

**HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE ON POWERLOOM INDUSTRY OF BHIWANDI: A  
CASE STUDY**

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**Abstract**

The Powerloom sector is decentralized and plays vital role in Indian Textiles Industry. It produces large variety of cloths to fulfill different needs of the market. It is the largest manufacturer of fabric and produces a wide variety of cloth, both grey as well as processed. There are more than 21.54 lakh power looms in the country distributed over 430,000 units. The sector contributes around 62% of the total cloth production in the country and provides ample employment opportunities to 4.86 million people. India manufactures 5% of cloth through organized sector, 20% through handloom sectors, 15% from knitting sector and 60% of Indian cloth is produced through decentralized power loom sector. The birth of Powerloom sector in country. According to the Powerloom Inquiry Committee (1960) the introduction of the power loom in the decentralized sector dates back to 1904. Earliest Powerloom installation was at Ichalkaranji now in Maharashtra state (Then one of the Princely states).

The name Bimbapuri came into existence because of King Bimb (TDG -1982). Bhiwandi, or the erstwhile Bimbapuri, is a heritage city that has been prominent for several thousand years. The name Bhiwandi is considered to be a corrupt form of Imbabura. In the regime of King Shilahar, Bhiwandi city was known as Sonale and in the same period, the Muslim population called it Bhiwandi.

This paper will focus on the historical development of Powerloom industry in Bhiwandi.

**Key Words:** History, Industries, Powerloom, Handloom, Small Scale industries

**Introduction:**

The demand for cotton fabric is on increase for use as bed sheets, Sarees, dhotis, towels, kerchiefs, dress materials, furnishings, napkins etc. The cloth from power looms is cheaper, has good quality finishing and uniform appearance when compared to the cloth from handlooms. Power loom workers play Key role in the power loom units of the Bhiwandi. In my study I found that they come from the different states of the country, and they are from agricultural background. Around 91% of the workers are emigrants from the states like Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh, Tamandu, West Bengal, Gujarat, Karnataka, Haryana, Maharashtra (Districts Sholapur, Nasik, Thane, Osmanabad, Ahmednagar, Aurangabad, Bid, Osmanabad, Dhule, Jalgaon, and Bushwalk) and also from neighboring country like Nepal There are many reasons for their migration which are mentioned below. Main causes of the migration I found are acute poverty, landlessness, caste conflict in the village, low education, unemployment, attraction towards city, conflict within the kinship (conflict with brother, uncle or their children) natural calamities like flood, and earthquake

some are affected due to Mumbai Textile mill strike of 1980's, some made crime in native place settled over here (Mr. X).

Bhiwandi is known as the Manchester of India` because it has the largest number of power looms in the country, in addition to being one of the major textile industries of India. Bhiwandi city, the headquarters of the Taluka of Bhiwandi, comes under the administration of the Bhiwandi-Nilambur Municipal Corporation. Bhiwandi city is part of Thane district. Bhiwandi is considered a part of the Greater Mumbai metropolitan agglomeration, along with Navi Mumbai and the cities of Kalyan, Thane, Ulhasnagar, Doomily, Mira-Bayada, Karat and the Vasai-Virar region. The city, known for its textile industry, has the largest number of Powerloom in the country and is sometimes dubbed as 'The Manchester of India'. A major portion of the population is employed by the Powerloom sector. The Mumbai-Agra highway (NH-3), passing through Bhiwandi ensures the smooth connectivity of the city with Mumbai, Thane, Nashik and the rest of India (Wikipedia).

In the early Twentieth century, Bhiwandi was a small town, inhabited by Maharashtrian and Konkani Muslims. The main occupations of the people at that time were agriculture, fishing and handlooms. With the advent of electricity, the handlooms began to be quickly replaced by power looms. In the 1930s, it became a hub of the textile industry Bhiwandi had a port on the Kawada river during the 16th century in an area known as Bunder Mohalla, which was used for trading of woods & spices. This harbor was well known for the export of salt, teakwood, cotton and grains. Businessmen & merchants travelled frequently to this area. In this period, a merchant was referred to as a 'Saudagar', and now the area is called Saudagar Mohalla. The outstanding features of this city are found in the Kanheri caves. The labourers who work for the shipping building lived in areas that are today referred as Sutarwada & Hamal Wada. In 750BC, the Egyptian traveler Ptolemy visited seven places of Thane District; and in his travelogue he mentioned his stay at Bhiwandi as one of these places. In 1542, the Portuguese requested the Nizam of Ahmadnagar not to allow oceanic thieves on the sea way of Kalyan and Bhiwandi in the regime of king Shilahar, Bhiwandi city was famous for the business of diamonds, pearls, silk, perfumes and carved goods. Businessmen would stay in an area named Wani Ali (this reference is also found on a rock inscription in Lonad village of Bhiwandi). According to the explanation of 'Tariq-E-Nava-Id' (an Urdu book), Bhiwandi city was a way or harbor for a pilgrimage to Haj for Muslims in the Konkan region and the hilly regions. Baba Makhadum Ali Farukh Mahimi, after whom the famous Mahim Darga is established, pilgrimage to the Haj through Bhiwandi.

