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978-0-521-19333-7 — Small Town Capitalism in Western India
Artisans, Merchants, and the Making of the Informal Economy, 1870–1960
Douglas E. Haynes
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Small Town Capitalism in Western India

This book charts the history of artisan production and marketing in the Bombay Presidency from 1870 to 1960. Although the textile mills of western India's biggest cities have been the subject of many rich studies, the role of artisan producers located in the region's small towns has been virtually ignored. Based on extensive archival research as well as numerous interviews with participants in the handloom and powerloom industries, this book explores the role of weavers, merchants, consumers, and labourers in the making of what the author calls "small town capitalism." By focusing on the politics of negotiation and resistance in local workshops, the book challenges conventional narratives of industrial change. The book provides the first in-depth work on the origins of powerloom manufacture in South Asia. It affords unique insights into the social and economic experience of small town artisans as well as the informal economy of late colonial and early post-independence India.

Douglas E. Haynes is associate professor of history at Dartmouth College. He is the author of *Rhetoric and Ritual in Colonial India: The Shaping of a Public Culture in Surat City, 1852–1928* (1991), and co-editor of *Contesting Power: Resistance and Everyday Social Relations in South Asia* (1992) with Gyan Prakash, and of *Toward a History of Consumption in South Asia* (2010) with Abigail McGowan, Tirthankar Roy, and Haruka Yanagisawa.

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*This book is dedicated to the late Rajnarayan Chandavarkar,
Ghanshyam Shah, and my past and present colleagues
at the Centre for Social Studies*

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CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom
 One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA
 477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
 314-321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre, New Delhi - 110025, India
 103 Penang Road, #05-06/07, Visioncrest Commercial, Singapore 238467

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 It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of
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www.cambridge.org
 Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521193337

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First published 2012
 First paperback edition 2017

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication data

Haynes, Douglas E.

Small town capitalism in Western India : artisans, merchants, and the
 making of the informal economy, 1870–1960 / Douglas E. Haynes.
 p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-521-19333-7 (hbk.)

1. Artisans – India – History.
2. Cottage industries – India – History.
3. Textile industry – India – History.
4. Capitalism – India – History.
5. India – Economic conditions – 19th century.
6. India – Economic conditions – 20th century.

1. Title.

HD2346.I5H39 2012

330-dc23 2011027046

ISBN 978-0-521-19333-7 Hardback

ISBN 978-1-316-64980-0 Paperback

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 accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in
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Contents

<i>List of Images</i>	<i>page</i> viii
<i>List of Maps, Chart, and Tables</i>	ix
<i>Preface</i>	xi
<i>List of Abbreviations</i>	xv
Introduction	I
1. The Historical and Global Contexts of Artisan Production	23
2. Artisanal Towns	56
3. Consumers, Merchants, and Markets	93
4. The Organisation of Production	127
5. Small Town Capitalism and the Living Standards of Artisans	159
6. The Colonial State and the Handloom Weaver	193
7. The Paradox of the Long 1930s	229
8. Weaver-Capitalists and the Politics of the Workshop, 1940–1960	265
Concluding Reflections: The Making of the Informal Economy	303
<i>Appendix I</i>	315
<i>Appendix II</i>	317
<i>Bibliography</i>	319
<i>Index</i>	337

Images

1. Female Spinning Silk from Reel onto Bobbin in Western India, c. 1900	<i>page</i> 51
2. Cloth Printing, 1873	53
3. A Scene in the Bazaar at Sangamner Town, 1911	61
4. Jari Workers Drawing Silver Wire, c. 1909	67
5. Yeola Silks, c. 1909	113
6. Ilkal Silk Saris with Pure Jari Border from the 1930s	125
7. Weavers in Western Indian Town, c. 1873	135
8. Woman Stretching Warp on Street, c. 1930	137
9. Weaver at Loom over Pit, Sangamner Town, 1913	164
10. Special Famine Relief Camp for Weavers Organized by the American Marathi Mission, c. 1900	177
11. Churchill Loom, 1907	208
12. Pit-Loom with Dobby and Double Box Fly Shuttle Sley	210
13. Cottage Warping and Sizing Machine Produced by the Department of Industries, Bombay, c. 1924	214
14. Hattersley Loom Advertisement, 1904	217
15. Tikekar Patal Sari Advertisement, 1941	245
16. Advertisement for Butterworth and Dickinson Loom, 1904	250
17. Imitation Jari, Silver Gilding on Copper Wire, c. 1960	276

