

Social History of Leather Industry and Technology in United Provinces: A Case Study of Agra (1860-1950)

SUMMARY of THESIS

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Summary

Introduction

This study attempts to document the history of leather industry and technology in United Provinces with particular reference to Agra region. The time period of this study has undertaken is 1860-1950. The main rationale for selection of this period is that, it was a period of rapid transformation of leather industry from cottage level to modern factory level. It is this transformation that this study is interested to explore and document. This study also proposes that British colonial rule with systematic administrative and technical intervention transformed the leather industry from a handicraft to export industry. This process had multiple socio-economic and political implications which this study attempts to capture.

Leather is a hide or skin prepared from the pelts of domestic and wild animals by processing with either the bark or fruits of certain trees and shrubs, or some mineral salt, or some chemicals process. These agents are called tanning material. Leather is basically used since ancient times to the present because leather is a flexible item which generally obtained from nature and very easy in use. It covers the body of human being and resisted them from cold, hot and rainy weather. After the passage of time, the ancient man knew the fine techniques of making leather from its raw hides and skins. At the ancient time, hides and skins usually get from the hunting and livestock breeding which could be used for clothing and for making tents for their safety which prevent them from the wild animals and different weathers. Leather usually became stiff at low temperature, while they rotted with heat. Leather is generally more acceptable to human rather than fur and it is used by man to wear as coats and shoes, etc. Leather is healthier for our feet because it's breathable and therefore cuts down on potential foot fungus or other problems of the body.

Historically leather has been an integral part of human activity. The Assyrian texts and the Homers Iliad mentioned the first rudimentary tanning process which provided the process of making leather from its hides and skins. The history of making leather in India dates back to 3000 BC. Leather tanning process was usually done by indigenous techniques in the rural areas of India. Leather Mashak and leather sail were generally used for storing water and straps or bands were manufactured with

leather. Leather shoes are also mentioned in the code of Manu as a suitable gift for Guru (except cowhide). Marco Polo mentions in his book that the curing of hides and skins had increased in Gujarat leather industry and every year a number of ships went to Arabia laden with the skins of goats, oxen, unicorns(single-horn animal), and other animals.

During the Second World War, the rapid development of leather and leather goods industry took place in India. In 1913-14, only 25 large units, employing 2753 workers, were established, and by 1941, the number of units had increased to 114 and the workers to 26,053 in India. At 1947, the British had shown considerable interest in leather manufacturing in India and had even established some chrome tanning units in Bengal, India mainly exported raw hides and skins. In India, the population engaged in the recovery and processing of hides and skins belonged predominantly to either the scheduled castes or Muslim community.

The leather industry in United Provinces, especially in Cawnpore, had the transition from craft production to factory production is well known under the colonial rule. The leather craft witnessed specification in the form of a separate class of flayers, tanners, and leather manufacturers emerging in place of a single artisan who performed all the functions in their native places. During the colonial period, a class of factory workers was added and had a large scale of factory production. In Cawnpore, the leather industry came up around the time providing for the demand of harness and accoutrements for the East India Company's native army and the Bengal artillery. After the revolt of 1857, a leather factory named Government Harness and Saddlery factory was set up in 1867 at Cawnpore to fulfill the requirements of army troops. This factory remarked as a new one in North India which related to promotion of leather craft.

Scope of the Study

The history of science and technology of colonial India is now a well-established academic branch of history. Generally, historians of colonial science documented histories of railways, heavy industries, cotton, silk, telegraph, forests, etc., but the leather industry did not receive adequate attention. On account of this, the present study has fascinating potential for not only its explorative character but also its potential contribution to understanding the regional dimension of British colonial rule

and its impact on Indian society. India is well known for the export of leather goods to the foreign country in the colonial period due to its large cattle population in the world. Leather industry is most important with regard to the national income under colonial rule. A large number of people engaged in leather work and got employments. In the colonial period, the British had introduced several new technologies to enhance production related to leather products. This industry played an important role in global trade share and had an interesting dimension between socio-economic conditions of leather workers.

This study explores the social history of leather craft in colonial period. It analyzes the factors which helped in flourishing the leather industry in United Provinces and Agra region under colonial rule. It analyzes government policies which promoted the structure for the development of the leather industry and aspect of providing employment to a large number of people who constituted the bottom of the economic and social hierarchy. This study explores and documents how the leather industry of United Provinces and especially the Agra region during British rule generated social changes within political, economic and social domains of both Muslims and Untouchable communities. All these issues are very much relevant even today. After exploring all these issues, we know about why the decline of the leather industry and related to macro-issue occurred in our time.

