagapatnam, Alipore, Ganjam and Chicacole.<sup>xxi</sup> This was used primarily as tablecloths but sometimes used for ladies' dresses.

One of the well-known names in cotton textile was chintz or *chites* (written in dozen different ways such as *cheetas*, *chinte*, *chidneys* etc.) These were the painted cloths, also called *perses*. Although, it did not form a major component of French export, it had a special craze in Europe as it had beautiful finesse. Its possession was considered a status symbol by the aristocratic women and ladies of rich families. A special variety of chintz was known by the name of *Chite metabi*.<sup>xxii</sup> It was a precious article and was regarded as an Oriental luxury. Its export to France gradually declined due to the prohibitory regulations imposed by the state on the import of painted and printed cloths.

Among the decorated fabrics of Coromandel, the flowered and figured weaves called *jamedani* enjoyed a worldwide reputation. It was very similar to *organdi* except it was brocaded and stitched.<sup>xxiii</sup> While the muslin was woven on looms, *jamanis* were of different patterns, based on flower and figures motifs and also from the point of view of their treatment and technique employed. Each pattern had a different mode of treatment. Its trade remained mainly in the hands of the English and the French share was very marginal.

*Gingham* was a pure cotton fabric woven with dyed yarn and patterned in either stripes or checks. It was usually in red or blue shade. This fabric was well known in European markets though some of the European cities like Rouen in France and Birmingham in England had started producing a similar variety.<sup>xxiv</sup> However, the excellence of prints and texture of the Coronamdel textile could not be matched, particularly that of the four-thread tissue. The red *gingham* needed eighty days to prepare and dye the thread for a single piece and six days to weave while the blue *gingham* needed ten days to prepare the thread and six days to wave it.<sup>xxv</sup>

*Guinea* and the *semi-guinea* formed an important proportion of the French cargo. It was of the same texture and weave as the long cloth but was woven of cotton thread and dyed in bright shades. It was manufactured in the Andhra lowlands Cuddalore, Cheynoor district and the states of Tanjore and Ramnad states. The French settlement as Yanaon also produced the first quality of white *giunea* of 50 conjons. Its beauty caught the eyes of Bussy and he ordered one dozen shirts of this material for Madame Pompadour. Each shirt was emboldened in golden thread.<sup>xxvi</sup> The French generally bought the *guinea* of north of 19 and 23 conjons which was sent to Pondicherry to be bleached and dyed in blue. It was used for table covers, bed sheets and for furnishings, while *guinea* of 50 conjons was used for shirtings. Another French settlement of Karikal also produced *guinea* but it was of inferior quality compared to that of the south. It was of 15 conjons. The importance and consequently the trade of *semi-guinea* grew with the even-expanding slave traffic. During the period of free trade (1769-1785), the French purchased about Rs. 5 million worth of *guineas*. In 1768, the French Company purchased 54020 pieces of *guinea* white worth 10,86,797

*livres* and sold it for 14,42,448 *livre tournois*. The company bought 37,970 pieces of blue *guinea* in the same year valued at 5,24,624 *livres* and sold it for 6,15,062 *livre tournois*.<sup>xxvii</sup>

*Salempore* (in the old records it is spelled *sallampore*) was a staple variety of cotton cloth that was prepared all over Coromandel coast. It varied from coarse to fine texture consisting of white, blue or brown colours. Even its length was not uniform and varied with each region. The villages near Masulipatnam, Nellore, Cuddalore and Tanjore produced the best variety. It was a popular item of export, both to the South-East Asia and Europe. The details of the cost of manufacture of *Salempore* can be found in the English records.<sup>xxviii</sup> Usually a woman with three children dressed cotton and prepared the thread for a piece of cloth in fifteen days to make it available for the loom. An ordinary weaver took almost two months to weave about three pieces of cloth, provided there was no interruption due to external or natural factors.

