A HISTORY OF THE KAMALAPURI TEXTILE INDUSTRY

Vol. I

C O N T E N T S

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CHAPTER ONE

When Eve Bit into the Apple

Choosing one's profession is rather like selecting a wife. It is not always done because of love or romance, particularly in India. The same considerations of suitability, stability, respectability, durability and possibly profitability, apply in both cases. Just to ensure that none of these considerations are ignored, a whole lot of aunts and uncles, friends and 'well-wishers' take a hand in the proceedings and advise you and your parents as to what should or should not be done. And the procedure followed is often the same, either through recommendation of mutual friends or through an advertisement, except that one appears under 'professional' column and the other under 'matrimonial'. The subsequent procedure is also almost identical – interview and selection, salary / dowry negotiation and the final fixation of the auspicious date – except that in the case of profession, the horoscopes are not usually consulted.

Consequently, which profession an individual enters is largely a matter of circumstance. Except in the case of highly talented individuals with a singular determination, it depends on a number of factors such as job opportunities, education, environment, and so on. Even a person like C.V.Raman the Nobel laureate entered the Indian Audit and Accounts Service before switching over to physics and going on to win the Nobel Prize.

In the old days of the caste system, it was much more simple. A carpenter's son became a carpenter; a mason's son, a mason. A boy knew it from birth and adjusted himself accordingly. Ambition or aspiration had no part to play for most people.

In my own case, ever since my father became a partner in a spinning mill when I was about twelve years old, my professional fate was sealed. Though it was not mentioned in so many words, it was understood by everyone that I would study textiles. My interest in literature and history, my brief desire to become a film director, my idealistic interest in politics were all brushed aside as youthful indiscretions. "What can you do after studying literature or history?" my brother argued vehemently. "You can only teach them! Surely, you don't want to be a teacher for the rest of your life, do you?" My mother pleaded, "It is alright to have shares in a film studio, though I don't like it. But to become a film director and mix with all those…… actors and actresses! It is not a respectable life for a member of our family". "If you enter politics, the British will throw you in goal; you don't want to spend the rest of your life in prison, do you?" my father asked me sagely. Before such cast-iron arguments, I succumbed meekly and agreed to contribute to the family progress and welfare by studying textiles and spending the rest of my life in a textile mill.

Most people go through their working life without thinking very much about it. They do not often realize that they spend more time in their jobs that they do with their wives or children, that a profession unconsciously moulds their character, opinions and behavior. It shapes their lives,

determines their place in the social hierarchy and earns them a reputation or blame in their society. A wife can be divorced for various reasons and it is not too difficult to find another, but a profession is not that easy to acquire, particularly if one had been sacked from his previous job.

But people with intelligence and imagination and perhaps some ambition, try to make something out of their jobs, however unimportant they might be. They infuse it with glamour; 'I typed a novel that ought to win the Nobel Prize'. Or, they elevate it to the level of indispensability, 'If I hadn't given that injection at that precise moment, the patient would have died'. Such an attitude towards their jobs helps to boost their egos and gives them a sense of importance. This is perhaps a good thing since it usually makes them better at their jobs and gives them considerable degree of job satisfaction.

So, when it was decided that I should spend my working life producing textiles, it gradually became important to me. Not immediately, - for my first reaction was one of indifference-but over a period of time. In the pecking order among the scientific and technological professions, the mathematicians are the super-brahmins. They are so rare as to be almost invisible to ordinary mortals. Nuclear physicists, chemists, biologists, electronic and computer technologists come next. Statisticians, social scientists, etc., are well below the others. In this social hierarchy, a textile technologist is almost an untouchable, though the discovery of synthetics on the one hand and the necessity for designing clothes for space travel and prosthetic grafts for heart operations have somewhat improved his standing. But if he had stuck to God-made fibres only he had no hope of salvation.

Though I might be at the bottom of the pecking order among the scientific professions, I told myself that it was still an honourable and socially relevant profession because textiles came next in importance to food – though nudists might dispute this – and for some people at any rate, it might be even more important than food. After all, starvation is not visible, but nudity is. Fashion conscious ladies would gladly sacrifice their food in order to get into a tight, but fashionable dress. However, I have never been interested in fashions. As a scientist, I have always been interested in facts and figures. But as far as fashions are concerned, I realize that figures are more important than facts. Therefore, at least as far as this chapter is concerned, I shall try to reduce facts to their bare essentials and stick to figures as far as possible.

On going through what I have written so far, it seems as if my enthusiasm for my profession has taken me in a different direction to the one I intended, which was to relate the history of the Kamalapur textile industry. But having gone in this fascinating direction, I might as well go a little further and relate about the origin and the history of textiles in general. After all, Kamalapur is a proud inheritor of that long tradition, the handloom weavers of Kamalapur being historically famous for their turbans and upper cloth.

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How did textiles – or more particularly clothing – originate? There are a number of explanations for it - the scientific as well as the romantic.

Scientists tell us that about a million years ago, when the forests were destroyed as a result of the melting of the ice cap, Man who was uptill then a tree dweller and a vegetarian, had to come down to earth and hunt for his food. This resulted in a number of physical as well as biological changes. One was that he lost his body hair and soon felt the effect of climatic variations. But as a born innovator, he soon overcame the problem. He killed animals, ate the flesh and used the skin to cover his body from the rigours of the cold. (I can quite imagine my vegetarian friends raising their eyebrows and asking, 'What did the vegetarians do?' The answer is simple; they wore the barks of trees! From ancient times many Hindu saints have refused to have anything to do with leather and have used wood even for sandals).

But according to Christian mythology, when Eve bit into the proverbial apple, she became conscious of her nudity and even more, that of Adam. They must have covered themselves with fig leaves as a stop gap arrangement until Adam was able to find a more suitable and permanent substitute.

Another hypothesis that has been put forward is that clothing originated in the decorative impulse of Man. Like most of the animal kingdom, the decorative impulse was largely confined to the male of the species; the cock with its crown, the peacock with its feathers, the lion with its mane are examples of such male vanity. In a similar fashion, homo sapiens too tried to decorate himself. At first, it took the form of painting the skin, tattooing, and wearing of amulets for protection of different parts of the body. Having no clothes to embroider, the primitive man embroidered himself. The early man went to any amount of trouble and discomfort to beautify himself. 'Dandies' seem to have been even more prevalent among primitive people than among the civilized.

However, during the last five thousand years or so – particularly after the invention of clothing – the decorative impulse seems to have influenced women more than men. Adam might have been born first, but that was the only time he got preference. In the last five thousand years, women seem to have acquired many of the prerogatives of men. The chief feature of Islam was that a woman's dress might be ornamental in private, but should give protection to the rights of the husband in public. Hence, the purdah. While nudism might be the sworn enemy of the textile industry, the Bhurkah is the garment to end all garments – at least as far as the fair sex in concerned. Women's fashions have been alternating between these two extremes. But which part of female anatomy should be hidden for the sake of modesty seems to have been a matter of custom in different cultures and civilizations.

'In olden days it was simply shocking

To have a peep at a glimpse of stocking'

In Victorian times in England, while the exposure of the feminine ankle was considered immodest, partial exposure of the bosom was highly fashionable. In India, while a woman's body is fairly well covered, the exposure of the midriff – including the naval – is quite common.

In one were to study the clothing habits of Indian women at the time of Mohanja Daro, they seem singularly free from any kind of inhibitions as we know them today. Fabrics are loosely and often

inadequately hung from a girdle round the waist. The top half of the body is almost always exposed, though decorated with ornaments. Since those days, more and more portions of women's anatomy have been covered with the progress of time, though lately, there seems to be a move in the opposite direction.

Male jealousy has oten been considered as the reason for introducing clothing for women – particularly married women. If protection was the only reason for the wearing of clothes by women, then the face should have been covered first. But jealousy is related to sexual monopoly and clothing stands in understandable relation to it.

Is modesty the result of clothing or its cause? Many primitive tribes who do not wear any clothing have a very highly developed sense of modesty. Their behavior is conditioned by a very strict code of conduct and they seem to accept it willingly. Therefore, we are forced to look for other explanations for the wearing of clothes than mere jealousy or modesty.

The fact of wearing clothes of purpose of concealment involves the possibility of attracting attention through mystery. There is a curiosity about anything that is concealed. It excites our interest and desire to find out what is hidden. Fashion is often nothing more than attraction through concealment. Therefore, apart from the natural factors of climate, comfort and protection clothing seems to be the combined result of modesty, concealment, decoration and often, advertisement.

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While the biological, physiological and psychological causes are matters of speculation and form one aspect of the development of clothing, its actual physical development is another important aspect and is related to the growth of skills and technology. Apart from painting, tattooing and the wearing of amulets, all primitive people – even those who wear no clothing – wear a girdle round their waist. Therefore, we can infer that the girdle pre-dates other forms of clothing. It was chiefly a male appendage and was used more as a pocket for carrying things such as a stone implement or a tool and left both hands free for whatever the individual wanted to do. The habit of carrying things round the waist still persists in many parts of the world, though the girdle has disappeared and has been replaced by a dhoti, lungi or trousers. The first girdles came from Nature – a plaint bough or the stem of a tender plant. Once fitted with a girdle, the body as a machine was greatly improved. Later on, it became a suspender for decorations or 'clothing' when occasion demanded it. Bundles of leaves or grass became 'suspenders' so long as the girdle was there to hold them. It is interesting to note that very early figurines from Mespotomia and Mohanja Daro have a girdle as a very prominent feature of both male and female attire.

The wearing of leaves round the abdominal region seems to focus attention on the impulse to emphasise the primary sexual characteristics. This manifested itself in the early observances and ceremonies at the time of puberty and the rites associated with it.

Since the dawn of history, every material – animal, vegetable and mineral – has been used for manufacturing textiles or as its substitute. Metal was first used as armour plating as protection in

warfare and when the knights from Europe went to fight in the crusades, the same metal was used for making chastity belts for their womenfolk – with what success, it is not known. It was perhaps the only 'purely non-functional' garment in the entire history of textiles.

But the arrival of the gun powder and the invention of the bullet in the sixteenth century made metallic armour useless. According to Linda Martin who has been looking into corsets, "the blacksmiths who became unemployed as a result of discarding armour decided to use all the metal available for manufacturing corsets. They made enough corsets by the early 1900s to put together annually, two battle ships! So, for four hundred years, the steel corset was the basis of the shape that women were required to have!"

To the casual on looker, this seems a somewhat far-fetched explanation. However that might be, according to the same writer, "Corsets are found in the lingerie drawers of such imperial ladies as Queen Elizabeth I, and Catherine the Great of Russia. These leaders chose to flatten their breasts with stays, stiffen their ruffled collars with jewels and laces and hoop their farthingale skirts so that they could bell out towards the rear making the total shape look remarkably like a turkey". But after the French revolution, any woman with an exaggerated hour-glass figure could be accused of belonging to the old aristocracy and guillotined. So, for about a decade, women kept their corsets off. But the tyranny of the under garment soon returned only to disappear after the invention of the aeroplane.

With the coming of the first world war and women going out to work and the growth of the suffragette movement, corsets were discarded in favour of 'roll-ons' garters, and suspenders for stockings and the woman's figure came into its own, in public as well as in private. Howard Hughes who was designing aircraft to be used on carriers in war time is credited with inventing the aerodynamically sound strapless bra which a woman could raise or lower a few inches with the press of a switch while she was wearing it. One supposes it depended on whether she wanted to present a high or a low profile to the outside world. It was perhaps the 'ultimate' in the low down on the uplift. It was described – not without a sense of humour – as 'the bra that defied gravity'. But things have advanced much further now-a-days. While some have described a bra as 'Bosom Rehabilitation Associate', to other women of the liberation movement, L.I.B. means 'Let's Ignite Bras'. They consider a bra as another symbol of a woman's slavery.

Anyhow, with the departure of corsets, the role of metal as a shaper of feminine anatomy or as a protector of virtue has gone for ever. Metals – particularly the more expensive varieties – have become merely accessories after facts and figures.

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It is interesting to speculate as to what would have happened if Homo sapiens had developed an alternative mechanism to the body hair and the retention of heat. Supposing Nature had provided some kind of air-conditioning device which automatically changed as between summer and winter, between tropical and temperate climates, and even between night and day. After all, most biological organisms are able to thrive in the extremes of heat and cold. So, why did not Man, or for that matter woman, do the same?

If Mankind had developed such an automatic thermostatic control mechanism on their skin, they would probably not have bothered to invent the fire. And if a fire had accidentally broken out, they would have soon put it out and forgotten all about it. The art of cooking would have still remained undeveloped; forests would not have been destroyed to provide firewood; conservation and ecological balance would not have been a problem. Coal would never have been dug from the bowels of the earth, water would never have been boiled and consequently, steam would not have been used for generation of power or locomotion. But man would still have invented the wheel and other gadgets associated with it though it would not have been used for spinning yarns. But other gadgets would have been developed along totally unexpected lines.

The possibilities seem almost endless. If Mankind did not need to wear clothes, there would have been no fashion shows, no nudist colonies, and no strip-tease joints. Romance might have taken a totally different turn, and sex and pornography would have been very different from what they are today……Yes, it is very interesting to speculate how Mankind would have developed if they did not have to wear clothes……interesting, but perhaps, futile.

But when once the covering of the human body became a necessity, clothes became a matter of comfort, status and fashion. Unfortunately, these three factors were often in conflict so that people – particularly women – had choices that were somewhat agonizing. 'The womanliness of a woman's apparel resolves itself into the more effective hindrance to useful exertion offered by the garments peculiar to women', says Thorston Veblan, the American economist, whatever that might mean.

If one wants to live in a cold climate, one needs woollen clothes. On the other hand, if one wants to go to a party or a wedding, perhaps silk is more appropriate, for it is very elegant. But elegance during office hours might be somewhat dangerous. One would of course like to have the warmth of wool, the elegance of silk and the versatility if cotton combined into a single fabric. But not only has this proved to be an idealistic dream, but also an irrelevant one, since one does not need all these properties in a single fabric. The advent of synthetics has made it possible to produce a different combination of properties according to the end-use of the fabric. And durability is a characteristic of doubtful advantage both for the wearer and the weaver, to the wearer because it will soon go out of fashion and to the weaver because is bad for business. 'Fashion wears out more apparel than the man' according to Shakespeare.

Fashion is perhaps the most unpredictable of human frailties. Anything that everyone wears is obviously not fashion; but anything that nobody wears is even more so, unless of course it is so expensive that nobody can afford it. Even in the days of Adam and Eve, the lady who was wearing a lion's skin would have looked down on her sister who was wearing only a goat's skin in the same way as a lady who might be wearing imported nylon georgette might look down on one wearing cotton handloom sari today.

'We are by nature all as one, all alike, if you see us naked; let us wear theirs and they ours, and what is the difference?' says Robert Burton in the Anatomy of Melancholy. But the moment we put on clothes, we acquire an identity, a status in society. Then, we are docketed and pigeon-holed as

belonging to a group, a class a community. A king has to wear Royal robes; a lord, ermine. A gentleman wears a tie according to European custom. A turban was once a statue symbol in the East, of respectability, to be replaced by a Gandhi cap in India in the thirties and forties of this century. Academic robes, soldiers' uniforms, nurses' caps are all indicative of status not only of the group, but within the group also. The parson has to button his collar at the back. Different occasions demand different types of clothing and this was made into a fine art in Europe – particularly in England – till the second world war.

When Trotsky was sent by Lenin to sign a separate peace treaty with the German high command during the first world war, the Germans insisted that the signing ceremony, the Russian delegation should wear formal clothes. The communists had always considered all types of formal clothing as symbol of capitalist dominance. Trotsky did not know what to do and sent a telegram to Lenin. The reply soon came. "Sign the treaty in your pajamas if you have to, but sign it at all costs".

