10 Rural Artisan Development Strategies and Employment Generation

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I THE PROBLEMS

Interest in rural artisan development has sprung from two basic considerations: (i) that economic progress achieved so far has not benefited the rural artisan class; (ii) that overall rural development should embrace rural industrialisation using local resources, including especially the manpower resources of rural artisans. So far, two lines of action have been pursued to promote rural industrialisation. The first, analogous to the strategy for agriculture, aims to stimulate self-employment by providing the needed inputs. The other is a more comprehensive strategy, envisaging the organisation of production and marketing with provision of inputs as a part. This means in practice the organisation of the artisans and craftsmen into industrial co-operatives for collective procurement of inputs and the organisation of production and marketing. Both strategies envisage some measure of state participation.

The purpose of the present paper is to evaluate these strategies in the light of the evidence thrown up by empirical studies made in Karnataka.

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to throw light on the needs of the artisans and the extent of their fulfilment. As the strategy should be built on the character of the artisan-craftsman class and of the inputs and product markets, Section II will broadly outline these features. This is followed in Section III by an evaluation of the input supply strategy and the industrial co-operation strategy. Section IV sums up the discussion and outlines the desirable future course of action.

II WHO ARE THE ARTISANS?

Rural India has been known throughout its history for its crafts and cottage industries and a very large number of groups of artisans have flourished here in the past. A majority of these have survived hitherto the onslaughts of modern organised industries. It is estimated that there are in all 572,000 artisans in Karnataka, the value of whose output of goods and services is about Rs. 2660 million, representing about 9 to 10 per cent of the total state income for the year 1975.1 It is desired that this proportion shall rise so that the non-agricultural classes particularly in the rural areas, obtain more employment and income. As things are, certain artisan trades, such as weaving, handicraft, carpentry, oil extracting, cobbling, and coir working appear to be getting higher incomes, as is evident from the fact that their proportions of state income are higher than their proportions of the total artisan population. The artisan groups which are getting relatively lower shares of income are sheep-rearers, tailors, the traditional village servicemen like barbers, dhobis and potters.2 The variations in income shares across these groups may be due, apart from their receipts for a day’s work, to the employment availability in a given year. We shall return to this later.

An interesting feature of the artisan groups is that some of them are highly stratified socially. Thus a majority of the rural artisan occupations, such as barbering, pottery, dhobi, cobbling, blacksmithing, oil-extracting and, to some extent, sheep-rearing, carpentry and weaving are caste occupations. Even some crafts like stone-carving and painting are also wholly or partly confined to specific caste groups. However, there are some crafts which are all-caste occupations. For instance, toy-making and lacquerware are practised in Karnataka by muslims,

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2 Ibid., Table 1 and Table 3.