One of the famous varieties of textile of the Coromandel was *palempore*. According to some the word 'Palampore' is derived from '*Pamampose*' or '*palangposh*' – cloth – decorated by a certain process. This word was almost solely used by the Europeans. This textile represented the artistic workmanship and had quaint illustrations of scenes from the epics -Ramayana and Mahabharat. Based on mythological themes and religious stories it had the same richness of architecture framework that was reproduced on cloths. It created a pleasant cavalcade of motifs and designs, harmonizing block printing and hand painting. It was used as canopies, wall hangings, screen rolls, prayer cloths, jackets and women's cloths, and used as a decoration cloth of carts and temples during processions and festivals. The genre

prepared for canopies, screens and decorations was entirely hand painted with patterns of trees or mythological subjects. Before applying paints, the 38 x 1 ½ yards cloth was torn into convenient pieces of about 6 yards. These were then well rinsed in water or in mixture of soap, earth and water mixed with milk. After drying the cloths, the general pictorial outlines were drawn by males while the inner figures and in some cases the colouring of drawings was done by women. The chief colours used were dark red, blue and yellow. The common size of *Palempore* was 1 ½ yards square or 7 feet x 4 ½ feet. There appears to be three distinct classes of *palempores*: a) those on a white background was entirely block printed in red with a black outline, b) cloths painted in two or three colours, e.g. red, light blue, dark blue, green, yellow and dark brown with white base. These were partially hand painted, and e) those cloths in two or more colonies were entirely hand painted. *palempores* were prepared by specialist weavers – Uriya weavers known as Dera, Tonti and Rongoni as well as by Telugu weavers comprising of Devangulu, Salelu and Pottusalelu castes. *palempores* were woven mainly near Masulipatnam but there were some other regions as well such as Nagore, Arcot, Madura and Walajanagar. Its export is believed to have started very late, in 1771 from Ganjam to England, and then its demand picked up. Some Berhampur merchants had dealings with the French, especially in the time of Mons. Bussy.<sup>xxix</sup> The export of *palempores* remained erratic due to the disturbed political conditions around the weaving villages.

The most sought after item among the Coromandes textiles was the handkerchief (*romal*) and enjoyed a ready market in Europe and elsewhere. Madras handkerchiefs found mention in the famous American novel *Uncle Tom's Cabine* by

Upton Sinclair. It was an important component of textiles export, as these handkerchiefs could never be imitated in Europe. There were several centers of production and the names of each variety were derived according. For example, there were Masulipatnam handkerchiefs, the Palicat or the Madras handkerchiefs, that of Tranqueber, and Pondicherry. The handkerchiefs made at Masulipatnam were considered of superior variety for their brightness of colours and texture quality. Two varieties mentioned in European sources including by Fraix, were *swaragaon* and *vetapalem*.<sup>xxx</sup> The first one contained fine squares and coloured threads, each piece contained 12 handkerchiefs of a yard and a half square. However, the dimensions varied according to the demands of the Europeans. The English showed interest in smaller squares while the French and the Dutch preferred bolder checks.<sup>xxxii</sup> The main centre of production spread along the banks of river Krishna. The Palicat or the Madras variety was sold in the 'new World' – in Peru, Mexico the islands of the West Indies. It was known for its variety and colours. There were seven types of handkerchiefs according to its texture- those of 23,26,28,32,36,40 and 48 conjons and they were sold in pieces of ten.<sup>xxxiii</sup> The French Company had a prosperous trade of this item and bought handkerchiefs of Masulipatnam for 1,65,932 *livres* which was sold for 548,872 *livres* in Europe in 1768, handkerchiefs of Tranquebar worth 31,864 *livres* sold for 59184 *livres*, of Palicat worth 93,093 and sold for 249,646 *livres* while that of Pondicherry was bought for 32,372 *livres* but its sale was rather low and fetched only 31500 *livres*.<sup>xxxiii</sup> However, the private traders could not take advantage of this trade.

According to W.S. Hadaway, as early as 1676, a French refugees from Holland had established a cotton printing plant at Richmond.<sup>xxxiv</sup> Here almost all the early patterns initially used by European printers were variations and adaptations from Indian cloths..He claims that the French and the English cotton manufacturing was influenced by the Indian patterns.