The British in India were great adherents of the 'correct' wear for each and every occasion – even more than in their own country. The clubs started by the British during the later half of the nineteenth century in various towns and cities were very strict on this point. It was just as bad to be over dressed as underdressed. Some of them still continue that tradition. There have been instances of some well known Indians being asked to leave some clubs because they were not 'suitably attired'. Most Indians were naturally bewildered by all these and often got blamed for being ignorant. In 'A Passage to India' of E.M.Forster, one of the characters, Ronnie Heaslop refers to this somewhat contemptuously. "Aziz was exquisitely dressed, from tie-pin to spats, but he had forgotten his back collar stud, and there you have the Indian all over; inattention to detail; the fundamental slackness that reveals the race……" But he did not know that poor Aziz had in his magnanimity lent his collar stud another Englishman who had forgotten it! The sahibs in India were greatly annoyed with Mahatma Gandhi during his visit to England in 1931, not because he was a radical challenging British power and authority in India, but because he went to the Buckingham Palace to have tea with king George the Fifth and Queen Mary in his loin cloth!

I remember the first Indian Chairman of a large British company complaining against the unwritten but strict rules with regard to dress in his office. He had to wear white trousers, a tie and a jacket even in the height of summer when he went to his office in the mornings. His room in the office was air-conditioned and maintained at a fairly low temperature, but as soon as he got in, his peon came and took off his jacket and put in on a hanger. He was expected to work in his shirt sleeves, dictate letters, grant interviews, etc., feeling miserably cold. But when he went into the directors' lunch room – where there was no air-conditioning – he was expected to keep his coat on while eating his lunch! The fact that he caught frequent colds only meant that he wasn't as tough as his predecessors in office who glared at him from their perch on the walls of the board room and dared him to defy the conventions they had established and cherished for more than a century!

Ultimately, his health and his comfort were restored by the junior staff. Soon after the Indian chairman took over, they made a representation that the compulsory wearing of ties might be dispensed with as far as they were concerned – the hall where they were seated was not air-conditioned

– in view of comfort as well as expense. They also pointed out that since the company did not pay them a dress allowance, it could not insist on any particular form of dress. Though the chairman of the company felt that their request was reasonable, none of the 'old hands' in the company were inclined to yield. They felt it was the first sign of insubordination and granting the request would lead to grave consequences. They may even turn up in dhotis! But in the end, the chairman had his way and granted the request. After that, he too could dispense with the ceremonial taking off of his jacket when he reached his office.

While conformity on the one hand and smartness on the other were the twin key-notes of clothing throughout the ages, there have always been a few rebels who tried to be eccentric and non-conformist. Polonius advised Laertes as follows:

'Costly thy habit as thy purse can buy,

But not expressed in fancy; rich not gaudy;

For the apparel oft proclaims the man'.

It still does!

But eccentricity of dress often helps a potentially great man to early fame. Poets and artists, actors and such-like have often dressed in somewhat quixotic clothes to attract attention or to identify themselves as belonging to a particular class of society. The Hippies and the flower people of modern times were merely the latest addition to a history of non conformism though they might have thought themselves unique at the time. Eccentricity also induces – sometimes – a degree of glamour and excitement that is rarely found in conventional clothes however smart of expensive they might be. A little studied carelessness also creates what is often described as sexiness in women.

'A sweet disorder in the dress

Kindles in clothes a wantonness'.

But ultimately, what is left is a slight feeling of disappointment. As Charles Dickens tell us, "Probably, every new and eagerly expected garment ever put on since clothes came in, fell a trifle short of the wearer's expectations". Not satisfied, we go looking for something else, something better in the fond hope that the new clothes will enhance our status, our popularity, etc. That is perhaps the basic reason why the textile industry has continued to expand in spite of all its vicissitudes.

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So we may take it that when Eve bit into the apple, the textile industry was born. Leather was the original textile material, not cotton or wool as many of us imagine. But not content with acquiring a consciousness of nudity, Eve must have complained to Adam about the rash she was getting on her delicate skin as a result of wearing rough, raw hide. Consequently, tanning of leather was probably the first textile process invented by Man. That makes textiles one of the oldest professions in the world and it must have been a great aid to the other oldest profession in hiding as well as in revealing the various

parts of female anatomy. It is obvious from all this that textiles has a very long and more or less respectable history and one need not feel ashamed about entering such a profession.

Strangely enough, in spite of all the developments that have taken place, leather has not lost its position as a premier textile material even today. Leather and its Siamese twin fur, are in as great demand today as they ever were. It is fur that is traditionally supposed to tempt innocent women into sin, not cotton, wool, or even silk. Leather is also popular among the modern younger generation as an all purpose, all weather garment and Carnaby Street – the fashion Mecca of the teen agers – is flooded with leather goods, both imitation as well as real.

Since those early days, the fortunes of the textile industry have been fluctuating. The neck-lines have been going down and the hem-lines have been going up, but fortunately for the existence of the industry, they have never met, though they have threatened to do so many a time.

Tanning of leather also meant that the food and clothing industries became distinct and separate, made clothing comfortable for the first time in its history and laid the foundations for the establishment of Rotary clubs at a much later date. But after wolves started going round in sheep's clothing leather probably went out as a general purpose garment and fibres came into their own.

From the tanning of leather to the arts of spinning and weaving, it must have taken many thousands of years. To understand that certain fibres could be spun into yarn and then interlaced into a fabric demands considerable ingenuity as well as initiative and it was a major discovery of the ancient times. Wool was probably spun into yarn before cotton because spinning of cotton involves knowledge of agriculture as well as the process of ginning while sheep skin was probably the natural clothing of nomadic man and spinning of sheep's wool was logically the next stage.

Silk had its origins in China. In the very early days, silk from the cocoons was torn off and spun just like cotton or wool. That silk cocoons could be boiled and the fibre reeled off as a continuous filament must have been discovered, perhaps as the result of an accident, like most discoveries in the early days. Silk was known in India too from early time though it was cultivated in Europe only after the return of Marco Polo who was supposed to have brought it to Europe clandestinely.

There is reason to believe that cotton was first grown and put to use in India before anywhere else in the world, more than five thousand years ago. Excavations at Mohanja Daro have unearthed bits of cotton cloth and twine. Fibres in these bits of cloth belong to the same botanical species as some of the wild cotton still found in parts of India. From those ancient days, throughout the changing fortunes of India's long history, the spinning wheels continued to hum their tune of property and the craftsman of India earned ever-lasting glory for the delicacy of their muslins.

The muslins of India were so fine that an old legend tells the story of Princess Zeb Un Nisa who appeared in public somewhat scantily clad. When her father remonstrated about it, she replied that she had seven layers of muslins covering her! The names given to the fabrics of those days were most evocative and when translated became 'woven air' (Bap thera) and 'evening dew' (Shabnam). The latter

obtained its name because if laid on the grass, it was totally invisible. Even as late as 1846, one Dr.Taylor reported that he came across a pound of cotton yarn which was two hundred and fifty miles in length!

One cannot help wondering, what has happened to those exquisite skills, to those nimble fingers that fashioned such sartorial delicacies? They have disappeared before 'growth' and 'change' and 'progress', along with the coach builder and the palanquin maker …… never to return.

Indian fabrics were exported to Europe in the time of the Greeks and the Romans. It was known as 'Baum Wolle' – tree wool – to distinguish it from ordinary wool. While wool provided warmth, cotton provided the delicacy of smoothness and texture and was therefore highly prized by the upper classes – particularly women – who seem to wear the thinnest of garments in the coldest of evenings. Fabrics such as the Dacca muslin must have been the envy of European craftsmen who could not produce anything to match it, and the pride of the owners. Arabs had a monopoly of this trade for some centuries. After the discovery of the sea route to India by Vasco Da Gama in 1498, many of the seafaring nations of Europe such as Portugal, Holland, France and Great Britain formed companies mainly for the purpose of purchasing textiles and spices from India and selling them in Europe.

But the coming of the industrial revolution in Europe changed all that. It is not often realized that it started with inventions in textiles. Perhaps the first invention of the industrial revolution was the flying shuttle of Kay in the year 1738. This enabled the weavers to double their output and in turn made the spinners search for mechanical aids to meet the increasing demand for yarn supplies. And a whole series of inventions followed. All that remained now was to find markets for the cheap cloth from Lancashire factories. These were provided by the political domination of India by Great Britain.

With the consolidation of British power, it was decided to introduce railways into India and the first train steamed from Bombay to Thana in 1854. Beginning with the ports of Bombay, Calcutta and Madras, the parallel lines quickly spread their tentacles and soon, almost the whole of the Indian sub-continent was criss-crossed by railway lines. But when once the products of the industrial revolution were introduced into India, it was inevitable that the revolution itself should follow. The first textile mill in Bombay was established in the same year as the railways. In fact, the textile industry reached Ahmedabad even before the railway did, since the equipment for the first mill had to be transported by bullock carts.

In the early stages, the cotton textile industry was concentrated in and around Bombay. But soon it spread to Ahmedabad and then to other centres like Kanpur, Calcutta and Coimbatore. The factors that played a part in the expansion of the textile industry in the nineteenth century were, the growth of railways in India making for easy transport of machinery and goods from ports to other areas, the opening of the Suez Canel which reduced the cost and time of transportation from Europe to India and the adventurous spirit of the early pioneers who started these mills under very difficult and trying conditions. The growth of the industry in the early twentieth century can be largely attributed to the growth of the national spirit and the desire for economic self-reliance and the subsequent boycott of British goods. The national movement no doubt placed emphasis of khadi, but the Indian textile industry also benefited from it.

The early struggles of the industry to compete with imported British, and later Japanese goods, the cloth famine during the Second World War and exports to Europe and Britain of Indian textiles in the post war period – they all make fascinating history and is of great interest to the economist and the sociologist, but they need not detain us here. The industry has covered a full circle.

What separated Man from the animal kingdom for ever was not only the discovery of the wheel and the fire, but even more, an awareness of the past, present and future, a consciousness of memory as well as a feeling of hope, aspiration and despair. The wearing of clothes was the first external symbol of that parting from the animal kingdom. After that, there could be no going back.

Therefore, my entering the textile industry as a profession may be directly attributed to Eve biting into the apple.

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CHAPTER TWO

The Beginning

I was born and brought up in the town of Kamalapur, India. My father was an agriculturist with farms very near the town and consequently, he could live in Kamalapur and still visit his farms every day. My home town was not remarkable in any way. No great king or emperor had ruled there; no religious or ancient temples to attract pilgrims; no scenic beauty to captivate tourists. It was founded about three hundred years ago by a petty chieftain and had remained quite ordinary until the coming of the textile industry in the twentieth century made it fairly well-known.

At the time I was born, Kamalapur was a sleepy, district headquarters town with a population of about fifty thousand people. But Kamalapurians were intelligent and hard working people who carefully looked after themselves and their interests. They were highly pragmatic, not easily swayed by emotion or sentiment and took decisions when their heads were cool. They did not indulge in useless luxury – they could not afford to – and did not waste their time and money in unprofitable ventures. But at the same time, they were kind and hospitable to strangers. While they might often quarrel among themselves, they quickly joined together the moment there was any external danger. Whenever anyone made what they considered a preposterous suggestion, they had an apt retort. They asked, 'What is the profit?" That roughly summed up their philosophy of life.

When I was a boy going to school in the late twenties, there were only two textile mills in Kamalapur. Their real names are not important and I have forgotten them. But as far as the public was concerned, one was referred to as the 'Blue Chimney Mills' and the other as the 'Red Chimney Mills' according to the colour of the chimneys that stood tall and erect – about a mile apart from each other – and clearly visible for many miles around. Sometimes, they puffed away gently, thin wisps of smoke moving slowly along the path of the wind. At other times, they belched black smoke full of soot, depending I suppose upon the condition of the boilers and the requirements of power. "The red chimney is angry today", the townspeople would exclaim on such occasions. There was often a discussion among them as to which chimney was taller, but it was never verified. Even after hydro-electric power was introduced and the boilers dispensed with, the chimneys continued to dominate the horizon until the factory inspectors demanded their demolition on the grounds of safety. But the names of the mills continued to be based on the colour of their erstwhile chimneys for a long time.

The two mills also had loud sirens which blew at certain times of the day to indicate the time and to ensure that their workers turned up for work punctually. Since very few people had clocks or watches in those days, it was also helpful for the people of the town to know the time and many people began their day on the authority of these sirens. The first one went off at 5.45 a.m. to wake up the workers from their slumber and the second one at 6.45 a.m. indicating that they should start for work, which began at 7 a.m. Often, there was a discrepancy of a few minutes between the sirens of the two mills and people would enquire, "Are you on Blue Chimney time or the Red Chimney time?"

The Blue Chimney Mills was the older by a few years and the first one in Kamalapur, started as early as 1922. The owner Mr.Gajapathy Raj was a very religious person and it is said that he decided on the colour of the chimney, because his favourite god Krishna was blue in colour. He had been an agriculturist who grew cotton and sold it to merchants. From them, he learnt that there was more money to be made by ginning it than by growing it. So, he started a small ginning factory, ginned his own cotton as well as those of his friends and relations and started selling it to merchants from Bombay. Once, when he went on a pilgrimage to Banares, he stopped in Bombay on the way to meet the people to whom he had been selling cotton. He found that they were far more affluent than he was because they were making cloth out of his cotton and selling directly to the consumers. He then stumbled upon what he called 'an eternal truth' which was that the nearer he did his business to the ultimate consumer, the more money he could make. Being a man of determination as well as imagination, he proceeded to implement the findings of his own research by starting a textile mill. After a lot of difficulties, trials and tribulations, he succeeded in establishing the Blue Chimney Mills Limited.

In those days, there were no financial institutions to help struggling entrepreneurs, no stock-brokers for underwriting the shares, no consultants to advise them or submit project reports or analyse market potential for different types of fabrics. One had to be a bit of a gambler to start an industry at all in those days and Mr.Gajapathy Raj was certainly one. First, he related to all his friends and relations about what he had seen and learnt in Bombay and the imperative need for the setting up of a mill in Kamalapur. Having got promises of investment, a company was registered with the help of the only chartered accountant in the town. The name of the company itself was decided after consulting an astrologer, but he probably never bargained for it to be known as the Blue Chimney Mills. Anyhow, he had some prospectus and application forms for shares printed in the local language and went from village to village in his bullock cart collecting shares from other agriculturists who were of the same caste as himself. He had a brahmin clerk with him to keep an account of the collections. The money was collected in driblets of about five hundred rupees at a time.

He placed orders for machinery with technical help from an Englishman and started building his mill according to the plans supplied by him. But when the machinery began to arrive – even earlier than expected, because of the recession in Europe – there was not enough money to pay for it and Mr.Gajapathy Raj had to pawn not only his agricultural property, but even his wife's jewellery in order to pay for it. When at last, the mill began to produce yarn and cloth and he was able to declare a dividend, he had a model of the mill buildings made in silver and presented it to his favourite deity as a sign of devotion and thanks giving. In later years, in the years of his prosperity, he used to mention these early struggles with pride to anyone who cared to listen to him.

The type of management that was prevalent in India in those days was known as the 'managing agency' system. The British companies in India (whose share holders were in England) had what was known as agency houses to manage their industries on the spot and they were known as managing agents. This form of management was adopted by Indian companies also because it suited the social and economic environment in India at that time. In fact, the managing agency system may be said to be an extension of the joint family system into the industrial field. To start an industry in India in the late nineteenth century or early twentieth century was extremely risky for an Indian. If an individual with

enterprise wanted to start an industry, he naturally had to depend on various branches of the family for his capital requirements. He also had to ensure that profits were sufficiently large when compared to other kinds of investment because of the additional risk involved. The managing agency system satisfied both these requirements, because the entrepreneurs got a share of the profits as well as dividend on their investments. Mr.Gajapathy Raj made his brother and one of his cousins as partners in the managing agency firm so that they too could share in the prosperity and also because of their investment. The managing agents considered themselves as 'owners' of the business they established and behaved as such. To be known as a 'managing agent' was a status symbol. It ensures a man's position in society as well as his powers and responsibility in the prestigious field of industry and commerce. Even their associations were called 'Mill owners' Association' until quite recently.

Starting a mill necessitated a big change in the life style of Mr.Gajapathy Raj and his family. He had to give up his home in the village and come and live in Kamalapur. His ancestral profession of agriculture took second place and was left in charge of a manager with frequent visits by his wife who enjoyed life in the village much better. As befitting his new status as a 'mill owner', he hired a bungalow in the posh area of the town and later when the mill started making money, bought a plot of land and built for himself a luxurious house with a large garden. He had to have a car – and later two – to go to the office every day and for occasional visits to the village. His children went to an English medium school and started reciting nursery rhymes to him, rhymes which he did not understand, but about which he rather felt proud. He added a turban and a closed coat to his ward robe for attending board meetings. His wife insisted on a photograph of him in his new clothes. An enlarged version of it was hung in their sitting room for all to see. It was also rumoured that he had added a mistress to his other appurtenances of dignity, but this naturally could not be verified.