In the 1341 Tribal king Jasaba alias Papera won the Bhiwandi from the king of Jawahar (Taluka of Thane district). According to contemporary corresponding of the Portuguese, it appears that they were afraid of the local tribals (Kolis). In 1616, Badshah Shahjahan won the Bhiwandi local tribals (Kolis) and then attacked the Adilshaahi of Vijapur. In 1657, Chatrapati Shivaji Maharaj fought with the British on the soil of Bhiwandi and in 1659; he constructed twenty fighter ships at Bhiwandi harbor to fight the British. Zenda Naka in Bhiwandi is the spot where Shivaji hoisted his saffron flag. In 1670, he built an army of 500 young soldiers in Bhiwandi and attacked the Mahuli fort of Shahpur. His subsequent victory in Shahpur meant that he had established his rule over the Konkan region (History of Maratha- 216). In 1682, Ranmastakhan attacked and looted Bhiwandi, but Raje Sambhaji (son of Shivaji) defeated him. In 1690, the Portuguese established their rule

over Bhiwandi. In 1720, Ran Chandra Mahadev (brother-in-law of I-Bajirao Peshwa) attacked Bhiwandi and established his rule on the city. In 1760, due to the weakness of the Peshwas, the tribal king attacked Bhiwandi and succeeded in establishing his rule. Considering the importance of Bhiwandi harbor in 1817, the Britisher too attacked Bhiwandi in order to capture it; evidence of this battle are found near Brahman Ali post office (Tomb of Arab soldier). In 1836, the British divided the local tribals and established their Waterloo Battalion.

There was military camp of the British Army in the Lap Ali area of Bhiwandi. The person navigating the ship lived in what is today called as Tandel Mohalla. In the Moghul period, Bhiwandi city was known as 'Islamabad'. They built a mosque called the Islamabad Masjid and the Eidgah situated at Eidgah road.

In the 1850-1857 (period of East India company), there was a situation of anarchy in North India. The Navab of Avadh existed only for the name sake, whereas power and control was concentrated in the hands of the hands of British East India Company. There was no emancipator for subjects. Thieves and robbers had run amok. In such a helpless situation, people left their villages for survival elsewhere. Among those who left, a majority of them were weavers. The revolt of 1857 was largely responsible for this situation to arise. Hordes of weavers from Azamgarh, Banaras, East Uttar Pradesh, and South Bihar started their journey to find livelihoods in other areas (Patil-1990). Compared to the north, the south was politically and socially peaceful at the time. Large numbers of these weavers came to Bhiwandi through the Agra Road. While still on the way, some of these weavers settled at spots like Maheshwar (southern part of Indore) Dhule, Jalgaon, Malegaon, and Yeola, however the majority of them settled at Bhiwandi. Since Bhiwandi was close to Mumbai, the textile industry was started in Mumbai. In 1853, the railway routes were extended to reach up to Thane and then on 2<sup>nd</sup> June 1854 to reach Kalyan. The first textile mill was started in Mumbai in 1854 and by 1860; six to eleven mills were started.

1860 to 1865 was a period of the American Civil War. America blocked the way of the Eastern harbors. The result was that Manchester was in short supply of cotton. Consequently, the demand for Indian cotton increased. In these years, the Mumbai textile industry flourished, which has had an impact on the contemporary handloom in Bhiwandi. In 1927, Philanthropist Dadaab Dandekar started an electricity generation company at the local level. Later, he signed an agreement with the Tata to merge his company with the Amalgamated Electric Supply Company. Following this agreement, three phase electric supply was started in Bhiwandi, which instantly gave rise to the number of jobs available in Bhiwandi. Additionally, the electricity charges too were affordable at the time. (Patwardhan-2000).

### **Conclusion:**

Weaving is the method by which threads are interlaced to make cloth. The principles of weaving have not changed through the ages. Modern textile mills do quickly on machine what people did slowly by hand. What these ancient people did not understand was that cords could look to have developed in certain particular places and then spread all over the world.

The earliest woven clothes that we have records of are these. The Near East, about 5000 B.C. Egypt, about 4000 B.C. central Europe, about 2500 B.C. South American Peruvian coast about 1500 B.C. and China, about 1200 B.C. The use of different type of fibers for weaving developed in various places of all Indian. Wool was first used when the sheep was domesticated, about 1600 B.C. Cotton was first used in India and Spread from there to Asian and finally to Europe. Silk fibers were first used in China, on the other hand of the world, in ancient Peru, the cotton plant and llamas and a places were providing material for making cloth. And since man has always liked to have colorful clothing, it is interesting to know that the ancient Peruvians had already found ways to have more than 150 tints and shades in their cloth.

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