In the northern and southern coasts of Coromandel including Kondavid, Rajamundry and the environs of Cuddalore, an export item of textile called *basin* was manufactured. There were two main types of basin- *dimiti Telingana* and *demit Tamaulana*.<sup>xxxv</sup> The former was considered better on account of its quality. According to Flaix, about 30 per cent of the fabric imported into France was re-exported. Its share was only one-eighteen of the total value of imports from India, and during the period of free trade, its value had dropped from 5,700,000 livers to 1,200,000 livers. The special type of Indian basin was the four-thread texture – two horizontal and two vertical.<sup>xxxvi</sup> This particular variety was extremely suited for men's vests, waistcoats, clothes and trousers. By late eighteenth century, several manufacturing centers emerged in France at Rouen, Torries and many others, though the textile produced here was of inferior quality.

There is very little information on the Indian technique of washing and bleaching. Flaix provides us minute details of its procedure and in a memoir; he advocates the adoption of Indian method of beaching. This he considered more economical and convenient than the one practiced in France. The Indian method also helped the cloth to become durable. The washing procedure is also described by John Milford.<sup>xxxvii</sup> According to him, *mooree* superfine was soaked in cold water for two

days, then put in water mixed with cowdung, then washed on the fourth day. On the fifth day, it was dipped in *chuna* (lime) water, dried and heated on the sixth and seventh days, laid in the air and sprinkled with water on the eighth day, washed, put into soap and then exposed to the sun. By the twelfth day it was put into soap water and heated, exposed to sun on the thirteenth and fourteenth days, again washed and then soaked in lime juice, put into soap water, heated and exposed to the sun. The process was repeated till the twenty-fourth day. Washing of muslin was done in sheep's dung and lime water and the process lasted almost nine days. The bleaching of white textiles required immersion of cloth in sour milk. At the end, starching was done with rice water.<sup>xxxviii</sup> In another memoir addressed to the French Company written in 1733, elaborate description and details colouring and dyeing is provided. The author mentions not only the process of colouring of silk and cotton but also gives the names of the ingredients used in different dyes.<sup>xxxix</sup> The quantity of coloring components used is also mentioned of items-like chilly, *ambla*, arrack sandal, *kusum* and gum. Vegetable dyes were used for the purpose of coloring the clothes even till late nineteenth century by the Indian textile producers. Vegetable dyes were considered superior to the mineral dyes because with repeated washing its colour became fast and bright. Blue colour was obtained from indigo, green from turmeric and indigo, yellow from turmeric black from indigo and gallnuts, maroon from lac and red from logwood or *chaya* roots.

As regards the social composition of the Indians associated with the textile sector of Coromandel, merchants, weavers, dyers and washermen constituted an important segment of the south Indian society. Their importance had increased with

the growing demand of the Indian textiles among the European but not their fortune. They were constantly drawn into the vortex of European rivalry on the Indian coast, subjecting them into greater subjugation.

Describing the mode of dyeing, Pennant wrote, “Though the methods of the Indian dyers are exceedingly tedious and complicated, and though they are utterly unable to explain the rationale of their processes, yet the beauty of their colours cannot fail to be admired, and must inspire us with the opinion that a knowledge of their methods might improve the processes of the European dyers...”<sup>40</sup> Legoux de Flaix also described in detail the rich and beautiful red colour of Indian cotton, particularly the dyeworks of the province of Condavir in Masulipatam and ascribed the beauty of colour to the method of dyeing. He wrote, “On croit avec raison parmi que la beauté de cette couleur résulté principalement des procédés de la teinture”.<sup>41</sup>

The black colour was prepared through the old bits of iron which was heated and washed in water. The bits were then put into an earthen pot with water and a small quantity of jaggery added to it. The pot was tightly covered and the contents were kept for about three weeks and babul seeds in outer covers. This ink was used only for making black out lines. Indigo dye was used to fill large surfaces.

The tools used for painting or making figures were a sort of fountain pen of many sizes and types to suit the needs of rough or delicate patterns. A bamboo stick of about six inches in length was cut at one end into a narrow point and the point was split through the centre to form a nib to function as a pen. Just above the point, an egg shaped ball of fibre or wool was formed forming the receptacle for the colour when the pen was in

use. This tool remained in use among the Indian artisans till the beginning of the twentieth century.