When once the mill was a success, Mr.Gajapathy Raj became the most important citizen in Kamalapur overnight. Parties were organized by various trade associations and 'committees of hosts' to felicitate him on his services to the industrial progress of Kamalapur, on his business acumen, courage and enterprise. I remember attending one such tea party as a little boy along with my father. It was presided over by a much travelled politician of Kamalapur who represented the district in the Central Legislative Assembly. Somehow, his speech impressed itself on my mind. He said, "I was in Manchester, that great centre of the world textile industry last year. There are as many chimneys there as there are coconut trees in Kamalapur. Thanks to Mr.Gajapathy Raj, we have one chimney now. But unless there are at least a hundred chimneys, we cannot say that Kamalapur is an industrial city". Whether Mr.Gajapathy Raj relished the idea, it was not known.

He brought to the new industry he had created, all the virtues as well as the limitations of his past. For him, agriculture was not so much a profession as a way of life. He was attached to the soil and cultivated it with devotion. Land disputes led to more murders in Kamalapur district than any other factor. Consequently, when he entered industry, he brought the same devotion and loyalty that he had lavished on agriculture in an earlier age. It was not so much an economic interest as a way of life. He had persuaded his near and dear ones to invest money and he could not let them down. It was not only a corporate responsibility – which was limited – but also a personal one. The success of his company was

synonymous with his personal reputation and a failure meant a loss of face. His involvement in the mill was not merely great; it was total.

On the other hand, he brought with him to industry all the limitations of an agricultural society. The tradition of paternalism was strongly ingrained in his mind and heart. In the village, it was the custom to share the work among all the people available and he practiced the same principle in his mill also. Whenever the sons and nephews of his tenants and farm workers came to him for a job, they were employed in the mills and the work was shared. The wages were also shared in proportion. It worked well for some years, but after the trade unions came into being and he was forced to increase wages and retrenchment was opposed, he got into grave difficulties. But that is another story.

His paternalism meant that he was genuinely interested in the welfare of his workers in the same way as he had been in the village. He loaned money for their weddings and funerals, attended them personally as far as possible, enquired about their families and maintained the old loyalties and traditions that existed in the village. In return, he also expected them to obey his orders implicitly and without question, as they had done in the village. But unfortunately for him and the mill, there were far too many workers for him to maintain the old relationship successfully. And then, there were the trade unions which did not make a big headway in the beginning, but which eventually did. Consequently, the practice of this type of paternalism – which was essentially feudal – was extremely difficult and in course of time, became impossible. What with trade unions and government regulations, the structure of relationship crumbled after sometime. But the process of change led to a series of bitter struggles. Mr.Gajapathy Raj as well as the other industrialists of Kamalapur was greatly disillusioned as a result.

The change from a master-servant relationship to an employer-employee relationship was an extremely painful process and it took a major general strike before a new social equilibrium could be established in Kamalapur textile mills.

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But the monopoly of Mr.Gajapathy Raj as the only industrialist of Kamalapur was soon challenged. The Red Chimney Mills was started a few years later by Mr.Ramesh Prasad, a distant cousin of Mr.Gajapathy Raj. The two families had lived in the same village for five generations. Their ancestors had been brothers who had partitioned the land and they had had many land disputes in the early days which had been decided by the breaking of heads on both sides and later in the courts of law established by the British. It was a period of rivalry between the two families for the leadership of the village when they would not attend even funerals in each others' houses – a sign of deadly feud. But during Mr.Gajapathy Raj's father's time, a marriage was arranged between the nephew of one family with a niece of the other. This resulted in reconciliation between the two families. Then came a period of what might be described as a truce when Mr.Gajapathy Raj's father and Mr.Prasad's father became almost friendly. But the rivalry was not entirely given up though it had taken a very civilized turn in the form of arguments over various issues, differences of opinion on village matters or trying to out do each other in matters of money as well as prestige.

For example, while Mr.Gajapathy Raj claimed that he was the first to enter industry, Mr. Prasad hotly disputed this. He claimed that even before the First World War, his father had purchased a Ruston oil engine to be installed in his well for purposes of irrigation and it was this that gave the idea to Mr.Raj to start a ginning factory. But Mr.Raj laughed at this preposterous claim and described Mr.Prasad's engine as a 'rusty' oil engine. Sitting on the verandah of the village choultry, the argument would go something like this.

Mr.Raj: "How much did that monster of an engine cost you?"

Mr. Prasad: "Not much more than the pair of trotting bullocks, for which I understand you paid through the nose".

Mr.Raj: "And all that oil you have to transport from the town must put you back quite a bit".

Mr. Prasad: "At least, my engine doesn't consume fodder and oil cake even when it is not running".

Mr.Raj: "And I suppose your engine gives you manure for your farm like my bullocks do, and carry your produce to the market or plough the fields during sowing time".

And so the argument went on. But since neither would give any precise figures, it was difficult for the other interested villagers who were listening to these conversations as to whether the oil engine was more economical than using bullocks for irrigation.

But after the starting of the two mills, the rivalry took on a more sophisticated and in some respects, more subtle turn, trying to outwit each other under a cloak of friendship. Many tales used to be related about their rivalry. In the early thirties when there was a slump in the cloth market partly because of severe Japanese competition, most mills found it hard to sell their products even by undercutting each other. Rather than ruin each other by mutual rivalry, the two mill owners of Kamalapur who produced cloth realized that in unity lay strength, forgot their old prejudices and met in the home of a mutual and respected friend. At the meeting, Mr.Raj proposed that since they both produced similar varieties of fabrics and sold in the same market, they should fix prices for all their varieties and sell only at those prices. This was gladly agreed to by Mr. Prasad and they parted with expressions of mutual affection and respect.

However, a fortnight later, it was discovered that while the Red Chimney Mill had accumulated a stock of five hundred bales of cloth, its rival had no stocks at all. Further enquiries by Mr. Prasad also brought to light the fact that while he had strictly adhered to the agreement, Mr.Raj had given a discount of five percent to the traders which enabled him to clear his stocks. Mr. Prasad was furious and felt cheated and called Mr.Raj on the phone and shouted at him for this perfidy.

"Don't shout my dear cousin", Mr.Raj spoke calmly. They always referred to their traditional relationship whenever they had a sharp difference of opinion. "You have always claimed that your machines are newer and your quality is better. Therefore, I assumed that same prices meant for the same quality. Since my quality is poorer by your own statement, I thought I should sell my products five

percent cheaper, in order to be fair to myself and my customers!" Thereafter, Mr. Prasad vowed never to have any business dealings with his cousin again.

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Another and somewhat indirect rivalry between the cousins was in the realm of politics.

The early thirties was a period of great national awakening. Mahatma Gandhi started his salt Satyagraha in the year 1930. Thousands of people went to goal for breaking the salt laws and for picketing liquor shops and foreign cloth shops. The spirit of freedom pervaded the entire country. Both Mr.Raj and Mr. Prasad knew that the freedom movement – particularly the picketing of foreign cloth shops and the emphasis on buying home made goods had benefited their business. But as business men, they did not want to 'flirt' with sedition lest the British Government gave them trouble. After all, government had a way of letting business men know when the authority was displeased with them.

Therefore, when V.I.Ps such as the governor of the state visited Kamalapur, they vied with each other to invite them to their factories, praise them for their services to India and entertain them to tea. The local authorities in Kamalapur, knowing the intense rivalry between the two captains of industry, ensured that the favour of the visiting dignitaries was fairly evenly divided between them.

But Raghava Raj, son of Mr.Gajapathy Raj who was a student in the local college pre-emted the whole thing by getting himself arrested by the police in one of the student demonstrations. It took all the influence and diplomacy of his father with the local authorities to get his son released of promise of good behavior. But the son was adamant in his views and though he did not directly clash with the authorities again, he maintained his contacts and friendship with the local congressmen.

The senior Mr.Raj decided to make the best of a bad situation, claimed that his family had always been patriotic and that his son was merely carrying on the family tradition. While he still continued to placate those in authority in his shark skin cost and turban, whenever any nationalist leaders came to Kamalapur – particularly after the civil disobedience movement was called off in 1933 – he encouraged his son to receive them in his homespun shirt and dhoti and praise them for their sacrifice in the cause of national freedom. Mr. Prasad, in virtuous indignation, condemned the behavior of his cousin as sheer hypocrisy while he himself helped local congressmen financially in private, just in case they should come to power at some future date. In fact, both businessmen followed that well known dictum, 'what does it matter if Rama rules or Ravana rules?'

So, when the congress decided to contest the elections in 1936, Raghava Raj was elected as a member of the local legislature as a congress candidate. But providence was not partial in granting its favours and in the same year, in the new year honours' list, Mr. Prasad was conferred the title of 'Rao Sahib' – the badge of slavery as Mr.Raj described it. Privately both the cousins were satisfied – each in his own way. As far as politics was concerned, the rivalry could be described as a drawn match.

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Other mills started coming up in Kamalapur during the later twenties and early thirties, partly because the freedom movement gave a fillip to locally made cloth and partly because, the local people were of an enterprising nature and willing to try new things. The wives of well-to-do merchants and agriculturists used to taunt their husbands, "If Mr.Raj and Mr. Prasad can start mills and call themselves 'mill owners' and 'managing agents' why can't we? In what way are we inferior to them?" Thus were the husbands egged on to initiative and enterprise by their ambitious spouses. It was said in later years by learned economists that the reason why the textile industry developed in Kamalapur was because the climate was very suitable. The fact was the people who started the textile industry, people like Mr.Raj and Mr. Prasad, did not know that there was any relationship between humidity and spinning. Friendly rivalry on the one hand and the implied challenge on the other were the spurs. However, the starting of the mills was followed by the establishment of trade unions, appointment of committees by the Government, and so on. Consequently, it was felt that a mill owners' association of Kamalapur – later to be known as MOAK – should be established in order to protect the employers.

While everyone welcomed the idea, it was a long time before the association could be established. No one was willing to pay a subscription; all jobs should be honorary, they said. But an even more important reason was regarding the selection of the first president of the association. Everyone seemed to sense the historic nature of the appointment and felt that it should be unanimous. But they could not decide who it should be since both Mr.Raj and Mr.Prasad were strong contenders for the post, while publicly denying any interest in the office.

In a society where tradition plays an important part in all such appointments, seniority was a major consideration. Mr.Raj – as a pioneer in starting the first mill – naturally felt that he should be an automatic choice. On the other hand, Mr.Prasad was the senior in age by about six months, and his attitude was, "Why a youngster should be selected when a mature person like himself is available?" But in public discussions there were protestations of disinterest in the job by both gentlemen. "Who wants to keep going to Delhi or Bombay every month neglecting his own business?" both of them protested, Finally, Mr.Ashok Kumar who was young and dynamic, and a newcomer to the textile field and to Kamalapur suggested that a committee of two – consisting of Mr.Raj and Mr.Prasad – may be constituted to select the first president. Apart from anything else, the suggestion had the merit of ensuring that whoever was selected would have their joint approval. Mr.Kumar also suggested, "of course, as the two senior most industrialists of city, they can be made patrons of the association and they will continue in that capacity for life". The two gentlemen welcomed the idea. It solved a ticklish problem, ensured the cooperation of the two largest mills and the tradition of seniority was also maintained. Needless to say, one good turn deserves another, and Mr.Kumar was chosen as the first president. That was how a rank outsider who was considered an upstart by both Mr.Raj and Mr.Prasad happened to occupy the most coveted position in tradition bound Kamalapur. The association had a membership of nine mills.

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But as the thirties progressed, the textile industry in Kamalapur was getting into increasing difficulties. Even though the war had broken out in 1939, there was not much relief for the industry

because the Japanese competition was still very severe. The newer mills could survive somehow, because they had bought machinery cheap and they were modern, but the Blue Chimney Mills, which was now nearly twenty years old and which had paid very high price for its machinery immediately after the first world war found itself in difficulties. The cost of production was high and the quality was not as good and it was extremely difficult to sell its products.

When the Second World War broke out in 1939, the textile people expected the demand to increase but it was not so. The Japanese competition was still there and crippling the Kamalapur mills. So, when the Indian Government wanted to place some orders for cloth for war purposes in early 1940, they were very happy and a delegation from the newly formed Mill Owners' Association of Kamalapur was sent to Bombay to get a big share of the Government orders. Mr.Prasad was chosen as the leader of the delegation but in the meeting held before the departure of the delegation to Bombay, Mr.Raj made it clear that whatever orders were secured, they should be equally divided between the mills according to their size.

The delegation stayed at the Taj Mahal Hotel for about a week, though the meeting with the Government officials lasted only for two days. The slender finances of the association were completely wiped out as a result of this visit and it was found that there was not enough money to pay the salary of the only employee of the association for the next month! A quick collection had to be made from among the more willing mills in order to make the association solvent again.

But when the Government orders came, it was found that a major portion had gone to the Red Chimney Mills and the rest was distributed among six others! It was obvious to everyone that Mr.Prasad, as the leader of the delegation had somehow managed to convince the officials that he should get a major portion of the order.

Mr.Raj was furious. He called for an immediate meeting of the association to discuss the situation and moved a no confidence motion against the leaser of the delegation for not following the instructions of the general body of members. Mr.Prasad – in a show of virtuous indignation – threatened to resign. He said that the government officials had insisted on quality products and had placed orders accordingly though he – at great personal sacrifice – had insisted that the orders should be distributed equitably! The meeting broke up in disarray with no decision being taken and did not meet for a long time afterwards. Mr.Raj sent telegrams of protest to various officials and was told that the matter would be reconsidered when the next order was placed. But it needed all the prosperity of the Japanese war years for the association to stage a comeback.

Mr.Raj was a very worried man. Mr.Prasad had very cleverly managed to purchase a lot of cotton at low prices while he himself was paying very high prices because the prices were increasing and because he was short of funds. His creditors were pressing him for money and the banks would not give him any more credit. The wages for his workers were due on the tenth of each month and he did not know how to meet his liabilities. In those days, there were no financial institutions or government agencies to assist mills in distress. No one came to the aid of the mill if it was in trouble and no one accused him of being anti-social if he made lots of money. That was to come later. Bit in 1941, Mr.Raj

was on his own. He seriously considered pawning his wife's diamonds in order to save the mill. But it was one thing to do that when he was a struggling industrialist, young and optimistic, but very different when he was a senior citizen among the mill owners. And he was not sure if even that sacrifice would save the mill. It was at that critical time that he received an emissary from his arch rival, Mr.Prasad.

Mr.Prasad of course was fully aware of his cousin's predicament. While outwardly sympathizing with him, he nevertheless intended to fully exploit the situation. So, the emissary spoke soothing words to Mr.Raj. He said that Mr.Prasad was fully aware of his friend's difficulties, that he was willing to let bygones be bygones and come to his aid in his hour of need. After all they were relations of a sort. They hailed from the same village; and he would not like to see the oldest mill in Kamalapur go into liquidation and be taken over by some smart operators from Bombay or Calcutta. Therefore at great personal risk to himself, he was willing to buy the shares of the Blue Chimney Mills at a reasonable price. Of course, he would retain Mr.Raj as a director…… and so on. Mr.Raj was getting on in years (forgetting that he himself was six months older) and it was time he devoted the last years of his life to pilgrimage, prayer and meditation rather than worrying over financial problems……

For Mr.Raj, to give up his mill was hard enough. He had spent the best years of his life in building it up and had staked his reputation on it. But to sell it to his traditional rival who had never let an opportunity slip without scoring a point over him was a bitter pill to swallow. But he was a pragmatic man and he could not see any alternative. With a heavy heart, he negotiated the sale. Each step he took towards its conclusion was like a step he took towards his grave. The negotiations were prolonged and tortuous. The generous sentiments expressed by Mr.Prasad evaporated very quickly when it came to parting with cash. But Mr.Raj was in no position to stand firm and the deal was finally concluded.

