II. The industrial revolution and after

No significant progress was registered in the field of industry until Desbassyns de Richemont took over as Governor in 1826. He first established the **ateliers de charité** (charity workshops) in order to improve the living condition of the indigent members of the white population, the **topas** or **gens à chapeau** and their descendants. To run these workshops, experienced weavers and dyers were brought from France among whom were Gonfreville, an expert dyer-*cum*-chemist, besides Flament and Godefroy, the expert weavers. The authorities in France also encouraged the establishment of such workshops and deputed skilled dyers and weavers to Pondicherry to train the local population with a view to competing with British trade by adopting modern techniques. These workshops were under the control of a **Comité de Bienfaisance** and in 1827 Thomas Godefroy, an ex–foreman of a spinning mill in Rouen, was appointed **Chef d'atelier** and Flament, his assistant.

Shortly after, Gonfreville was authorised by the Government to start a dye house and a weaving factory for which land was allotted to him in Muttirapalaiyam. He conducted research for utilising some of the local plants for dyeing purposes and forwarded the results of his research to France for consideration. The early workshops were, however, not provided with adequate machinery. The yarn used by the workshops was of an inferior quality. Godefroy, therefore, found it very difficult to run the workshops without proper machinery. Nevertheless a total number of 133 hands were entertained in the workshops.

Desbassyns was neither satisfied with the research work of Gonfreville nor with the performance of the new weavers in the workshops. He, therefore, encouraged the immigration of weavers to Pondicherry from the neighbouring regions like Cuddalore by providing them houses to live in so as to produce in Pondicherry itself the cloth required for dyeing.

In 1828 the charity workshops (**ateliers de charité**) were converted into weaving factories (**ateliers de tissage**). Buildings for housing the factories were constructed. The flying shuttle slowly replaced the ordinary shuttle.

In 1840 they were redesignated as **Ateliers de Bienfaisance**, only to disappear in 1851 after 25 years of existence. The establishment of these workshops created the required atmosphere and introduced the necessary skill which encouraged private entrepreneurs to start such workshops in the region with modern equipments. 7

Large-scale industries :

The **ordonnance locale** of 1826 may be regarded as the harbinger of the Government's new industrial policy. The **ordonnance** of 18 February 1827 paved the way for the industrial revolution in Pondicherry through the introduction of mechanism in the realm of industries. The new **ordonnance** assured that financial assistance would be extended to French citizens coming forward to set up sugar factories, distilleries, etc. in the settlements. Desbassyns who was already toying with the idea of introducing a spinning unit in the **Ateliers de Bienfaisance** wrote to the Ministry in France that the mission of Gonfreville and others would succeed only if necessary looms were sent to Pondicherry for starting a spinning mill on the western style.[8] About the same time private entrepreneurs in France seemed to evince some interest in starting a spinning mill in Pondicherry. Desbassyns' wish was now very near fulfilment.

Swadeshi Cotton Mills Co. Ltd.:

In 1828 Blin, a businessman settled in Pondicherry and Delbruck, a businessman of Bordeaux, together came forward to start a spinning mill in Pondicherry. They asked for certain concessions from the administration to face the challenge of the British textile industry which controlled the market in India. The concessions asked for included :

(a) a 20 per cent. grant towards the cost of machinery imported from France,

(b) a grant to meet the expenses for the immigration of weavers,

(c) an advance of 30,000 francs to be repaid in six years at an interest of 4 per cent. for the purchase of raw materials,

(d) free passage for workers and free transport of machinery on the ships owned by the Government,

(e) allotment of rent-free land for the mill,

(f) permission to utilise the workers employed in the Ateliers de Bienfaisance.

Subsequently, the firm **'Le Prince et Poulain'** which supplied the machinery for **'Blin et Delbruck'** also expressed its desire to establish a similar mill in collaboration with Doris Junior of Bordeaux. In a letter addressed to the **Ministère de la Marine et des Colonies** on 18 February 1829, the firm expressed its readiness to establish a modern spinning mill within a period of five months with a production capacity of about 700 kg. per day, which was four times the production capacity of the mill first proposed, provided the Administration would accord the same concessions assured to the first firm. Shortly after, the two firms merged to form **'Poulain Duboy and Co.'**

In 1831 the mill manufactured only 2,451 kg. of yarn per month. Within another three years, the output increased to about 13,000 kg. per month. Most of the yarn manufactured was utilised for weaving and for manufacturing a particular variety of white and blue bleached cloth which came to be known as "cloth of M. Poulain and Co." According to a report, the products of thd mill were displayed in the exhibition held at Paris in 1834 and was mentioneis with credit. In 1835, according to Governor De Melay, the mill worked to full capacity with hundreds of people on the pay rolls.* The cloth manufactured with the yarn produced by the mill was held in great demand everywhere and was sold to the best advantage. [9]

All along the mill had to encounter serious financial difficulties and had to face stiff competition from the British textile industry. The mill was expanded in 1838 by the addition of a weaving section. The cloth manufactured in the mill was exported to Senegal and Reunion. To sum up, from 1828 to 1844, the new industry was helped through grants to build up a new cadre of workmen who were relatively rare in India then.

