

CHAPTER—V

INDUSTRIES

I. Old time industries

The classical geographers and the Tamil Sangam literature have left us details of the trade links which existed between the ports situated on the Coromandel Coast and the Mediterranean since the First Century A.D. The exports from here included muslin, silk, pearls, gem stones, ivory, etc. It is significant that the excavations at Arikamedu near Pondicherry have brought to light the existence of tanks and courtyards which, it is conjectured, were used in the preparation of muslin cloth in ancient times. Amongst the other industries which flourished in the town at that time was that of bead making. Gold, semi-precious stones and glass were used for this purpose.,

In 1127 A.D. some families of the pratiloma caste who were weavers by profession accepted some *iraiyili* land at Tirubhuvanai in Mannadipattu Commune and in return undertook to supply clothes to the local temple on specified occasions and in stated quantities.¹ This only goes to show that the area surrounding Pondicherry must have been famous as a manufacturing centre of textiles early in the Twelfth Century.

Kaikkolars were members of an influential community in the Vijayanagar Empire. They lived generally around temple precincts, in separate streets. By profession they were weavers and enjoyed certain social privileges. It will not be far-fetched to suggest that the village of Kakkalippattu in Mannadipattu Commune must have been, at least from the Vijayanagar days, a settlement of Kaikkolars who in the Seventeenth Century migrated to Pondicherry and its vicinity at the invitation of François Martin to feed the European market with the textiles of Pondicherry.

In a letter written in the year 1648, the Council of Madras wrote that the incursions, robberies and devastations carried out by the forces of Golconda and Bijapur "hath wrought a desolation on a great part of the country

round about especially the three principal cloth ports of Tevanapatnam, Porto Novo and Pullacherry." The last mentioned Pullacherry is none other than the modern Pondicherry.

The Danes who had settled in Pondicherry about the beginning of the Eighteenth Century had built up a very lucrative trade in cotton manufactures.² The departure of the Danes, however, dealt a severe blow to the industry, since the inhabitants were deprived of export facilities. The local chieftains were, therefore, interested to attract other Europeans to settle down in Pondicherry and to serve as intermediaries in the export trade. François Martin had this to say in his Memoires about the situation then in Pondicherry: "A little after our arrival at Masulipatam we were solicited by Sher Khan Lody, Governor for the King of Bijapur of the province of Valikondapuram to go and establish ourselves on his territory where there are good manufacturers of cotton textiles. This prince promised us advantageous terms to carry on commerce there. A representative of the Company who visited the locality reported about the goodness of the climate and the fine quality and large quantity of the cotton manufactures in the locality."³

Later when François Martin became the Chief of the French Establishments in India, he encouraged the immigration of weavers to Pondicherry from the neighbouring regions. He also invited cloth printers from various places to come and settle down in Pondicherry with the intention of starting the manufacture of dyes and painted cloth and had also built some sheds to enable those workers to work in the sheds. As trade flourished, merchants in Pondicherry ordered for cloth from weavers in the Carnatic i.e., the country in-between the River Nellore (Pennar du Nord) and the Vellar. These merchants advanced money to the weavers in the Carnatic with instructions to produce particular varieties of cloths as per specimen obtained from France.

Karaikal was then famous for the special quality *guingams* (i.e. white cloth with small red stripes). These *guingams* were brought to Pondicherry from where they were exported to Manila. Hence the name Guingam Manila. The varieties called *Guinées du Nord*, *Jamdanis* or *Organdis à fleurs* were manufactured at Yanam.⁴ Machilipattinam was famous for its red colour and check handkerchiefs. Cart-loads of unbleached clothes were brought to Pondicherry to be bleached at 'Moutalpet' (Muttiyalupettai), long considered the home of the most renowned bleachers of India. Generally, the superior

quality unbleached guinees were brought from the North either for being bleached or for dyeing in blue. Pondicherry thus became well-known for the high quality of its dyeing, thanks to the skill of its artisans. The dyeing of cloth in indigo blue became widespread in the settlement and the finished products commanded ready overseas market. The cloth required for dyeing was brought to Pondicherry from the neighbouring towns like Kanchipuram, Vandavasi, Tiruvannamalai, Salem, Tarangambadi and Cuddalore. Piece goods were also brought to Pondicherry from Bengal and Orissa. In due course, the town developed into an important trade centre. Warehouses stored with piece goods intended for dyeing sprang up everywhere.

The toiles du sud were brought to Pondicherry from Karaikal for being dyed in blue. These cloths were of an inferior quality. Handkerchiefs, also brought from Karaikal, being of an inferior quality, were exported to Batavia.

The blue cloths (guinees) were the only items of export which brought some profit to the colony. Two-thirds of the cloth involved in the trade were no more manufactured in this territory but were brought from Salem. Nevertheless, Pondicherry maintained its position as a centre of trade because dyeing in blue with indigo was not so good anywhere in India than in Pondicherry.

Some interesting details about the old time industries in Karaikal are available to us from a report prepared by Cordier, a Naval Captain, in reply to a detailed questionnaire received from the Ministère de la Marine. According to this report there were 26 pottery units in Karaikal engaged in the manufacture of utensils, flower pots, water jugs, etc. Some of the units also produced tiles in their kilns. In the year 1823, as many as 100 brick kilns and 71 brick makers were counted. The same report revealed the existence of 35 oil mills manufacturing coconut oil, gingili oil, besides producing oil from elipe (*bassia longifolia*) and laurel seeds. Of the three soap units, two were located in Karaikal and the other in Tirumalarajanpattinam.⁵

The three coir manufacturers in Karaikal engaged lascars or coolies according to the type of coir to be manufactured. They used six different types of looms for the purpose. The work was carried out generally between January and October every year.⁶