The textile trade with Coromandel region was carried out through a set of local merchants by means of a contract. These merchants were called *gomastahs* and they acted as agents of the French and the English companies. This practice of making advances to the weavers through *gomastahs* to supervise production of the textiles for which orders were placed had been followed by the Europeans.. The families of Mudaliars Chettis and Pillais were some of the most important merchants associated with the French. There is ample evidence to suggest that the Coromandel merchants, who were drawing towards the European trading system, were losing their independence and many of them were ruined through the stringent system of contracts. The English officials were adopting a deliberate policy to exclude Indian merchants in order to directly control the weavers and other producers. Various plans as those of Sadlier, Cochrane and Dick reflect this trend.<sup>42</sup> These attempts created problems for the French in procuring textiles as many of the local merchants had dealings with the English as well as with the French and the Dutch. Basil Cochrane tried to use political influence to exclude the French buyers from this region through Anthony Sadlier, the Chief of Masulipatnam <sup>43</sup> The *chay* goods in Masulipatnam were supplied by a body of merchants like Annum Lingiah, Nareadhamily Veeranah, Cotohgoond Budriah, Cotaah Goondah Ramiah etc. As the English Company did not have sufficient investment, these merchants contracted with the French private merchants such as Messrs Farcy, Le Cote & Co., Mons Moracin etc.<sup>44</sup> Similar problems existed even in Bengal where an identical attempt was made by the French that was resisted by the

English. Thus, it can be said that the intense competition existing between the English and the French to procure Indian textiles at the lowest cost worsened the plight of the Indian merchants. In the normal condition, interaction of market forces of this kind would have had favourable results for the local merchants. But the political rivalry among the European powers created adverse situation for the Indian merchants.

It is evident from various records that the French had sought engagements with some of the relations of English Company's merchants. By this means, the French fared reasonably well in their trade endeavours. In Masulipatnam, they succeeded in procuring substantial amounts of *chay* goods. In 1786 Mons Bomcauss in Guntoor circular had remitted from Pondicheery a sum of Rs. 50,000 Madras pagodas as an advance money to the weavers employed to produce cloths for the French and another merchant, Ramah Naig, a French Dubash, advanced a sum of 70,000 Madras pagodas to purchase *chay* goods.<sup>45</sup> The French trading activities witnessed great revival once the American war of Independence was over and a new French Company was established in 1785. However, it lasted for a short period.

The weaving community of the south experienced a similar situation. In the Tamil region Kaikolar or Kaiklava caste manufactured cloth not only for local consumption but also for exports. They dominated the big weaving centre of Montalpeth in Pondicherry. The frequent Anglo-French conflicts adversely affected them. There were regular migrations from this caste of weavers to the military profession. Devangas formed another group of weavers in the region of Andhra and Carnatic and usually prepared dark blue cloths and silk borders. There were certain other communities of weaver who made cloth for the Europeans such as Salwars who

were the inhabitants of Tamil region, the Janrawar who migrated from Andhra to Tamil lands and made superfine cloth, and the Saurashtraans or Pattunulkaras of Madura. Besides, *Niligaru* were indigo dyers, specializing in several shades of blue. The European companies began the process of registration of weavers which must have restricted their liberty. The cotton textile production in India was based on money advances to the weavers through agents, unlike the putting-out system that was prevalent in Europe. Weaver's position greatly depended on the market forces, particularly on the availability of thread. This in turn depended on the abundant supply of cotton from the centres of cultivation. It is evident that cotton production on the Coromandel Coast was not sufficient and the bulk of cotton was supplied by the *Lambadies* who brought this from Western Deccan region. The increasing price of thread and the inflexible rate of payment by the Europeans began to affect the quality of textiles. Ever since time of François Martin, like the English, the French had pursued the policy to encouraging weavers to reside in their settlements. Later, this policy was vigorously followed by Dupleix. Some sheds were constructed, Trees were planted and washing centres were made available to them. Cartloads of unbleached cloths were brought to Pondicherry to be bleached at Moutalpet (Muttiyahepattai).<sup>46</sup> The town became the home of reputed bleachers of India. Pondicherry also earned its name for the dyeing industry and cloths were brought from distant places to be dyed here. Moracin through money advances made a serious attempt to attract some two to three hundred families of weavers from Carnatic to come and settle in Pondicherry. <sup>47</sup> The concentration of weaving looms in the Guntur Ciracar was mainly due to the efforts of the French agents. The French demand for *chay* goods that kept the weavers

occupied. Yet the French efforts could not last long due to their political failures vis-a-vis the English.