At last, the two rivals met under very different circumstances. The agreement of sale was prepared by their respective lawyers and was ready for signature. Mr.Prasad had dictated the terms and got away with it. He savored the situation to the full. "The trouble with you has always been", he pontificated for the benefit of Mr.Raj. "You are really not cut out for business. Modern business needs acumen, shrewdness, imagination, and if I may say so, guts……." Mr.Raj was silent. But his lawyer interrupted. "Here is the agreement Mr.Prasad. I and my learned colleague have both approved it", he pointed to Mr.Prasad's lawyer who was by his side. "You will have to give a cheque for a lakh rupee as the first instalment and then, my client will sign it and hand it over to you".

But Mr.Prasad was enjoying the situation and he didn't see any need to hurry through it. "You see Mr.Iyer", he spoke to the lawyer. "In spite of all my modernism, I am a strict follower of Indian tradition in certain aspects. Business such as this should be concluded at an auspicious time. I am sure my cousin will agree with me". He smiled at his old rival. "I shall issue the cheque at eleven a.m. tomorrow morning which is the time my astrologer has suggested to conclude this business".

"In that case, my client will sign and hand over the agreement to you when the cheque is received, tomorrow morning", said the lawyer.

Mr.Raj began to get worried about a twenty four hour delay. "But I thought we were going to finish everything now! That is why I came personally".

“Don’t worry my dear chap”. Mr.Prasad patted him on the shoulder. “One day’s delay will not make any difference. I am a man who keeps his word. You can sleep peacefully tonight”.

Mr.Raj returned home with a heavy heart. He had to go through that humiliating experience of meeting Mr.Prasad, a second time! But he did not know that at the same time as he was sitting in his rival’s office, the Japanese fleet was moving stealthily towards Pearl Harbour. And within a matter of hours, the United States and Britain were at war with Japan.

Even before Mr.Raj heard the news on the radio the next morning there were half a dozen cloth merchants waiting on the verandah of his house. Mr.Raj was somewhat puzzled as to why they were there at all. It was general knowledge that he was negotiating for the sale of his mill. “We understand you have large stocks of cloth for sale sir; we have come to buy them”, they said.

Immediately, he became alert. Why this sudden interest in his Mills’ products when they had studiously avoided him so far? He remembered the advice his rival had given him the previous day about shrewdness. Something must have happened during the night and he wanted to find out what it was. So, he called the servant and asked for the morning paper.

The merchants looked at each other. They knew they could no longer fool him and get the cloth at a lower price as they hoped to. So they told him about Pearl Harbour. He rose and spontaneously hugged them and shed tears of joy. There will be no more Japanese competition; there will be a big demand for cloth, not only in India, but also for the forces, for export, for so many things…… And he drove a hard bargain with the merchants.

At eleven a.m. there was a call from the Red Chimney Mills. Mr.Raj took it himself. When Mr.Prasad asked, “Why aren’t you here to sign the agreement?”

“What agreement?” asked Mr.Raj in reply.

“You mean you are not going to sign the agreement!” Mr.Prasad cried. “After having solemnly committed yourself!”

“You see my dear cousin”, it was Mr. Raj’s turn to give advice. “Modern business may need everything you suggested yesterday – acumen, shrewdness, imagination and guts, but it certainly does not need superstition about auspicious times. You must learn to strike while the iron is hot. If I have taught you that one lesson during our little negotiation, I would not have entirely wasted my time”.

But in spite of Mr. Raj’s sage advice to his cousin about superstition, the fact was that almost every one – including Mr.Raj himself – were superstitions in one form or another. Astrology played a major part in their domestic life and often in their business dealings. Perhaps, it was not so much a belief as a matter of habit. Their parents had followed a particular way of life and they did not like to change it. Often, even when the man wanted to give up such ideas, the ladies were against it and it was easier to follow the beaten path than to venture on new ground.

Once, when I was honorary secretary of the Mill Owners' Association of Kamalapur, I decided to hold the annual general meeting of the association on what I thought was a convenient date. The office manager – an orthodox brahmin – pointed out that it was 'Ragu Kaalam' – an inauspicious time that repeated itself at the same time on the same day of the week. In my enthusiasm for efficiency, I brushed his objection aside.

But for the first time in the history of the association, we had a quorum. Almost everybody had turned up – to protest against the holding of the meeting at 'Ragu Kaalam'! No one would sign the register and the meeting had to be postponed for want of quorum! But according to the rules, whenever an annual general meeting was post poned, it had to be held the same time next week which also meant Ragu Kaalam. But the second adjournment enabled the meeting to be fixed on any suitable date and time and – having learnt my lesson – I chose an auspicious time for the meeting. But no body turned up and the minutes book had to be sent round to the various mills for signatures to make up the quorum!

But the interesting thing was that neither Mr.Prasad nor Mr.Raj took this matter as seriously as the first Government order that Kamalapur Mills ever received. Mr.Raj felt that he had had come through the jaws of death into a land of paradise. But he did say to his more intimate friends that if it wasn't for Mr.Prasad's superstition about auspicious times, he would have lost the mill. Mr.Prasad on the other hand told his friends that Mr.Raj ought to thank the Japanese for his continued existence as an industrialist.

When someone suggested that business was just as unpredictable a game as cricket, both the gentlemen agreed.

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One of the major tragedies to hit the Kamalapur textile industry was the general strike in the year 1948. It was not only a bitter economic conflict but an emotional upheaval which left its mark on the industry for a long time to come because of it timing. It was the year after independence when everybody was hoping for a better life. Instead, thousands of families were adversely affected for many years. It was rather like the year old strike lasted longer, perhaps the Bombay worker were better able to meet it, unlike the Kamalapur workers of 1948 who were very ill-prepared for what over took them.

During the war years, the managements of Kamalapur, used to unprecedented prosperity, were very generous in recruitment. The method of wage payment in those days was dependent vaguely on the quantum of work done; that is, everyone in the department shared whatever work there was so that the wage bill of the management did not go up very much. The managements thought they were doing social service by providing work for more people. It was a misguided social service. But it was in fact the feudalism of the villages transferred to the industrial scene.

But in the year 1947, when elected governments came to power in all the states of India, they fixed minimum wages for all textile workers irrespective of the quantum of work done. This put the managements of Kamalapur mills to considerable financial loss at a time when they hoped to make good profits. There was therefore a demand from the managements of those mills that minimum work loads

should be fixed for all workers and the excess workers should be retrenched. The unions naturally would not agree to such a proposal. Losing a job was a major disaster for an industrial worker in India and no union official who agreed to it could survive for long as leader.

The negotiations between the managements and the unions were prolonged and futile. In those days when the unions were new and aggressive and the managements had not learnt to deal with the unions and thought of them as trouble makers, discussions often meant hurling accusations against each other rather than a meaningful dialogue. Finally, the negotiations broke down and the managements decided to retrench workers unilaterally and put up notices accordingly. This was the signal for a general strike of about forty thousand workers in twenty five mills in the whole of Kamalapur district with the sole exception of the only British owned mill which did not retrench any workers.

The strike took its usual course, like the progress of a disease. The mistake the union leaders made was in thinking that the Government would interfere at some point and settle the dispute in their favour. This did not happen because the Government had seen the balance sheets of the mills and felt there was some justification for retrenchment. In the beginning it was peaceful and disciplined. But when the first month's wages were not distributed, many of them began to feel the pinch. First the jewellery, later even pots and pans began to disappear from the workers' homes to the pawn shops. Seeking alternative jobs was the next step, but there were very few alternative jobs available in Kamalapur. And finally, sponging on friends and relations who were perhaps slightly better off than themselves. But above all, the fear and uncertainty for the future. How was one to quantity these in human terms for forty thousand workers?

One of the things that happened during the strike and which upset many managements was that the unions prevented the personal servants of the managing agents such as cooks, drivers, watchmen, etc. from working in their houses. The contention of the unions was that these servants were being paid from the companies. As such, they were also 'industrial' workers and should therefore join the strike. While some mills might have paid domestic servants out of the mills' funds, many were not doing it and it was not possible to say who was really 'an industrial worker'. Therefore, there was an attempt to stop them all, but it did not succeed. But it was not so much the inconvenience that upset the managements as the affront to their dignity. "After all I have done for these people, they treat me like this!" exclaimed Mr.Prasad at a meeting of MOAK. "They fell at my feet to get into the mill and now they expect me to fall at their feet!" cried Mr.Raj. Yes, it was a time of great disillusionment about human nature for both sides.

So, the inevitable happened. After three months, the workers decided to return to work under the conditions imposed by the managements. That was when violence started, when the vast majority wanted to return and the hardcore minority did not. But soon it was over and the mills were back on full production within two weeks.

Three bitter lessons were learnt as a result of this unfortunate experience. One was, the trade unions learnt never to go on a prolonged strike, for it took them three years to recover their leadership again. They learnt to go slow, to observe hartals, to gherao, but never to strike for long periods. The

second was, the managements learnt never to recruit workers unless they were absolutely essential. The third lesson was that the strike was responsible for replacing the master servant relationship that existed in many mills by employer – employee relationship.

A few years later, I visited one of the textile mills outside Kamalapur district as a member of the textile enquiry committee. A worker in the spinning department – whose face seemed vaguely familiar – came and gave me a big smile and a Namaskar. When I asked him how he knew me, he explained. “I was a worker in Kamalapur sir, in your mills. But I was sacked during the big strike for being a bad character”. There was no bitterness or mockery in his smile; it was pure and innocent.

“How are you faring here?” I asked him.

He grinned and said, “You ask the manager sir”. He enquired after my father and various members of the staff and went away happily, having met someone from his home.

When I asked the manager about him, he remarked, “Shankar is my right hand man in the department. I am thinking of making him a supervisor. And then he added, “You know that strike of yours provided a lot of trained and loyal workers to those of us who wanted to start mills outside Kamalapur. Yes, it was good that it took place when it did”.

I knew there was a moral in all this, but I couldn’t guess what or to whom it applied.

CHAPTER THREE

The British Connection

"What are you taking back to India with you, apart from your college notes and your English wife?" A British friend of mine asked me a few days before my departure for India.

Yes, I had been sent to England to study textiles at the Manchester University. But the Second World War had broken out while I was there and I got stuck there more or less for the duration. So, I took a job after I finished my studies in a textile laboratory and got married to an English girl. Now that the war was nearing its end, I was ready to return home with my wife. Therefore, my friend's question was very relevant.

"I am not taking anything back", I replied with my tongue in my cheek. "On the other hand, I am leaving something behind.

"I suppose it is only natural", replied my friend. He was a very serious person. "Having been in this country for more than seven years, having absorbed our culture and traditions, you will no doubt leave a bit of your heart to some of the finer things of life here".

"I don't think it is my heart", I said mischievously. "When I came here first, I weighed one hundred and thirty pounds; I now weigh only one hundred and twenty six. So, I am leaving four pounds of my solid flesh behind. But I am sure it is not my heart. For one thing, I am still breathing and for another, I don't think my heart weighs four pounds".

"Cynical as usual", remarked my friend in disgust.

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I remembered the evening before I left Kamalapur. My father had invited a few of the leading citizens of the town for a dinner as a sort of farewell for me. Of course Mr.Raj and Mr.Prasad were there. The conversation naturally turned towards my impending departure to England and the guests – none of whom had ever been further away than Bombay – took it upon themselves to give me some wholesome advice so that I might not fall a prey to all the temptations of a foreign land. One gentleman said, "I am going to give you the same advice that Mahatma Gandhi's mother gave him when he went to England. 'Don't eat meat, don't touch alcohol and don't have anything to do with women!"

Before I could protest in self-defence that I was already a meat eater, Mr.Raj came to my rescue. "Don't be silly!" he chided the first speaker. "He already eats meat. If you make impossible conditions, how can you expect the poor boy to observe them?"

But Mr.Prasad, more worldly wise and sophisticated, could not allow Mr.Raj, to have the last word. "After all, when you are in Rome, you must do as the Romans", he philosophized. "It is no use telling him not to have anything to do with women. I have heard that in England, women serve in restaurants, work as shop assistants, and as clerks in offices. He has to deal with them. "No my boy", he

turned to me with his eternal wisdom. “Women are like fire; if you go too near, you will get burnt. If you are too far away, you will feel cold. So my advice is, thus far and no further”. He beamed at his audience with satisfaction.

“I suppose you speak from the experience of your Bombay visit?” muttered Mr.Raj, in an apparent reference to that ill-fated delegation of which Mr.Prasad was the leader.

“England is a very cold country and I believe you need a fire ten months in the year”, was my reply, much to the amusement of the younger people present and the consternation of my father.

Another gentleman who had perhaps been reading the more juicy sections of the British Sunday papers advised me not to indulge in writing any love letters during my stay in England. “I believe English girls do not hesitate to go to court and sue you for breach of promise if they have any written evidence against you”, he warned me. So, after reaching England I composed a verse and sent it to him.

‘You can say it with flowers,

You can say it with mink;

You can do what you like

But don’t say it in ink’.

It was perhaps a very good tip for avoiding matrimonial entanglements, but not the best advice for an aspiring author!

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The details of my life in England are easily summarized. I spent the first two years at the Manchester College of Technology and took a degree in textiles. A scholarship from the University enabled me to undertake research and take a Master’s degree. The war had broken out by that time and I got a job in one of the textile laboratories where I spent five years inspecting defence textiles acquired by the British Government. But apart from my professional training, I had absorbed the intellectual ferment of the late thirties; learnt to appreciate literature, art and theatre. I had become a member of the soc-soc – the socialist society of the University - and thought all capitalists were sinners by definition and all poor people were angels – an attitude not particularly conducive for running a family business in India.

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As a student of textiles, I was naturally interested in learning as much as I could while I was in England. I wanted to visit the mills in Lancashire, see their working and organization particularly as many mills in India were modeled on Lancashire mills. As one who knew very little about other industrialized countries, I had a great respect for British technology. But one of the problems I had to contend with was the reluctance of the British to show their textile mills to foreigners in general and Indians in particular. When the college organized a visit to a mill, the notice would usually say, “We regret that

overseas students cannot participate in this visit". I believe that this prejudice was due to a number of reasons.

The first was of course a natural resentment that people in India were actively boycotting British goods – particularly textiles. They were used to thinking of India as their exclusive preserve as a market and the boycott of British goods by Mahatma Gandhi and his followers for political reasons annoyed them. They had the largest textile industry in the world till about 1914 and now that industry was beset with depression and the prospects of shorter working week for many mills. This feeling was reflected in a black flag demonstration in Lancashire when Mahatma Gandhi paid a visit there in 1931.

The second reason was the feeling that people from other countries came to Lancashire, to technical schools and colleges, learnt what Lancashire had to teach them and then went and established factories in competition. England was the home of the industrial revolution. The first inventions in textiles had taken place there and yet, they were now faced with the prospects of competition from countries like Japan and India. "Why should we dig our own grave?" was their feeling.

The third reason was a hidden feeling that perhaps, others had better machines, better mills. After all, Lancashire mills – most of them – were old and out dated. This aspect of Lancashire's attitude was suggested many years later by a Japanese industrialist when I visited Japan in 1956. He said, "I visited England in 1910 as a young man. They wouldn't show me their mills then, because, they were afraid I would copy them. But when I visited England as a senior industrialist in 1936, they still wouldn't show their mills because……." he hesitated and then said, "because, I think they were ashamed to show them".

I myself had similar experience in the fifties. When I wrote a letter to the director of the laboratory where I had been working during the war saying that I would like to visit them, I did not reveal my background that I had worked there during the war. I got a polite reply to say that it was a private laboratory and visitors were not permitted. But when I did manage to visit them through the intervention of one of their members, the director recognized me. And when I showed him the letter of refusal I had received, he was most embarrassed. But we had a good laugh over it.

The textile machinery manufacturers in the United Kingdom on the other hand were keen for foreigners to visit them so that they could sell them their machines. But when I wanted to see one of their machines working under industrial conditions they were a little hesitant. After some telephoning, they explained that the mill in which that machine was working did not like visitors from abroad – particularly Indians. But the manager had agreed to my visit provided I did not go into any other department. I replied, "I am not interested in visiting his mill, but only in seeing your machine working".