Area of the Study

This study focuses history of leather industry related activities in United Provinces with special reference to Agra region. Under the colonial rule, in 1775, British East India Company founded the northern territory under the Bengal Presidency. In 1834, this northern territory was named as ‘Agra Presidency’ and then named as ‘North-Western Provinces’ including Agra in 1836. After the revolt of 1857, there was an attempt to reorganize the province. Accordingly, Delhi was separated and merged with Punjab and Oudh, thus the new state was created named ‘North-Western Provinces of Agra and Oudh in 1877. Then this state had newly named as ‘United Provinces of Agra and Oudh’ in 1902. In 1st April 1937, British Govt. changed the name of this Presidency as ‘United Provinces’ included 9 divisions with 48 districts approximately combined regions of present-day Indian states of Uttar Pradesh and

Uttarakhand. Finally, on 25th January 1950, the United Provinces were named as 'Uttar Pradesh' in free India.

Objectives of the Study

- To explore the background of the emergence of leather industry in United Provinces and Agra region under colonial rule.
- To document the factors which help in the emergence of leather industry in United Provinces and Agra region under colonial rule.
- To analyze the export and import of leather products in United Provinces and Agra region under colonial rule.
- To analyze the quality and quantity of leather products in leather concerns of United Provinces and Agra region under colonial rule.
- To explore the intensity of adaptation of new technologies and policies in the development of leather industry by the colonial Govt.
- To explore the social history of leather industry in United Provinces and Agra region under colonial rule.
- To explore the socio-economic condition of the leather worker castes in United Provinces and Agra region under colonial rule.
- To examine the employment pattern (caste and community views) in United Provinces and Agra region under colonial rule.

Hypotheses

- Colonial state has introduced several new technologies to enhance the production related to leather product.
- Leather industry flourished in United Provinces with the emerging needs of colonial state.
- Leather industry responsible for emergence to new social classes both among the Muslims and Hindu communities in United Provinces and Agra region.

Methodology

The proposed study is based on Data analysis method and Data interpretation method for both analysis and interpretation of primary and secondary sources. However, the main focus is on primary sources which include archival records, consisting of, annual reports of different departments, settlement reports, proceedings of industries

department, and assessment report of various leather factories. The secondary data are also used and that has been a collection of books, magazines, articles, journals, periodicals, and e-sources.

The primary materials have been collected from the Uttar Pradesh State Archive in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh Regional Archive in Agra, National Archive of India in New Delhi, Department of Industries in Uttar Pradesh, Department of Labour in Uttar Pradesh, Some old leather factories in Kanpur and Agra, a Regional branch of CLRI in Kanpur, etc. The secondary material has been collected mostly from the Libraries, Internet, Magazines, Journals, etc. Both of these primary and secondary sources can easily understand these points.

Primary Sources

- Imperial Gazetteers of India.
- District Gazetteers of United Provinces.
- Reports and proceedings of the department of industries.
- Census reports of Government of India.
- Reports of factories in United Provinces.
- Reports of the department of statistics.
- Annual reports on foreign trade of United Provinces.
- Export and Import department of Agra and Kanpur.

Secondary Sources

- Books.
- Articles.
- Journals.
- Periodicals.
- Theses & Dissertations.
- Magazines.

Chapterization

The first chapter entitled 'Introduction' deals with a brief introduction to the topic/title of the present study, the scope of the study and area of research and its importance. It also provides information regarding the review of the literature on the leather

industry. It also deals with a brief description of the objective of the study, hypotheses and methodology which applied to present work that has been undertaken.

The second chapter entitled 'History of Leather Industry in India with special reference to United Provinces' deals with the evolution of making leather from hides and skins in the world and in India during the Ancient, Medieval and Modern period. It further explains the detailed of making of leather products in different cities of United Provinces especially Cawnpore and its growing leather industry in the form of large concerns. It also provides information about the contribution of trade associations in the commercial growth of the leather industry in the United Provinces.

The third chapter entitled 'History of Leather Industry in Agra Region' deals with the establishment of slaughterhouses and its functions which helped to promote the leather industry in Agra region because the leather industry is generally depending upon slaughterhouses and tanning industry. It also explains the protest against the cow slaughter. It further gives a detailed description of the emerging leather factories in Agra and association set up by the colonial government for the development of the leather footwear industry in Agra.

The fourth chapter entitled 'Leather Technology and Leather Institutes in United Provinces' deals with the techniques and technology used in making leather from hides and skins and technological changes took place in colonial India from craft to factories. It further gives a detailed description of the government policies granted to leather institutes or leather working schools or tanning classes which were set up in the different cities of United Provinces by the government authorities for making leather of high quality and for trained pupils for working as artisans in various leather or tanning factories.

The fifth chapter entitled 'Social History of Leather Craft in United Provinces under Colonial Rule' deals with the social hierarchy of leather workers which were belonged to Hindu and Muslim communities. It further gives a detailed description of such castes i.e. Chamars, Jatavas, Mochis, Bhisti, Qassabs, Quraishi, etc., which had emerged in the leather craft mainly in United provinces from the ancient to modern times and still working in present days also. It further gives information about the labour condition in leather factories under colonial rule.

The sixth and last Chapter entitled 'Conclusion' deals with the summary of the findings and conclusion which sums up the discussion in the above chapters which dealt with the evolution of the leather industry in United Provinces and in Agra region.