Everything was getting on well until about 1864 when the concept of free trade was gaining ground throughout the world. Countries like Senegal started allowing duty-free the import of all goods irrespective of their origin. The cost of goods manufactured in Pondicherry was comparatively higher than those coming from England and Belgium in spite of the tariff imposed on them at the time of their entry into France. From 1869 the industry passed through a period of decline and in July 1870 the mill had to close down. [10]

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* From 1-6-1835 to 30-6-1835 the mill bought 108,488 kg. of cotton and produced 94,388 kg. of yarn providing employment for 225 workers inside the mill.

Gustave Cornet, the President of the **Chambre de Commerce** and his associates made strenuous efforts to reopen the closed mill. In 1875 the **Chambre de Commerce** took up the cause of the textile industry and called for the grant of **prime** to the mills either on the cost or on the quantity of the yarn produced by the mill. While on the one hand, the efforts of Gustave Cornet and his associates helped reopen the spinning mill in September 1875, the granting of **prime** by the Administration on the other hand, encouraged the production of yarn. [11]

In 1876, the **Chambre de Commerce** called for certain modifications in the customs regulations. About this time, Senegal permitted the entry into that country a variety of cloth which was even inferior to that manufactured in Pondicherry. As a counter, the system of giving a **certificat d'origine** and a registered trade mark for the goods was introduced in 1877 and the minimum weight of the cloth was also prescribed. [12]

In 1886 the ownership of the firm changed hands and came to be known as "Savana" with the Central Office at Bordeaux in France. [13]

In 1902 the looms numbered 454 with a total number of 17,000 spindles engaging 2,500 employees. [14] In 1956 i.e. two years after the merger of the French establishments with India, the unit was sold to a Kanpur firm and came to be known as "Swadeshi Cotton Mills Ltd." The unit manufactured only grey goods and forwarded them to the parent mill at Kanpur for processing. The raw materials required for the unit are secured locally as well as from the neighbouring State of Tamil Nadu and from foreign countries. The total quantity of yarn spun in 1960 was 15,51,677 kg. and the quantity of cloth manufactured was 1,30,70,736 metres.

Sri Bharathi Mills Ltd., Pondicherry :

A spinning mill by name **'Filature et Tissage Gaebélé'** was started in Mudaliyarpettai in the year 1892. Though this unit came to be firmly established only in 1892 its origin is traced back to 1828. [15] This mill also passed through the same trials and had to close down with the loss of markets for its goods. It was this mill which was put again to production through the efforts of Henri Gaebélé in the year 1892.

In the year 1902 the total number of looms was 120 with 4,200 spindles and 500 workers inside the mill.[16] In 1921 the mill came to be known as '**Filature et Tissage Kesoram Poddar et Cie.**' with which the Kusappalaiyam mill came to be merged shortly after (probably in 1923). The mill passed under Indian management and came to be known as 'the Pondicherry Cotton Mills Ltd.' (1924) and later as 'Sri Barathi Mills Ltd.' In 1942 the number of looms increased to 302. The number of spindles rose to 19,700 and the total number of workers engaged was 1031. The unit was engaged in spinning cotton yarn and manufacturing coarse variety of grey cloths.

In 1960 the total quantity of cotton yarn spun was 7,10,707 kg., the staple fibre yarn production was 2,98,160 kg. and the quantity of cloth manufactured was 45,29,029 metres. The raw staple fibre was secured from Nagda and Indian cotton from Bombay, Rajapalayam and Tiruppur.[17]

In November 1965 the mill closed down throwing out of job nearly 1,600 workers. In May 1967 the Government of India decided to take over the management of the mill under the Industries (Development and Regulation) Act, 1967. Although the mill incurred heavy loss from 1967 to 1971, it turned the corner in 1972 showing a net profit of about Rs. 4.00 lakhs.[18]

Anglo-French Textiles Ltd. :

This mill, originally known as 'Rodier Mill', was established in the year 1898 by a British firm which had its Central Office in London.[19]

In 1899 the mill was provided with a railway branch line with the main Pondicherry-Villupuram railway line to facilitate the transportation of goods.

In 1902 the looms numbered 650 with 40,000 spindles and entertained 2,500 workers.[20] The unit was engaged in spinning cotton and staple fibre yarn, in weaving cotton cloth, besides bleaching and dyeing. The required raw materials were secured from the Indian Union and from the United States of America. Since 1924 the mill came to be officially known as 'Anglo-French Textiles Co. Ltd.' The total production of yarn was 49.45 million kg. and fabrics 26.35 million metres in 1960. Licence was issued to Messrs. Anglo-French Textiles Ltd, Pondicherry for the installation of 25,000 additional spindles and 500 automatic looms during 1965–66.[21]

Other attempts:

Another minor development was the issue of a licence in 1864 to Messrs. Paget & Co. to start a yarn factory in Kusappalaiyam. It was this unit which was later merged with Kesoram Poddar & Co.