When we got to the mill, the manager was waiting to receive us – more to ensure that I did not stray into forbidden territory than to welcome me. When we were introduced, he could not help boasting a little.

"You know, my mill is one hundred and twenty years old", he said with some pride in his voice.

I took one look at the environment – the old building, the peeling paint, the narrow cobbled passage, etc., - and remarked, “Yes, it looks it”.

He was rather taken a back. “Let’s go and look at the machine, shall we?” and led the way.

The remarks I made and the questions I asked of the manufacturer of the machine who had accompanied me evidently impressed the manager. And as we turned to leave, he invited me to visit the other departments and offer my comments on the working of his mill. When we got on to the technical level we had no reservations about exchanging ideas.

This reluctance to share knowledge with others was probably one of the reasons – among others – for the contraction of the Lancashire textile industry steadily for the past sixty years. Sharing knowledge increases it. A lamp under a bushel soon goes out for want of oxygen. We Indians had the same problem in the old days. All knowledge was unshrined in Sanskrit which was open only to the brahmins. People of other communities – however brilliant they might have been – had no access to it. Often, knowledge that was confined as a secret, died with the individual. Consequently, knowledge in India continued to contract instead of expanding and other countries soon overtook us. Though India had been an exporter of textiles for over three thousand years, the industrial revolution was born, not in India, but in Europe. I have always believed that open discussions and a sharing of knowledge is good for all concerned.

But when once the war broke out, things were different in Great Britain. Young men were all called up to join the armed forces; the mills in Lancashire were busy producing cloth for the defence services. People with qualifications were in great demand in industry and research. So, it was easy for me to get a job in a laboratory for the duration. In spite of the reluctance of Lancashire business to accept Indians, my presence in the laboratory was not resented by the staff and after a short period of initial reserve, we became very friendly. I learnt many things there, not all of them connected with textiles.

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When I returned to India, I found that though my theoretical knowledge of textile technology was good, I knew practically nothing about the various complex aspects of running a mill. Therefore, I realized that the question, what I was carrying with me to India beside my college notes and my English wife, was quite relevant.

So, I told my father that I would like to get some practical training in another mill under an experienced manager before I took charge of my own mill. He agreed with me and suggested that I should spend six months in the Blue Chimney Mills because, the manager, Mr. Hargreaves was considered a very knowledge and experienced person. A telephone call to Mr.Raj and everything was arranged within a few minutes.

Among the Englishmen in India, there was in those days a caste system more rigid than anything invented by the Indians. The members of the I.C.S. – the Indian Civil Service – were the super brahmins.

When a British army officer complained about the privileges and the prerogatives of the I.C.S., a young civilian was supposed to have retorted, “Yes, you are quite right. We do have two kinds of service here – the civil and the uncivil”. The army, the engineers, the public works department, medical services and the officers of the agricultural department, came in that order. The British businessmen came next. But the untouchables among the British were those poor Englishmen who were unfortunate enough to work for Indian companies. Jim Hargreaves told me that when he first came to India in the twenties, he was not even allowed to join the Kamalapur Club which was an exclusive preserve of the British in those days. Even when they were, in 1930, they felt rather intimidated by the Pucca Sahibs. Having been subjected to such humiliations, he was friendly but somewhat patronizing with the Indians. He said it was a shame that a person like me – well educated and with an English wife – could not join the club. But what bewildered him even more was that my wife and I did not want to join. He just could not understand it. Knowing that my father was a ‘mill owner’ and that I was educated in England, we were on a first name basis in spite of the difference in our ages. But I noticed that his employer Mr.Raj always addressed him as Mr. Hargreaves!

One of the rather unusual things that I noticed in Jim’s office was a camp cot with a pillow. When I enquired about it, he explained it to me.

“To an Englishman, this climate is killing over a long period of time. I come to work at seven a.m. and spend almost the whole morning working in the departments, inhaling cotton dust. By eleven a.m. I am dead beat. I have a wash, eat my sandwiches, take my shoes off and lie flat on the camp cot for one hour. That hour is precious for me. The staff have instructions not to disturb me under any circumstances. At the end of an hour, I feel fresh; my engines are recharged and I can do another spot of work. If people want anything from me, they always come to me at 2 p.m. when I wake up from my snooze. They know that I would be in my most expansive mood at that time. Would you like me to put in a cot for you? It will do you good you know”.

“No, but thanks for the offer”.

“I suppose you are young and used to this climate, but I would advise you to ask your wife to take a nap every afternoon, even if she has to force herself to do it. It improves a woman’s temper as well as her complexion”.

Jim was a hearty, red nosed Lancashire man who had spent a life time working in Indian mills. I had therefore assumed that he knew a lot more about running mills than I did, wrongly as it turned out. He had started as a fitter in a Lancashire mill, gone to night school and learnt the elements of spinning and weaving and with the aid of a City and Guilds certificate, got his first job in India. He knew the machines inside out, knew how to repair and maintain them and had a lot of bluff and confidence to see him through problems and difficulties. Whenever a technical problem arose, he pulled out an old and somewhat faded pocket book, peered closely into it and after putting it back safely, would give an answer to the problem. His subordinates used to think that there was something almost magical about that book and looked upon it with some reverence. It did not take me long to discover that it was an old edition of the ‘Spinner’s and Weaver’s pocket Book’. It was the bible of most mill people in Lancashire in

the pre-war days. I myself had a much newer and improved edition of the book and one day I presented it to Jim.

"You have got one of these, have you?" he said pocketing it. "Don't you need it?"

"I have got it all here", I tapped my head.

"Of course, you have been to the Tech, haven't you?" To a textile man in those days – even today – the 'Manchester Tech' was the holy of holies.

I merely nodded my head.

But Jim went off of a tangent. "You chaps go to Lancashire, learn everything we teach and then ruin our trade; now that isn't fair is it?" There was no bitterness in his voice. "And I suppose you will be sending people like me back home very soon".

"Well Jim, because we go to England to study textiles, we buy machinery from England", I replied. In those days, ninety percent of the machines installed in Indian mills were from Britain. "Otherwise, we might be buying them from Germany or the United States or even Japan".

"I suppose there is that about it", he confessed.

"And don't forget that for nearly four thousand years, from the time of Mohanja Daro, India was an exporter of cotton textiles to the world. So, it is only natural that we should want to reestablish that position".

"What the hell is Mohanja Daro?"

I explained it to him.

"Fancy that! He exclaimed. "But don't forget that the industrial revolution was born in England; not a stone's throw from where I was born. When Kay invented the flying shuttle in 1738, he planted the seeds of the industrial revolution; and Arkwright established the first spinning mills in the seventeen sixties; he invented the factory system that changed the world. There is British technology for you. So, my advice to you is, stick to British machinery. It is sturdy, it is reliable, and it is good. Then, you won't go wrong". There was a lot of pride in his voice.

He was to give me many more bits of advice like that, most of which – I regret to say - I did not follow.

While technology was easy to learn at college, one of the things that could not be learnt was how to evaluate the quality of cotton. There were no testing instruments in mills in those days and hand stapling and visual judgements were the only methods available. These had to be learnt by experience and I hoped Jim would give me some tips about it.

"There is nothing to cotton selection", Jim assured me. "The seller can always pull a longer staple than the buyer. But I have a simple method. Here, come with me", and he took me to the gates of

the mill and pointed to the long line of bullock carts parked outside with loaded bags of cotton. The Blue Chimney Mills consumed mostly local cotton which was transported by carts from neighbouring towns.

"You see those carts?" he asked me. "Which way do they face?"

"Clever chap! That means, they must have come from the east. Right?"

"Yes. I suppose so".

"You are learning! Now, you know and I know that cotton grown to the east of Kamalapur is a better variety than what is grown on the western side. Isn't that so?"

"I have heard about it", I replied.

"Therefore, when I come to the mill at seven a.m. during the cotton season and I see a long line of carts facing west, I say to myself, 'Ah, the good cotton'! And I pay them twenty five rupees more per candy. And when they are facing east, they get twenty five rupees less. It is fair for all concerned. The cotton merchants are happy and I am happy".

"Don't you inspect the cotton at all?" I asked in surprise.

"I do of course, occasionally. But as I told you, the seller can always pull a longer staple than the buyer".

Later I learnt that the cotton merchants tumbled to this method of Jim's. Carts loaded with cotton coming from the west went past the mill turned round and came back and were parked facing west. As Jim said, there was nothing to it!

One day, I asked Jim. "Have you seen any carts facing east lately Jim?"

"I am told that the crop on the western side is very poor this year, because they have all gone in for growing tobacco", he replied in great innocence.

Then he started at me for a moment and the truth suddenly dawned on him. "My God!" he cried. "You mean to tell me the blighters have been taking me for a ride?"

"You are the cotton expert Jim; I am only a learner".

From then on I think he was more careful.

Cotton is a hygroscopic material which absorbs moisture in wet weather and gives out moisture in a dry climate. If the cotton is too damp, we will really be paying money for water. Therefore, according to trade practice, all cotton transactions are supposed to take place at 65% relative humidity when cotton will have approximately 7% moisture. So, I asked Jim, "How do you ensure that the cotton contains the right amount of moisture and no more?"

“All this book learning isn’t going to be of much use to you my friend”, Jim said sagely. “In Karkoor where as you know a lot of cotton is ginned, the merchant looks at the sky on an evening when his cotton is ready. If it is a clear night, he waits. But if he thinks it is going to rain, he loads the bullock carts and sends them to Kamalapur. It takes about six hours to get here. And if there is any rain, the top layers get soaked. But I don’t reject that cotton. I buy it but let it lie in the yard for a few days in the hot sun and then have it weighed. By that time, the cotton will be bone dry. The merchant pleads with me that I am robbing him and I tell him that it is a just punishment for his sins for trying to palm off water as cotton. Then the horse trading begins and after a lot of haggling, we arrive at about the right weight. It is really very simple”.

One day, when I was walking round the spinning department of the Blue Chimney Mills, I saw a worker from my village whom I had recommended to Durgabai Mills, a newly started concern, which I knew was then on strike. So, I asked him how he managed to get a job in this mill which I knew was not recruiting any workers.

Soon, the truth was out. Durgabai Mills was a small unit employing only about three hundred workers. Since they were out of work and not getting any wages, there was a large scale racket in borrowing the admission tickets of the Blue Chimney Mills workers who were absent and get work there. On pay day, the worker who had lent his ticket paid the wages due to the Durgabai Mills worker for the number of days he had worked and everyone was happy. He told me that on an average, at least on hundred and fifty workers of the mill on strike were employed here every day. The supervisors of the Blue Chimney Mills and connived at this but the manager was blissfully ignorant of what was going on.

So I went in to Jim’s office and asked him, “Jim, have you checked your absenteeism figures lately?”

“No, but it is usually around fifteen percent”. He looked at me curiously. “Why do you ask?”

“You will be happy to know that it has come down quite sharply during the last one month”.

“How do you make that out?”

“Just check them”, I said laconically.

He did as I had asked him to do and was soon back. His face was redder than ever and he was perspiring profusely.

“You know, it is amazing!” he cried. “Until last month, the absenteeism was normal, like I said, fluctuating between thirteen and seventeen percent. But during the last one month, it has been only about three and half percent. I can’t believe it!”

I gave a quizzical smile.

“You know something that I don’t”, he said seriously. “Come on and tell me about it”.

“Why don’t you ask your supervisors for an explanation?”

“Don’t worry, I will! And when I get to the bottom of it, I will skin them all alive!” he departed.

But when he did eventually find out the truth, his remarks to me were more in sorrow than in anger. “I have been in this country for more than twenty five years and I am damned if I understand it. I feel I am still gropping in the dark. It looks as if the Indians are having one hell of a leg-pull on all Englishmen. I shall never understand this blasted country”.

“Don’t you think that the British Empire itself is one hell of a joke?” I asked.

“Perhaps you are right. I think it is time we all went home before we make absolute fools of ourselves”.

In spite of the exploitation of India by the British, I had always thought of Englishmen in India as honest and incorruptible, if somewhat arrogant. But Jim said, “Don’t you believe it. There have been black sheep among us just as there have been among you”.

“We call them white sheep”, I quipped.

But Jim was very serious. “My predecessor in this mill was a classic example”.

“Really?”

So, Jim told me the story.

“Old Vickers was a very unhappy man. When he came to India at the beginning of the century, he was hoping to lord it over the natives. But he could not join the club because he was working for an Indian company and he could not make friends with the Indians, because there were no equals. His boss was superior and the others were far too ‘low’ for him to mix with. In any case, he had nothing in common with them. He could not discuss with them football pools or the music hall jokes or the gossip in the Sunday papers from England. He had nowhere to go in the evenings and his wife felt the loneliness even more. To be excluded by her own kind was something she could not bear. After all, she had her self-respect and independence to which she attached great importance.

It must be realized that textiles was the oldest as well as the largest industry in India. Almost all the mills were owned by Indians and consequently a large number of Englishmen working in textiles were subject to this indignity and inconvenience. But Jim continued, “The wealthy Indians did not bother with them and the not so wealthy ones were only interested in taking advantage of them in various ways. Mrs. Vickers left him after a year and a half, not even waiting for the first leave. It only added a little gossip in the Kamalapur Club and then she was forgotten. So, poor Vickers was on his own; the bottle was his only companion and he soon went to seed. But soon after I joined as his assistant, the portals of the club were open to us. What with Gandhi and the Congress, it was felt that all white people should stick together. But as far as Bert was concerned, it was too late. He did join the club, but after a few months was politely told by the secretary not to come again since many of the ladies had objected to his behavior”.

“But all this has nothing to do with his honesty”, I said.

“I am coming to that, “Jim liked to tell his stories in his own way. “He got into the clutches of some merchants who were taking him for a ride. They paid him a commission on the goods he purchased and then threatened to tell his boss about it unless he gave them a better price and also bought far more things than the mill actually needed. Once he bought one thousand gross bobbins – enough to last this mill for ten years. But a rival merchant wrote an anonymous letter to Mr.Raj. Bert got wind of it somehow, came in one night and had all the bobbins chucked into the boiler fire, ‘to keep the steam up’, he said later.

But of course such a thing could not be kept a secret for long and Mr.Raj asked him to leave. “I didn’t mind him buying the bobbins, and taking a commission on the deal. After all such things have been part of the Indian tradition also”, he said later. “But burning them in the boiler fire was inexcusable. It was a sheer waste of money”.

“What happened afterwards? Did he return to England?”

“No. He finished a whole bottle of whiskey the night he was sent out, left a suicide note, got into his car and drove straight into a tamarind tree at sixty miles per hour”.

“It is not so much a case of dishonesty as a simple family tragedy that led to wrong doing,” I commented.

Jim was silent for a while puffing at his pipe. Old memories must have come back to him and he was perhaps thinking nostalgically of the past. But what he said somewhat surprised me. “It is strange”, he mused. “You think the average Englishman is honest, but the Empire is wrong. I think exactly the opposite. If individual Englishmen had been decent to Indians, we wouldn’t be losing the Empire”.

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Thousands of Britishers have worked in the Indian textile industry since the first mill was set up in Bombay in the year 1854. Most of them were honest and hard-working Northern who got on well with Indians and resented the snobiah attitude of the sahibs. And they contributed a lot to the growth of the Indian textile industry – particularly in the early years. Their life was perhaps a dull routine with periodic home leaves adding a bright touch to their monotonous lives. But it was occasionally enlivened by a dash of eccentricity exhibited by one of their class which was often quite out of character. The British contribution to the textile industry will not be complete without the story of Eric Henderson.

Mr. Henderson was the manager of Kamalapur Spinning and Weaving Mills Ltd., the only British owned mill in Kamalapur. He had worked there a since the mill was started in 1928 and his dear wife had stood by him through thick and thin during all those long years and put up with the heat of the central Indian plains. They used to visit the Kamalapur club frequently and were known as a dull but friendly couple and no one expected them to do anything adventurous or unorthodox.