The French and the English companies from the Coromandel Coast carried about 30 to 50 tons of Sapan or red wood for the purpose of dye. In Tamil region it was called *vartengnem*. The name 'sapan' was given by the Portuguese that gained common usage. According to Flaix, sapan wood grew on the Oriental ghats of Coromandel possessed the same quality as the one exported from Brazil by the Portuguese. But the Indian sapan wood gave very dense colour, probably because of suitable soil and temperature conditions. The French were interested in this product in order to break the Portuguese monopoly.

It also appears that the consumption of Asian goods in France had grown in the last few years despite all odds from 22 million livres before the American War, it increased to about 33 million livres annually after the peace was restored. **48**

The French Company purchased merchandise valued at 26,84,896.18.4 in 1768. This includes *salempores* – white and blue, *guinees*- white and blue, *percale*, *bettille*, *organdis*, *Taznatanne*, *Negarepans*, ching, *gingham* of Pondicherry, Madras, and Masulipatnam, basin *nankin* and handkerchiefs of all varieties. These were sold for 40,71,960.15 livres at a profit of 13,18,003.16.8 livres (i.e. approximately £ 2,25,761) out of a total cargo valued at Rs. 22,20,706 (£ 2,49,798).**49** In other words, over 90 per cent of the shipments to France from the Coromandel coast consisted of cotton items. Compared to this the English exports from the Madras Presidency amounted to about £ 2,71,933 in 1788.**50** Between 1786 and 1787, eight ships left the coast of Coromandel and together carried goods worth Rs. 3,380,243-5-62. This included a total of 3,41,400

pieces of textile. In this, 40,500 pieces were procured from Yanaon, and the cargo consisted of 14,000 pieces of *salempore* 88,600 pieces of muslin and 72,000 pieces of *romals* or handkerchiefs. **51** In 1790, *Le Compte D'Estaing* carried 7,840 pieces of *guinea* blue, 17,340 pieces of *guinea* white, 870 pieces of *salempores*, 1,068 pieces of *percale*, 2,700 pieces of *bettille* and 1300 pieces of blue and white romals of Pondicherry. **52** In the sale at Port L'Oreint in 1791, the cotton goods formed the most prominent part of the French imports from India. Out of total of 7,17,042 pieces valued at £ 12, 27,887, the Coromandel Coast provided, 1,34,673 pieces of white calicoes valued at £ 4,85,137 besides 37,383 pieces of muslin worth £ 44,261 and 85,478 pieces of prohibited goods worth £ 1,01,266. **53** However, the Indian exports to France rapidly declined after this because the National Assembly of France withdrew the privileges of the Companies des Indes in April 1790 and France was increasingly involved in the Revolutionary wars.

Coromandel cotton items did not provide very high margin of profit as was the case with the Chinese goods or Bengal luxury items. The piece-goods from Coromandel were based on a regular inflexible demand and more or less steady supply of cotton textiles despite the oft-repeated prohibitions and constraints on the imports from India. France faced a peculiar situation after 1785. The Compagnie des Indes de Calonne was established to revive French commercial activity in India but the state's prohibitions against the import of Indian textiles created a contradictory situation. The orders of 10 July 1786 banned the entry of muslins, checked cloths, tapestry brocaded stuff and other Indian textiles.**54** French policy towards the Indian cotton fabrics was not influenced by industrial development alone. The growing imbalance in foreign

trade, the general unrest among the French weavers and workers, the protectionist policy of the State to pacify the mounting criticism and stiff competition from the neighbours – all these factors shaped the French policy.

Yet, the Coromandel textiles did not experience any sharp decline in the French purchases and reached Europe and the western hemisphere through re-exports. It was only when the actual impact of the French Revolution began to be felt on their settlements that their trade diminished abruptly and henceforth, the French could never revive it to the pre-1791 level.

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