A yarn factory was started in Uppalam in 1830 on the northern bank of the Uppar, but it functioned only for about 35–40 years.[22]

Prior to merger, the three textile mills in the territory were geared to manufacture only special varieties of cloth for the French colonies in Africa. Following merger, the textile industry had to face new problems as their traditional export markets were lost. The cost of production was high as wages here were relatively higher than in the mills in India. The Indo-French agreement, however, provided for concessional treatment to Pondicherry textile imports to French colonies for a period of six months from November 1954. Soon after the expiry of this period, the French Government was requested to extend the period of concession. As the French Government was not inclined to oblige, the Government of India came up with a few measures to help the industry tide over the crisis. From 1 May 1955 the textile mills were exempted from the payment of export duty on cotton cloth produced by them for a period of six months by the Central Board of Revenue, New Delhi. The mills were also permitted to export any quantity of cotton yarn produced by them from the Pondicherry port.[23] From May 1955 the textile mills were partially closed for want of work consequent on the expiry of the period of concession. The mills effected large scale retrenchment of labourers. Among the three mills, one worked partially and the other two suspended production throwing out nearly 6,000 workers out of job. The economic crisis in the textile industry and the managements' action to tide over the crisis led to a conflict between labour and managements which the Government sought to resolve by referring the issues to the Textile Arbitration Committee in 1955.

In 1963 the production of yarn was 7.44 million kg. the bulk being between 11 and 20 counts. In 1964, the three composite mills had a total number of 86,084 spindles with 2,282 looms. Most of the yarn was consumed within the mills and only 0.91 million kg. were released for use in powerlooms and handlooms in the non-mill sector. The cloth produced was 42.56 million metres, mostly of medium quality and the balance of coarse quality.[24] Part of this was consumed in India and the rest was exported to foreign markets in Africa and Australia.[25]

Small-scale industries:

Prior to merger, the free port of Pondicherry permitted the entry of all goods duty-free with the result that rigorous customs control was in force all along the borders of the territory which hampered the growth of small-scale industries here. Private entrepreneurs were reluctant to invest their capital in small-scale industries because their products had on the one hand to compete with foreign goods in the home market and on the other to rely on the limited market within the territory. Nevertheless, there were a few small-scale units which were mainly engaged in the production of consumer goods like soap, oil, etc. There were also a few engineering units engaged in supplying spare parts, etc., required by the three textile mills in the town.

Usine Sainte Elizabeth, started in 1902, was a light engineering unit. It consisted of a foundry to which was added a rolling mill and a workshop equipped with modern appliances. Later, the unit was expanded and took up the manufacture of bolts, besides undertaking some welding work.

Some units were engaged in the manufacture of arrack, fine liquors and refined alcohol for use in the preparation of medicines, etc. There were also many rice mills and oil mills in the Territory. One factory attended to such varied functions as oil-crushing, bone-grinding, spinning and weaving. The French Administration also seems to have evinced some interest in the development of an ice factory in Pondicherry.[26]

There were 73 dyeing workshops engaged in dyeing work, processing annually 400,000 pieces of cloth, each piece measuring 16 metres in length and one metre breadth. There were also 95 indigo factories which developed as off-shoots of the flourishing dyeing industry in the Territory.

Cordier also attests to the establishment of an indigo manufacturing unit at Kottuchcheri in Karaikal in the year 1824. The products of the factory were exported mainly to Madras in bullock carts. Boat building was another important enterprise in Karaikal and a large number of small boats were said to have been constructed in the boat-yards there.[27]

Cottage industries :

Many families were engaged in hand printing of textiles for the export market. The local pottery industry developed some features which found expression in a new style of architecture. The manufacture of papier mache and terracotta toys was another popular avocation. Just before *de facto* transfer of the French Establishments, the village industries were badly hit due to the unsettled conditions in the Territory. Many families engaged in cottage industries were forced by circumstances to migrate to the neighbouring States for livelihood.

Mines :

Lignite was found as early as 1883 at Bahur and some other places in Pondicherry region. Seven samples of the lignite analysed in Paris showed an average ash content of 8.35 per cent. A French Company then attempted at compressing the material into briquettes but did not succeed. Permission was accorded in the year 1903 to one private firm to exploit the lignite deposits in 22 villages.[28] This venture too did not prove successful.

Interestingly in the year 1914 **Usine Sainte Elizabeth** of M/S. G. Gaudart & Co. is said to have obtained a mining lease over 4,369 acres in the Kanjamalais for exploiting the iron ore. Some iron ore is said to have been extracted and sent to France for magnetic concentration test. The report was found favourable but the outbreak of World War I seems to have prevented the working of the concession and the lease was cancelled in 1916.[29]

III. Industries and manufactures of the territory

Soon after merger Pondicherry lost its status of a free port. Restrictions were imposed on the import of foreign goods and the customs barriers put up on the borders prior to the merger were removed.

The Administration, at the same time, came forward to help the growth of industries in the Territory in various ways. The Directorate of Industries started functioning from 26 November 1955 and the benefits of the First Five Year Plan, then on the last lap of the quinquennium, were extended to the Territory.[30] A sum of Rs. 70,000 was spent during the First Plan period.