In the year 1948, Mr. Henderson retired at the age of fifty five and decided to retire to England. His wife returned first to get a house and get things ready to settle down in one of the southern countries. Meanwhile, Mr. Henderson lived in the Kamalapur club and waited to complete the formalities of his provident fund and other retirement benefits and have them transferred to England after getting the permission of the Reserve Bank of India. During this period of almost six months, he used to visit the home of a widow with a daughter by the name of Mrs. Denton. Exactly a fortnight before he was due to leave for England it was discovered that both the daughter Eileen by name – and Eric Henderson were missing. Mrs. Denton did not know what to do. As was usual on such occasions, the local British community came to her help. The superintendent of police – who was still British – was contacted and he had discreet enquiries made. Then it turned out that Mr. Henderson had become a Muslim, took the name of Salim Henderson, took Eileen as his second wife and was living in a small hotel in Kamalapur! There was nothing either the police or Mrs. Denton could do, since Eileen was over the age of consent and she did not want to return to her mother. In due course, Mr. Henderson departed to England with his brand new wife and no one had heard of them since. How did they get on? How was he placed financially? What happened to his first wife? These were the questions that agitated the Kamalapur club members as well as those who knew Eric Henderson and Mrs. Denton. But there were no answers forthcoming since his erstwhile employers kept their mouths shut. And all that the mother would say was, “Yes, I encouraged Eric. Since he was childless, I thought he might adopt my daughter!”

It was this occasional dash of eccentricity that saved British social life in India from its monotony and drabness.

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With the boom in textiles, a number of new mills were coming up in Kamalapur and the old ones were also expanding. No textile machinery was being made within the country as yet. Therefore, Kamalapur was a happy hunting ground for textile machinery salesmen of many countries, particularly Great Britain, Japan and Switzerland. Of them, the representatives of the United Kingdom manufacturers were the most prominent in the late forties and early fifties. The fact that most mills were equipped with British machinery was in their favour in the beginning. Because of my recent stay in that country, many of them were known to me or had introductions from mutual friends. Consequently, I was usually the first person on whom they used to call.

I remember one day in 1949, and Englishman walked into my office and because I happened to be in my dhoti and upper cloth, he walked out again and came back a minute later. We chatted for a while about conditions in the industry and about delivery of machinery. Then I asked him, “Where do you come from Mr.Taylor?”

“From very near Manchester”, he replied.

“I know that from your accent. But which part of Manchester?”

“You wouldn’t know. It is a small place called Gatley”.

"Number one bus?"

That really shook him. The bus that went from the centre of Manchester to Gatley was number one.

"And I really went out and asked your secretary if you spoke English!"

On another occasion, the managing director of a machinery manufacturing company in Great Britain was giving a party in the local hotel and I was invited to it. But Bill Hanton, managing director of Kamalapur Spinning and Weaving mills reminded his host about the strict prohibition laws in Kamalapur. "You have invited Mr.Sreenivasan to the party but you have also invited the deputy inspector general of police. It might be a bit embarrassing for both of them".

"I will soon fix it", said our host and telephoned the police officer. "Look here Jack, I have invited an Indian friend of mine to the party and if you object to his drinking, then you are not coming to the party".

This kind of free and easy social mingling was not possible, particularly with representatives from Japan. Apart from the language difficulty, their methods of negotiation were also somewhat different. They were usually prolonged and tedious, but after a little while, Kamalapur industrialists got on well with them. In spite of the initial advantage that the British enjoyed, the Japanese were able to sell more machines. The British never really got a foothold in Indian market after the war. With the increasing production of indigenous machinery, most of them wound up their offices by about 1960.

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My next professional contact with the British in the textile industry was with William Hanton. He was the managing director of the Kamalapur Spinning and Weaving mills where Eric Henderson had been employed.

After the dispute between Mr.Raj and Mr.Prasad in 1940 about the distribution of Government orders, the mill owners' association of Kamalapur had become more or less dormant. With the entry of Japan into the war the demand for cloth went up phenomenally and the mills were making unprecedented profits strikes and lock-outs had been banned and the leaders of unions which opposed the war effort in any way were all in jail. Consequently, the association had become more or less dormant and except for a clerk who had to go round collecting subscription in order to pay his own salary, there was practically no activity. It was Mr.Kumar the president who really kept it going. Even the annual general meetings and the election of office bearers was done by getting signatures in the minutes' book.

But with the coming of independence in 1947 and the revival of aggressive activity by the trade unions, the Kamalapur textile mills faced a number of problems and the association became active again. As a young hopeful, freshly returned from England, I used to participate actively in the meetings of the association. Bill Hanton also attended its meetings very regularly. That was how I met him.

Bill was a very different person from Jimmy Hargreaves. Thin, pale and tall with an intellectual face, he had a pronounced upper class accent and treated everyone else in a somewhat patronizing manner. After we had known each other for some time, we became friends and used to meet socially in the evenings. Our wives too got on well together. But one day, he asked me quite seriously, “Tell me K.S., you are clever and intelligent and well read, but how is it you have never managed to drop your accent?”

“Why the hell should I?” I retorted with some annoyance.

“A good accent as you know is a passport to higher positions in business as well as in social life in England”.

“I am not ashamed of my accent Bill. It is clear and easily understood by most people both in India and in England. In fact, people in England used to say that I spoke as if I was reading it out of a book”. I replied and then added, “By the way, how did you manage to cultivate yours?” For I could hear an occasional cockney sound making its presence felt in his well modulated voice.

Needless to say, the subject was closed. Bill probably realized he had made a mistake and I felt that his attitude towards my accent gave a clue to his entire character.

In the meetings of the MOAK (Mill Owners Association of Kamalapur) Bill was always constructive and helpful, but would never take the lead or initiative in anything. Among the business community, there was still a lot of regard and respect for the British and so, it was decided at one time that the chairmanship of the association should be offered to him. But his reply was definite. “We British are on our way out. You people should run the show now, not only in New Delhi but also in Kamalapur”.

After his remarks about my accent, a little reserve had developed between me and Bill, but he came to me one day and apologised for his comments. “I suppose we British are particularly class conscious. And things like accent and which school you had been to are matters of great importance. Thinking along those lines becomes a matter of habit even when you are out of England. But I had no business to make those remarks and I apologise”, he said.

After that, we became quite friendly. He was the only ‘intellectual’ among my friends in Kamalapur. I missed the passionate discussions about art, literature and social problems which I used to have in England with my friends. There were some professors from the local college whom I used to meet occasionally for discussions, but their approach to problems and ideas were essentially conservative and Victorian. But with Bill, I could talk about serious things in a light hearted manner or with cynicism, a streak that we both had. We knew the same pubs in London, read the same books and had a lot in common.

Soon, he started discussing his problems with me. Professionally, he was a very lonely man. His was only British owned textile mill in Kamalapur. His board of directors were in England; they did not understand the realities of the situation in India, but Bill was responsible to them. He could not discuss his problems with the other managements in Kamalapur. There was a vast social distance that separated

them. But having been educated in England and having an English wife, he felt he could talk to me in confidence.

One of the major problems about which he talked to me was the rationalization of workers in his mill. With the introduction of minimum wages to all workers in 1946, the wage bill of most mills had increased very considerably since there had been indiscriminate recruitment of workers in the past. This was not so bad in Kamalapur Spinning and Weaving mills. Being a foreign management, they were not subject to local pressures. But nevertheless, they too had excess workers. But when all the other mills retrenched their workers and there was a major strike, the Kamalapur Spinning Mills did not follow suit. This led to propaganda by the trade unions that even the British management had not resorted to retrenchment. The Indian managements resented this and wanted Bill Hanton to join them, but Bill's reply was that their recruitment in the past had not been as indiscriminate and therefore, retrenchment was not an urgent matter.

But in private Bill told me the real reason for his unpopular stand. "You see, India is now independent and in the eyes of the Indians, British managements are associated with British rule and British Imperialism. Indian managements can according to their interests and get away with it. But a foreign management – particularly British – has to be very careful. If I take any action, it will not be treated as any other labour dispute. It would be represented both to the Government and to the public as high handedness of a foreign management, as a remnant of British Imperialism in fact. Therefore, I have to be most careful".

"What you say might be correct if you are taking any action on your own", I replied. "But when you are only joining all the Indian managements, how can they single you out for penalization?"

"You know there has been a demand from some of the left wing groups that all British interests should be nationalized. It is the sort of pressure for which Nehru might easily give in. Anyhow, that is the decision from London. They have also told me to postpone modernization though the mill badly needs it. They want me to wait and see what will happen to British interests in the next two or three years before evolving a new policy".

But with the increasing burden of wages, the Kamalapur Spinning and Weaving mills could not carry on for long, particularly after all the other mills had succeeded in reducing the number of their workers to a reasonable level. But rather than take unilateral action and face a strike and adverse propaganda, Bill decided to apply to the industrial tribunal for permission to reduce the number of workers. The dispute took a tortuous course with statements and counter statements, adjournments for various reasons, recording of evidence and so on. It took two years before a decision was given in favour of the mills.

Apart from the fact that the mills had a legitimate case (because all other mills in Kamalapur had already reduced the number of workers), what clinched the issue was the evidence of the manager of the mill, Mr. Ralph Barnet. He had a commanding personality, a booming voice and a highly dramatic way of presenting things – like a Shakespearian actor playing Hamlet – in the witness box. He had a way of making even common opinions sound profound.

“Our machines are not ‘old’ my lord”, he exclaimed throwing his arms out in a gesture of protestation. “They are mature perhaps, and certainly well preserved, like you my lord.

“No reference to personalities Mr.Barnet”, admonished the judge, though one could see that he was pleased with himself.

“Pardon me, my lord”, Ralph Barnet bowed deeply. “I have been carried away by the dignity of this court. “But my lord, I wish to assure you that we look after our machines like new born babies. We do preventive maintenance, periodic over-hauling, just like babies receiving vaccination and inoculation so that they will remain healthy. And for tonics, we provide plenty of spare parts, oil and paint so that they are almost the same as new machines. Now, you tell me my lord, what more can we do?”

The judge obviously could not tell him what more he should do, but he was certainly very impressed by Ralph Barnet’s testimony and flattered at being addressed as ‘My Lord’ by an Englishman. The British had been the masters until as recently as three years ago. As he left the stand, the judge thanked him for having clarified the issue with the example of new born babies, but in the interests of accuracy, he added. “By the way Mr.Barnet, I am not entitled t be addressed as ‘My Lord’. That is used for high court judges only. To address me as ‘Your Honour’ would be appropriate”.

“Thank you for you clarification my lord”, Ralph made a deep bow and walked out of the stand with a benign smile for everybody.

So, the Kamalapur Mills and Bill Hanton got what they wanted. The only trouble was, two years later, the mill pleaded – before the same court as it happened – their inability to pay as much bonus as the workers demanded because money was required for modernization. (By then, the board of directors in England was convinced that the Indian Government was not going to nationalize British capital in India and had told Bill Hanton to go ahead with modernization). The union quoted the evidence of the mill manager in the rationalization dispute in which he had claimed, ‘we look after our machines like new born babies’. If that were so, the union contended that the machines would not need replacement.

So, the judge posed the question to the management, “How do you reconcile your own manager’s sworn statement with your present request that you need a lot of money for modernization?”

But Ralph Barnet told his boss, “Put me on the stand again Mr.Hanton and I will convince the old geezer”.

So, Barnet was put on the witness stand again and the union leaders were hoping for a lot of fun tearing his evidence to pieces.

So, the unflappable Ralph Barnet told the court, “Your honour, I must first of all apologise to you for using the wrong form of address when I was here the last time”.

The judge was more careful this time. He drew the attention of the witness to the apparent contradiction in the stand of the management and asked him if he could explain it.

“Your honour, I was under oath when I gave evidence last time and every word I said then was the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. We do look after our machines like new born babies; that is why the workers have no difficulty in running them. If you had a vintage car, say a fifty year old Rolls-Royce or even a T model ford, the driver will have no difficulty in driving it, if it was well maintained. It will be a pleasure to drive and a joy to ride. But your honour!” he spread his hands wide, looked forsaken and exclaimed, “If you wanted to go to Delhi on business, you wouldn’t go in that car, would you? Or should you? It may let you down at any moment. And it won’t travel at more than thirty miles per hour”. He paused.

Inspite of himself, the judge was impressed a second time. The example of the T model Ford he felt made things very clear and lucid, particularly as he himself had a lot of trouble with his car that was more than ten years old.

In his cross examination, the lawyer for the trade union referred to the Lancashire textile industry.

“Look at it! Just look at it!” Barnet exclaimed in a gesture of utter despair. “In Lancashire, all but a few of the modern mills have closed down. Heaven forbid that such a fate should ever befall the textile industry of Kamalapur”. Then he turned to the judge. “That is exactly our problem you honour. Our machines are good, but old like those in Lancashire. And they are slow when compared to the modern post-war machines. In a world of cut-throat competition, unless we have such machines, we cannot survive; we cannot pay dividends to our shareholders. And a time may come when we may not be able to pay wages to our workers! Do you wand such a situation to develop in Kamalapur? Personally, I love the workers of Kamalapur too much to wish them such a fate!”

The mills won their case.

Ralph Barnet soon retired and settled down in England, as the proud owner of a pub in Sussex. There, over large glasses of beer, he used to tell his customers, his experience of India, not how he was successful as the manager of a mill, but what a great witness he made in a court of law.

In the year 1960, the Kamalapur Spinning and Weaving Mills was purchased by Mr.Ashok Kumar and Bill Hanton retired. With his retirement, the British connection with the Kamalapur textile industry came to an end.

CHAPTER FOUR

To Err is Human

Machines and materials obey the laws of physical sciences. Their properties, their response to climatic changes, their behavior under stress, can all be accurately measures and often predicted, since the variations are often small and constant. If anything goes wrong with a machine, the fault can be easily located and set right. If one hundred looms of indentical specifications are working under one roof, their production of cloth will be that of one loom multiplied by hundred.

But human beings are not like that. Their behavior is often unpredictable. What a persons! Reaction will be to a given situation is difficult to forecast. And different persons' reactions to the same situation need not be the same. If that were so with regard to individuals, it is even more so with regard to a group of people. If one hundred people are working under one roof, their production will not be that of one man multiplied by a hundred. It will be often less. And occasionally it might be more. Groups tend to develop their own values and norms of behavior, their own sense of right and wrong. That is why management of people is fascinating and frustrating at the same time.

To illustrate this point by an example, if there are two people involved in a relationship, say wife and husband, Mr. and Mrs. A, there is only one relationship. If however Mr. A were unfortunate enough to have two wives, then there are three relationships, between Mr. A and Mrs.A1, between Mr. A and Mrs.A2 and last but not the least, between Mrs.A1 and Mrs.A2. Similarly, if there were four sides of a square and the two diagonals. It follows therefore that as the number of people involved increases in numerical proportion, the number of relationships increases at a much faster rate. It also means that the number of conflicts between people is also likely to increase in the same way unless there is identity of views and a common understanding.

Apart from the complexity of human relationships in industrial undertakings, there is also the burden of tradition in the textile industry. Apart from its antiquity and long history, the process of converting natural fibres into fabrics has not fundamentally altered in the last seven thousand years or so. First, the fibres have to be cleaned and all foreign matter eliminated. At the same time, the entanglements between the fibres have to be removed, the fibres made parallel and converted to a thread form. The thread has to be extended to the required fineness and twist inserted in order to give the yarn strength and stability. Then, the yarn has to be interlaced in some way in order to produce a fabric. If two sets of yarns are interlaced at right angles to each other, it is weaving; if they are in the form of loops, one row of loops hanging form the previous one, it is knitting. Finally, the fabrics may be finished in some form, say dyed or printed, in order to make them distinctive and decorative.

It is important to remember that as far as the natural fibre industry is concerned, these basic processes have not changed from the earliest times. All that industrial revolution has achieved is to accelerate these processes, make them more productive and improve them qualitatively. In other industries such as chemicals, every new product needs a new process to be designed and perfected and new machines to be built. But in textiles, it is merely a refinement of the same old process.

Consequently, textile industry is highly tradition bound. New ideas are more difficult to introduce. People always know 'better' because they have done it for years and years in a particular way and they do not want to change that way.

Another reason for this state of affairs is that clothing has been a permanent – almost eternal – requirement of people, like food. Bullock carts and horse drawn vehicles have given place to motor cars, cycles, trains and aeroplanes. Pigeon post has been replaced by telegrams, telephones and telex. But clothes have not given place to anything else – except other clothes. The threat posed to natural fibres from synthetics has been successfully assimilated through blends. The threat from substitutes like paper has not been a very major one. Consequently, there is a sense of permanence in the textile industry while other, more modern, industries are in a constant state of change.

