

NOTE

## Plight of Weavers

**Bharat Dogra writes :**

While handloom weavers suffer from many-sided problems, their most frequently voiced grievance is that of the non-availability of yarn at a fair price. The reason is that most handlooms get their yarn not from numerous charkha spinners, as Gandhi desired, but from mills. Hence the handloom as it exists today remains dependent on mills to a large extent. In order to increase their profits, mills frequently re-reel hank yarn (meant for handlooms and free of excise duty) into cones and divert it to powerlooms.

Due to shortage of yarn and other factors, mass distress among weavers has been reported from several places in recent months.

An expert on textiles industry L C Jain estimated (in 1983) that during the last decade 5.5 million handloom workers were rendered unemployed or their employment had been reduced due to the displacement of 1386 thousand handlooms (each handloom providing part or full employment to 4 persons) by 231 thousand powerlooms (each powerloom displaced six handlooms).

Similar massive loss of employment was seen in other areas of the textile industry such as the hand-printing industry. According to L C Jain, "because machines were employed for 942 million metres of cloth over and above the 500 million metres at which their output would have been frozen, as recommended by the Research Advisory Panel (textile printing industry) an estimated 2,50,000 jobs opportunities have been lost in the economy."

Thus ignoring the potential for village-based cottage-scale production has brought unemployment, under-employment and poverty to several million families, a tragedy that could have been avoided by making adequate use of existing skills of weaving, spinning and related works in *villages*.

In 1993, Nandini Joshi, who has a doctorate in Economics from Harvard, wrote a book in Gujarati (which has also been translated in Hindi) titled 'Our Distress and Alternatives' which argued that *khadi* and the spinning wheel are still practical and economically viable if only one gives them a fair chance. An additional argument she advances is that *khadi* can help people recover several hundred thousand hectares of land as badly needed fertile land for growing food. The mills require long and medium staple cotton which need more fertile land, irrigation and chemicals. On the other hand short-staple cotton needed for the *charkha* can be obtained on less fertile land some of which is not under cultivation at present and there is no need for agri-chemicals. □□□