The result of all this is that even when new ideas are introduced into the textile industry, they are done more as rites and ceremonies or for the sake of appearance than as a result of a deep-felt economic or technological need. It is rather like a friend of mine who made a lot of money in business and wanted to save his wife, the drudgery of the kitchen. He did not want her to struggle with a charcoal fire with smoke getting in her eyes. So, he bought her an electric cooker with all kinds of automatic controls. But the lady was highly traditional and old fashioned and preferred the open fire to which she was accustomed than the new-fangled gadget of which she was rather frightened. But she was nevertheless happy that her husband had shown her such consideration and she wanted everyone to know about it. So, instead of throwing away the cooker, she installed it in a prominent corner of the dining room with a satin cover on top so that every visitor could see it and admire it as an irrefutable evidence of her husband's affection for her. Some textile mills often modernized their equipment rather like my friend's wife, for exhibition rather than for economy or efficiency.

Slow horses and fast women were supposed to be responsible for the liquidation of many individual fortunes in an earlier age. But fast machines and slow men have been responsible for the liquidation of many corporate fortunes, particularly in the textile industry.

Recently, in the course of a survey of the handloom industry in a particular district, we came across a group of weavers who were producing what are known as 'upper cloths'. Upper cloths are long folded pieces of fabric worn on the upper part of the body in many parts of India. They are not functional but are usually a sign of dignity and respect. With changes in dress habits during the last forty years, people have gradually given up wearing these cloths. At present, they are worn only on ceremonial occasions such as weddings. Consequently, this group of weavers have been badly hit and find it extremely difficult to market their product.

But the skills involved in making upper cloths are no different to those for manufacturing saris. Therefore, it was suggested to them that they should switch over to saris. The weavers were aghast at the idea.

"What! Manufacture women's cloths!" They cried. "Sir, we have made upper cloths in the past for the coronation of princes and for their weddings. Zamindars have been to us to give special orders.

Our upper cloths have adorned the breasts of heroes in ancient times! And now you want us to make cloths for women? What has the world come to?"

Another weaver was more subdued, but more fatalistic. "Sir, our grand fathers made upper cloths and died; our fathers made upper cloths and died. We too will make upper cloths and die".

Inability to change according to economic compulsions would certainly lead to economic liquidation.

Another factor that has been responsible for the conservatism in the textile industry is family management. Textile production gave birth to the industrial revolution. It was the first industry to be mechanized and adopt a factory system of production. Since then, every country that wanted to industrialise itself started textile mills in the first place because clothing was next in importance to food. Further, the technology of textiles was simple, cotton was available in most tropical or semi-tropical countries, or could be easily imported. Consequently, enterprising individuals – with money, initiative and ability to take risks, like Mr.Raj and Mr.Prasad – established textile mills. They did not know anything about technology or markets or organization, but they had talent and enterprise and a little of the gamblers' spirit. Such men were the pioneers of industrialization in many countries.

But once the pioneers are gone, sons, nephews or other relations inherit and manage the business. In newer industries which came later, there is greater professionalization, but in textiles it has mostly been family managed, particularly in India where the joint family system is prevalent.

While all the factors mentioned above were applicable to the Kamalapur textile industry, family management was particularly so. Mr. Raj and Mr.Prasad were pioneers. But Raghava Raj was more interested in politics than in business. Lakshman Prasad on the other hand seemed more intent on spending the money his father so carefully accumulated. His interests were racing and fast cars. Only Mr. Kumar's two sons – Vasant and Dinesh – had gone to the United States, one to study electronics and the other, to specialize in Management. On the other hand there were many young men with ability as well as good qualifications working in mills. But they never reached the decision the decision making levels because the board room was reserved for the 'owners' and their relations. As this history progresses, it will be seen what effect the family management had on the fortunes of companies.

Consequently, family management has all the weaknesses and strengths of the joint family. The relationships within the family are reflected in the organization and vice-versa. If there is a high degree of cohesion among the family members and they all pull together, then the management is strong, united and efficient. But if there are dissentions within the family, then the management is weak with no unified policies. Even the staff members often range themselves on the basis of their loyalties and the entire organization is split from top to bottom. If the joint family breaks up, or if there are disputes over succession, or if one member of the family by virtue of his position, ability or initiative tries to get ahead of the other members, again there is trouble. Differences of opinions are not brought out into the open because family loyalty and solidarity are considered more important than a difference of opinion over business. But these differences go on building up over a period of years until one day there is a major conflict.

But family management inevitably means hereditary management, since the son or nephew usually succeeds the father. But older members do not retire at the age of sixty or sixty five and hand over power to the younger members. Even when they do, they still remain as advisors and take all the major decisions. It means that the younger members – who are usually better educated, have greater dynamism have no opportunity to exercise power until they themselves are old.

All this is not to say that family management is necessarily bad. The best type of family managed organizations are very efficient because of the close involvement of the family members in the business. To run the business well is for them a matter of family honour and the reputation of the business is synonymous with their personal reputations. A professional executive – however conscientious he might be – could never be so closely involved in his job.

Professional management tends to be impersonal, not highly involved in the fortunes of the business, nor with the area where the industry is located. They tend to follow the rules and are reluctant to take risky decisions. At least in one case, the head office of a company was shifted to a different town because the chief executive was a keen golfer and the then head quarters had no golf course in the area.

But on the whole, while family management had given stability to the industry in the early stages, it is also one of the reasons for the burden of tradition in the textile industry.

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I was working in a British textile laboratory during the Second World War after completing my education at the university. In those days there was a complete unity of objective between managements and workers in all British factories. Their first priority was to defeat Hitler and they ware willing to sacrifice anything towards that end. So, when a production committee consisting of equal number of workers' and management representatives was set up in the factory to eliminate snags and bottlenecks in production, one would have imagined it would have worked successfully. It did, eventually, but the first two meeting were almost total disasters.

I attended the first meeting somewhat as a neutral observer. In order to make the meeting more informal and meaningful, the research director – who was the chairman – had ordered tea to be served as soon as everyone was assembled.

As the waitress brought the tea and placed bowls of sugar in the centre of the table, people helped themselves to sugar discussing sugar rationing. But while the management representatives stirred the tea with the spoons provided, the workers' representatives took the pencils from behind their ears and stirred their tea with them, as they would have done in the departments. There was silence for a few seconds as the full import of their action sunk in and the workers realized their social faux paux. After that, the conversation became somewhat artificial and no meaningful decisions were arrived at the meeting.

Before the second meeting was called, in order to put the workers' representatives at their ease, the managing director had suggested that all management people should provide themselves with

some decent pencils to stir their tea. As soon as tea was served, we had the unusual sight of management representatives diligently and consciously stirring their tea with newly sharpened pencils while the workers, with equal deliberation, were stirring it with their spoons!

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Recently, I was driving along a road near Kamalapur and had to stop because the level crossing was closed. Some work people were digging the road and one said to the other, pointing to my car, "There is a blood-sucking capitalist for you!"

I got out of the car and went and spoke to the worker. "Look here comrade, I don't know why you called me a blood-sucking capitalist. I work just as hard as you do, I draw a salary at the end of the month and sometimes, even work on Sundays. Not only do I not get any overtime, but I don't get anything at all for working on Sundays".

"But if you are not a capitalist, how can you afford a car like that?" the worker asked me.

I laughed and replied, "Oh, I won it in the Punjab lottery!"

"Really? We have been buying lottery tickets too, but we haven't won anything so far", confessed the worker. "Then I suppose you are alright", he said and we parted friends.

That hard earned wealth should be frowned upon as blood-sucking capitalism while a windfall like winning a lottery should be taken as something normal, is perhaps a reflection of the times as well as a total lack of logic in human emotions. Perhaps that is why it is so unpredictable.

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While I was working as a management trainee in the Blue Chimney Mills, I came across a good example of the vagaries of human nature. Krishnan was a somewhat eccentric worker with a highly developed sense of right and wrong, fully conscious of his own importance in the scheme of things. Consequently, he was often at loggerheads not only with his supervisors in the department, but equally often with his trade union leaders. One day, he came to the office and complained that he had been paid ten rupees less than he should have been. The wages clerk checked the accounts and replied there was no mistake. But Krishnan was not satisfied. He went to the welfare officer and made an official complaint. The officer took up the matter with the accounts department, made a thorough study of Krishnan's production records for the month, verified the calculations and found no mistake.

But Krishnan was persistent if nothing else. The more the accounts people insisted there was no mistake, the more convinced Krishnan was that they were wrong. From his point of view, instead of being merely fools or idiots who did not know the first thing about calculating wages, they had now become rogues and villains who were desperately trying to hide their mistakes in a cloak of sanctimonious virtue. So, he went to his union secretary who wrote a letter to the management pointing out the gross carelessness and negligence of the accounts department of the mills in robbing the worker of his hard-earned money.

It was at this point that I came into the picture. I wanted to invite a representative of the union to come and inspect the books and satisfy himself about the correctness of the wage calculation. But I learnt that it was against company policy to show any books to the union. There was in fact a case pending before the supreme court on this very issue. So, I became a casual observer again.

In the course of the two weeks since Krishnan's first complaint, there had come a subtle change in the character of the problem. From being a minor grievance, it was slowly turning into a major dispute. Secondly, it was no longer a matter of ten rupees in the wage packet of a single worker. It was a matter of prestige, of honesty and integrity of Krishnan versus the accounts department of the mills and consequently of the mill itself.

Correspondence proceeded along more and more vitriolic lines, the union accusing the management returning the compliment by accusing the union of irresponsibility and of trying to create disaffection among the workers in order to strengthen their position in the mills. There was go-slow, drop in production and general indiscipline inside the departments, particularly the one where Krishnan worked. The matter was referred to the Government conciliation officer without any result. Ultimately, the union gave a strike notice that unless Krishnan was paid ten rupees on or before such and such a date, the workers of the mill would go on an indefinite strike. In order not to make it appear somewhat frivolous, a number of other long standing demands were also added. The management replied that the union will be solely responsible for any stoppage of work and the resultant consequences.

Conciliation proceedings were now taken up at a higher level. The minister of labour who was a native of Kamalapur and naturally had an interest in solving the dispute, called the parties together for a settlement. He advised the unions to drop all their other demands and withdraw the strike notice and pressed Mr. Raj to pay the paltry sum of ten rupees and settle the dispute rather than face closure at a time when the mill was making good profits. Mr.Raj saw the wisdom of the procedure. The question was whether the strike notice should be withdrawn first or the ten rupees should be offered first. Neither party wanted to appear they were weak and had surrendered. A face saving formula was deviced that they should both be done simultaneously.

Finally, the day before the strike was due to commence, the Board of directors of the Blue Chimney Mills met and passed the following resolution.

"Without in any way admitting any liability whatsoever, or negligence on the part of the accounts department, and in deference to the minister's wishes and a gesture of good-will and to preserve industrial peace in the mills, it is resolved to make an ex-gratia payment of rupees ten to the worker Krishnan".

The strike notice was withdrawn on the same day and at the same time as the resolution was passed. The next day, Krishnan was called to the office and offered ten rupees. But Krishnan threw the ten rupee note back into the cashier's face. "Keep your miserable ten rupees!" he shouted. "I would rather keep my grievance".

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One of the first problems I had to tackle as the chief executive of the family mill had nothing to do with textiles. Our work force consisted of about five hundred Hindu workers, one hundred untouchable workers and about fifty workers who were Christian but were untouchables before conversion. Generally speaking, the Hindu workers were more militant in union affairs while the untouchables and the Christians kept out of active participation as far as possible. Because of the social differences between these groups, there were three lots of tumblers in the mill canteen for serving tea – five hundred Hindu tumblers, one hundred untouchable tumblers and fifty Christian tumblers. They were washed and kept separately and never mixed.

But with all the talk of freedom and equality in the wake of political independence, there was an air of excitement everywhere and the untouchables naturally felt that this distinction in the matter of separate tumblers for tea was derogatory for their self-respect. There was some talk that it should disappear, but without a general consensus among the three groups I felt it would not be advisable to have them amalgamated. After all, I said to myself, I was there to run the mill without any trouble; I was not a social reformer, though I sympathized with the feelings of the untouchable workers. But one enterprising untouchable worker precipitated the matter by snatching a 'Hindu' tumbler from the hands of the tea vendor and drinking out of it. Someone else tried to prevent him from doing so, there was a scuffle, blows were exchanged and the situation was restored by the intervention of the night supervisor who promised to report everything to the management in the morning and ensure that 'justice' was done for all concerned and that the guilty would be punished!

So, long reports were waiting on my desk the next morning, giving various versions of the incident, each side accusing the other in violent and emotional terms and threatening dire consequences if 'justice' was not done! In the mill itself, there was an air of expectation, an uneasy calm that might lead to a stoppage of work at the slightest provocation. Though the untouchables and the Christians who had joined them later were in a minority, they too could upset the work schedule if they were displeased.

After learning the facts from the night supervisor who had stayed on to brief me, I sent for the worker who was the cause of all the trouble. He was agitated and nervous and probable felt he might be given some punishment. He also knew that in any show of strength, his community would come off badly because they were in a minority. He also felt he couldn't rely on the Christians who also considered themselves superior because they were 'converts' though they claimed equality with the Hindus. After the bravado of the previous night, he came into the office in a chastened mood.

"What have you got to say for yourself?" I asked him.

"I have not broken any rules of the factory sir", he replied. "It does not stay in the standing orders that there should be separate tumblers for the different communities. We talk of equality and yet, we are forced to drink out of separate tumblers. We are tired of it and we want to put a stop to it. We tried to discuss it with the caste Hindus, but they won't agree. And we are helpless because we are in a minority. I realize that now".

Obviously, he knew the rules and I felt sorry for him. In his place, I might have done the same thing and told him so. He was glad to hear me say so and was immediately on my side. But I also told him, “The unwritten rules accepted by society are sometimes more important than the rules that are written down. And this custom about tumblers has been in existence since this mill was started and no one has protested before. Further, while I have no objection to drinking out of a tumbler you have used, I am not here to bring about social reform; I have to run a factory. And the fact is, your action has resulted in a disturbance of the peace inside the department. So, you see my difficulty?”

“Yes sir”, he readily agreed.

“On the other hand, I have every sympathy for your feelings”. This made him smile. “Therefore, I don’t want to punish you though the others would expect me to do so. If you take leave for a week until tempers cool down, it won’t be a bad idea”.

“Yes sir; thank you sir”.

Then I approached the problem from another angle. “Why don’t you complain to your union about this distinction and ask them to set it right?”

“You know them sir; they are only interested in politics and in getting our votes. They won’t listen to me”.

“They may not listen to you if you go to them on your own. But if all the untouchable and Christian workers were to go to them in a body and demand equality, then they will listen. If not, you can threaten to form another union“.

“I could try it sir”, he said.

“You go off now and don’t let me see your face for another week”, I told him.

He must have put his leave to good use for a week later, a meeting was held outside the mill gates. All the big guns of the union turned up to harangue the workers on the need for social equality. The main speaker, Mr. Ram Swaroop otherwise known as ‘Stalin’, put the issue in a very emotional nut shell. “Comrades!” he shouted. “Do we not work on the same soulless machines without any difference of caste or creed? Do we not receive the same miserable wages for our drudgery? Are we not, all of us, oppressed and ill-treated by the same bloated capitalists? And don’t we hope to win a common victory against injustice and oppression? Yes comrades, we are the same in everything, in our misery and slavery, in our back breaking work, in all our sufferings and humiliations!” He paused, then continued. “In everything, except……..in the matter of tumblers. Therefore, should we not all drink out of the same tumblers? Are we going to allow this unscrupulous management to divide and rule us because of our disunity?”

A vote was evidently taken and everyone present voted for abolishing the ‘invidious distinction perpetrated by the management in order to keep the workers divided’. The resolution was forwarded to

me and the separation in tumblers disappeared soon after. No social reform was brought about with greater ease.

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It was in the late fifties that the Government decided to set up a number of spinning mills in the cooperative sector with handloom weavers' cooperative societies as members. Since the Government was investing a lot of money in these mills, it was felt that the selection of machinery should not be left to the individual boards of directors but there should be central purchase committee for this purpose. I was asked to be the chairman of this committee.

There were at that time three major machinery manufacturers in India. One of them wrote to the minister and observed as follows;

Sir,

The chairman of the machinery purchase committee is related to one of the manufacturers of machinery and he is a director of the second company. Since we do not belong in either category, we feel that we will be adversely affected. This is for your kind information and necessary action.

Yours, etc.,

The minister very kindly forwarded the letter to me and asked for my comments. I replied as follows:

Dear Sir,

With reference to the complaint from the machinery manufacturer. I feel that their anxiety is quite justified. Unfortunately, I cannot be related to them since I am already married and I have no children of marriageable age, but they could elect me as a director of their company. Then I would be completely impartial in my decisions with regard to the purchase of machinery for cooperative spinning mills.

Yours sincerely.

I never heard anything further about it afterwards.

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In one of the mills in Kamalapur – it was a co-operative spinning mills established by handloom weavers' cooperative society to procure yarn at concessional prices for the weavers – the board of directors appointed the son-in-law of one of their influential members as office manager of the mill on a salary of rupees two thousand per month. Under the cooperative societies registration act (which applied to this mill), no relative of the board of directors could be employed in any capacity. The chief executive of the mill, who was a young, enthusiastic and somewhat idealistic officer of the Government

pointed out to the board that their decision was infringing one of the important sections of the act and as such, was not right. But the board – consisting of middle aged cynical men of the world who knew all about doing a good turn for each other merely suggested that this objection 'may be noted in the minutes'.

"You might yourself be in need of our help one of these days young man", was that the chairman told the officer after the meeting was over.

The chief executive thereupon wrote to the state Government drawing their attention to the resolution and enquiring what he should do. After three months and a couple of personal visits to the secretariat, a reply was sent to the effect that either the son-in-law should resign or the father-in-law should resign, for the son-in-law had already been installed in his new post on an auspicious day. The letter was placed before the next meeting of the board of directors by the chief executive. The board of directors resolved to record the letter from the Government but to take no further action in the matter.

And the chairman advised the officer concerned, "Look here Mr……., you have drawn the attention of the Government. Now forget it. No one can find fault with you".

But the chief executive was troubled by his conscience. Desperate for a solution, he consulted me at this point. After some discussion and deliberation, a somewhat unusual solution to the problem suggested itself to me. "Look here, there is a simple way out", I remarked. "Ask your office manager to 'divorce' his wife and let them live in 'sin'. Then, the law will be complied with, the father-in-law and the son-in-law will be satisfied and your conscience will be clear. And the story can end with everyone living happily ever after".

I don't think my advice was taken seriously and I did not know what happened afterwards. But the problem did make me wonder the difference methods of finding solutions and decision making by different groups – particularly the management people, civil servants and politicians. For example, if an employee commits a theft, most managers will hold an enquiry and punish the worker – a warning or a fine if it is a first offence, or dismissal in extreme cases. A civil servant is often reluctant to take such a direct and effective action and will therefore report the matter to the police or to the Central Bureau of Investigation and let them deal with it. That way, he protects himself and escapes responsibility for an unpopular decision such as inflicting punishment. By the time the police come to a conclusion and the case is over, he would have been transferred. But when a similar decision has to be taken at the political level, there are a number of options depending on whether the decision make is in the Government or in the opposition.

If you are in Government, it is possible to appoint a tribunal an enquiry committee or in extreme cases, a parliamentary committee. The more serious the problem the longer it will take to find a solution. Whatever is done, it will be a long time before the result is known and by that time, the public would have lost interest in the subject. But if you are in the opposition, it is possible to raise points of order in parliament to draw the attention of the Government to the serious situation prevailing in Kamalapur, to organize a hartal or a bandh, or resort to relay hunger strikes and so on. In fact, the possibilities are endless.

The technology of textiles was very stagnant during the twenties and thirties of this century. While European textile industry in general and the Lancashire textile industry in particular languished for want of orders, there was an expansion of the industry in countries like Japan and India. There was very little research as a result and the machines manufactured in 1919 were not far different from those made in 1939. But at the end of the Second World War, there was a world shortage of textiles; there were expanding markets and competition among textile producing nations. This gave a momentum to technological research and about a decade after the war was over new machines began to come on the market and many Kamalapur mills – established during the twenties and thirties – needed modernization. One of the first in the new generation of machines was a carding engine which was intended to separate the fibres thoroughly and convert them into a thread form.

There were two makes of carding engines available in those days – one from Japan and one from Great Britain. The question was which was better from the point of view of quality, but the Japanese machine was certainly cheaper. Some went in for one and some for the other. But for the Blur Chimney Mills and for Mr.Raj, this proved to be an almost insoluble problem. While the manager who had succeeded Jimmy Hargreaves preferred the British machine, his assistant Mr.Nagaswamy preferred the Japanese machine. Mr.Raj trusted the assistant manager because he had known his father, but he could not over rule his own manager. But Nagaswamy offered that they should conduct an experiment to find out which was better and should buy one from each manufacturer. After knowing the result they could place orders for forty machines for the 'better' machine. The manager could not refuse the offer because it would seem as if he was afraid of subjecting himself to a test.

So, two machines were purchased, installed side by side and 'tests' were conducted. From then on, the whole thing became a matter of prestige as to who was right and who was wrong. And the two gentlemen spent their time torpedoing each others' experiments rather than in completing their own. Most results had to be discarded because each one claimed that something had gone wrong somewhere and the results were not comparable. Using the wrong cotton, or producing different counts of yarn, taking out different levels of waste, getting the materials mixed up before they could be spun into yarn, all these became part of everyday life. The experiments interfered with normal production and time and money was wasted. Weeks stretched into months and still, there was no result. At the end of one year, Mr.Raj lost his patience and sent for me to ask my opinion.

"Any decision would have been better than no decision Mr.Raj", I told him. "As a result of these 'experiments' you have lost one year without modernization; during the past year, the price of machinery has increased by nearly twenty five percent. So, unless you hurry up, you will miss the bus altogether. We are hoping to make carding engines in India and Government may soon ban all imports".

"What about these experiments? Have you gone through their results?" he enquired.

"Yes, nothing conclusive had emerged, which is what one would have expected under the circumstances", I replied. I did not want to say anything against the two men who had been so assiduously trying to dish each other.

"I think your father was very wise, sending you to England to study textiles", said Mr.Raj wistfully. "I missed sending my son. But I am going to send my grand son. Can you get him admission in your old college with your influence?"

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The textile workers of Kamalapur were all first generation workers who had come to their jobs from neighbouring villages. Most of them had got their jobs through personal contact with the managements or through strong recommendation. Though the industrial wages in Kamalapur during the twenties and early thirties were not very high, they were certainly better than agricultural wages and the workers were grateful to their employers for giving them jobs. This was particularly so in background such as Messrs. Raj and Prasad. Most of their workers were the sons or nephews of their tenants and farm workers or from their village. There was a lot of loyalty and affinity between the workers and managements of such mills and the first trade union – The Kamalapur Labour Union (KLU) – established in the late twenties found it extremely difficult to recruit members.

When the union attempted to hold meetings at the mill gates as the workers were going home after their shift, no one stopped to listen to them. Placards were torn down even without the managements' initiative. The managements considered the union leaders as 'rowdies' who attempted to create trouble among the workers and treated them as such. There were a number of occasions when the 'loyal' workers and the union leaders came to blows. The police rounded up the trouble makers and let them off after some time.

Another factor was, the union leaders did not really know the problems of the Kamalapur mill workers. None of them had ever worked in a mill; they did not know anything about textile technology, or event he names of the machines. Their idea of workers' grievances were gathered from a few disgruntles workers who had either been sent out or had to leave for theft or other reasons. Their idea of workers' grievances was also gathered from the works of Marx and such writers about the problems of the working class in nineteenth century Europe. Their speeches were often unrelated to the problems the workers had to face in Kamalapur mills. They had nothing to do with – say – the working conditions, the problems of cotton dust, the problems of safety, etc. They were vague but aggressive and the workers were not particularly impressed by them. The only thing they talked about was the low wages and rapacity of the managements who exploited both the workers and the consumers.

The leader of the union was Mr. Ram Swaroop who was partly an idealist – having been brought up on Marxian ideology – and partly a bit of a goonda, quite capable of using his fists when essential. Both qualifications were necessary in the environment in which he had to operate. He was known as 'Stalin Ram' by his followers. The word 'Stalin' was first used because of his unwavering communistic inclinations but later because of the ruthless manner in which he eliminated all opposition from within the union. But the combination of names – that of the communist pope and the Hindu God – was extremely helpful for him in making himself popular among large section of workers. Slowly, steadily and with determination, he was able to build up a following of hard core trade unionists, as loyal and committed as himself to the cause. He visited workers in their homes, he met their relations to try and

influence them, he was eloquent on the power that they could wield if only all workers joined together and got converts in ones and twos.

I met 'Stalin' only once, soon after the collapse of the general strike in 1948. I found him an impressive and jovial individual with nothing of the bitterness and venom he exhibited in public. He told me how he had once organized the sweepers of Kamalapur Municipality into a union and got them a big increase in wages by threatening to go on strike. After 6 months he went back to find out how they were getting on and were surprised to notice that many of them had taken an extra wife on the strength of the increase in wages.

After years of hard work, he had reached a point when he felt he could launch his first major industrial struggle in the year 1935. His close associate and potential rival Com.Purushotham advised him that the time was not ripe, that the mills were doing badly and would be only too happy to close them because of the Japanese competition if there was a strike. But 'Stalin' would stand for no opposition and declared a strike.

But the workers of the union, indisplined and unused to collective action, quarreled among themselves and when the first month's wages were not paid, they all went back to work. Com.Purushotham who could not stand the dictatorial behavior of his erstwhile colleague and was waiting for an opportunity to break away saw his chance and became the leader of those who wanted to return to work. The Kamalapur Industrial Workers' Union (KIWU) was born.

In course of time, other unions also came into existence. Particularly after independence, every political party felt that it should have an industrial wing to mobilize workers in their favour. But, KLU – which was backed by the left wing parties and KIWU which had affiliations with the ruling party dominated the scene for many years.

At the final meeting between the two leaders when Stalin Ram and Mr.Purushotham reached the parting of the ways, Stalin had shouted at his rival, "We shall not meet again, except as enemies, until we die!"

"We shall not meet again even after death, "Com.Purushotham shouted back. For we will be going to two different places".

At the first public meeting of KLU after KIWU was born, Stalin remarked, "I know we are called KLU. But I can only describe our opponents as clueless".

After such expressions of mutual regard and affection, Com.Purushotham worked hard, encouraged defections from KLU which was not very difficult, and cultivated the ruling party in the state legislature so that within a few years, he was able to threaten the supremacy of KLU in many factories. Each union claimed a larger membership than the other and the total membership of the two organizations was more than all the textile workers of Kamalapur. Their rivalry grew along with their 'swelling' membership until at one point in a conciliation meeting before the labour commissioner, Stalin shouted, pointing his finger at Purushotham, "If that man is working, then I am going on strike!"

After many years, the two rivals passed away, but the tradition established and cherished by them continued to flourish and the ideal of rivalry pursued in every mill and at every meeting in Kamalapur. Therefore, it was only natural that when KLU announced their plans for erecting a statue of their leader, KIWU should do the same. Their committee also passed a resolution proposing to install a status of Com.Purushotham at the same cross roads. But instead of going to the Municipality for sanction, they forwarded their request directly to the State Government. In course of time, both statues were sanctioned, the coordination between the two authorities being somewhat lax.

By a strange coincidence, the same auspicious time was fixed for the ground breaking ceremony by both the unions. On a fine cool morning before the night mist had cleared, two processions converged on to the same narrow cross roads and faced each other with their respective flags, slogans and loud speakers. When the leaders of KLU, as true law abiding citizens, complained to the police that their unmannerly rivals had no business to be there, the leaders of KIWU produced the order of the State Government and contended that since the State Government was the higher authority, their permission took precedence over the Municipality's permission. The police refused to interfere except to say that there should be no breach of the peace. A bizarre touch was added when two priests – one from each side – were pushed into the narrow space between the processions and microphones placed before them so that their recitation of the Mantras could be heard by the devoted multitudes. They recited them more or less in unison so that instead of two individual performances, it became somewhat of a duet which would certainly not have pleased the sponsors. They offered flowers, poured water into the small pits that had been dug and did the usual puja with all the paraphernalia. The leaders on both sides, while announcing their determination to fight unto death in order to maintain their right to install a statue of their dear departed leader, nevertheless asked their followers to remain calm and peaceful.

The KLU – whose revolutionary fervor had evaporated to some extent after the demise of Stalin and who prided themselves on following peaceful and democratic methods – thereupon filed a petition in the Kamalapur district court praying for an injunction to restrain their rivals from interfering with their legitimate right to install a statue of their leader. The KIWU – who did not mind going to a court of law when it suited them – filed a copy of the State Government's order and contended their order took precedence over that of the Municipality since the latter was subject to the control of the State Government. The judge refused to interfere, remarking that both were legitimate, if conflicting, orders and it was for the Government to resolve the issue.

Then the fun started. Having exhausted all legal remedies, the two unions, in order to assert their inalienable, democratic rights to install the statues of their respective leaders in the hallowed spot that had been chosen, but even more to prevent their rival from doing so, decided on direct action. While the KLU picketed the offices of the State Government for giving permission to their rival, the KIWU picketed the offices of the Municipality for the same reason. The former contended that their order was legal because it was earlier; the latter asserted that their order was issued by a democratically elected Government while that of the KLU was issued by the Municipality whose elected council had been superseded. When the picketing did not produce the desired results, there were processions, bandhs, hartals, and relay hunger strikes.

Meanwhile, KIWU – as the younger and more enterprising of the two unions – decided to take the law into their own hands. On a dark night, they took six masons to the hallowed spot, dug a pit and built a platform on which the late Com.Purushotham's statue was to be installed. By the time it was daylight and the members of the KLU realized what was happening, the platform was nearly one metre above ground level, at which point the police prevented them from going any further. The KLU who were certainly not far behind in such matters, brought a statue of 'Stalin' – which they had got ready against such emergencies – in a lorry the very next night to be installed on the platform which had been constructed by KIWU the previous night. But their attempt was foiled by alert KIWU members who were guarding the platform night and day. Rather than take it back, the statue was left next to the platform, prostrate. Fearing a breach of the peace, the police banned all meetings and processions and put a fence round the platform and the statue and posted a guard so that there would be no further encroachments. It was no longer possible for busses to ply along that route, what with the platform, the statues and the fence. They had to be redirected along a different route much to the inconvenience of the workers. The long suffering public of Kamalapur were forced to discover new lanes and by lanes to get to work.

The situation was now sought to be resolved at the political level. The state assembly was in session. One of the things that happened was an adjournment motion by the leader of the opposition 'to consider the serious situation in Kamalapur following the action of the KIWU to install a statue of their erstwhile leader illegally while there was a legitimate order of the Municipality granting permission to KLU to erect a statue of the late lamented and famous 'Stalin'. The minister for labour issued a statement saying that the situation was delicate, that negotiations were proceeding and it would not be in the public interest to discuss the matter any further. The speaker disallowed the motion and the opposition members walked out in protest.

At along last, when everybody's energies as well as patience were exhausted, thanks to the efforts of a 'citizens' committee, the two unions were brought to the negotiating table with the district collector as chairman. There were endless discussions as their respective location, the direction they were to face and so on. The traffic department insisted that there should not be more than one metre between the statues as otherwise they would cause a traffic problem. Finally, an agreement was arrived at.

And now, Stalin Ram Swaroop and Comrade Purushotham stand in the middle of the road within one metre from each other like duplicate traffic wardens, Stalin raising his mailed fist at his erstwhile enemy while Comrade Purushotham wagging a warning finger of the dire consequences to follow if Stalin were to misbehave. Refusing to talk to each other in life, they now face the prospect of gazing at each other's countenance for ever and ever in an unspoken but eloquent silence. A wag had written an epitaph on the statues, 'Till death do us Unite'.

And the busses have been permanently diverted.

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