Maps, Chart, and Tables

MAPS

1. Map of Weaving Towns in the Bombay Presidency	<i>page</i> 22
2. Weavers' Migration to Western India: 1860s–1950s	76

CHART

1. Rates of Labour – Daily Wages for Male Workers in Annas Per Day, Various Districts, 1882–5	169
--	-----

TABLES

2.1. Numbers of Looms in Key Handloom Centres of the Bombay Presidency	57
2.2. Number of Looms Compared to Total Population, Selected Western Indian Towns, c. 1910	59
2.3. Town Size in Major Weaving Towns of the Bombay Presidency, 1872–1911	60
3.1. Volume of Cloth Purchased Compared to Total Volume of Items Purchased per Week on Weekly Market Days in Several Markets of Khandesh (in Rupees)	101
3.2. Volume of Cloth in Rupees Sold at Maheji Fair in Three Selected Years (Providing Places Manufactured)	102
3.3. Population Growth of Bombay, Ahmedabad, and Poona	107
5.1. Rates per Day of Work in British Currency (Rupees-Annas-Pice)	167

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-19333-7 — Small Town Capitalism in Western India
Artisans, Merchants, and the Making of the Informal Economy, 1870–1960
Douglas E. Haynes
Frontmatter
[More Information](#)

x	<i>Maps, Charts, and Tables</i>	
5.2.	Women’s Wages in General Labour and in Cloth Production, 1882–1885 (in Annas)	171
7.1.	Sari Prices in Sholapur, 1930–8 (Rupees-Annas)	239
7.2.	Piece Rates per Sari, in Annas-Pice (Slightly More than One Day’s Work)	239
7.3.	Wages Paid (to <i>Asamis</i>) for Weaving Three Types of Saris, 1933–8 (Rupees-Annas-Pice)	240
C.1.	Growth in the Population of Key Weaving Centres, 1951–91	304

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Douglas E. Haynes
Frontmatter
[More Information](#)

Preface

The idea for this book originated when I was working on the political history of Surat in western India. During the course of my research, I found that Surat had largely been a city of artisanal industries during the late colonial period. The discovery that the economy of an entire urban centre could depend on these kinds of industries surprised me, largely because I had been conditioned by discussions of “de-industrialisation” to assume that they must have dwindled into unimportance. The relative absence of studies on such industries at the time clearly constituted a major gap in the literature on India’s economic history. I decided that I would try to examine the history of artisan production in future research. Eager to broaden out from a study focused on a single place, I chose to look at artisan cloth producers in the Bombay Presidency as a whole.

When I began my research, I saw little relevance of my project to an appreciation of India’s contemporary economy. During the early 1990s, Surat had become a city of considerable powerloom production, perhaps the largest textile centre in India; few obvious signs remained of the once significant manufacture of silk and cotton cloth by handloom. I originally assumed that the handloom industry had died out sometime late in the colonial period because small producers had lost the ability to compete with these new mechanized industries. A real change in my perspective took place when I started to search out people who had participated in the handloom industry as workers, workshop owners, or cloth merchants. To my surprise, some of these individuals or their offspring were now industrialists and cloth sellers in the modern textile economy; I discovered that the fathers, grandfathers, and uncles of many contemporary businessmen had once been involved in handloom manufacture and had

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 Frontmatter
[More Information](#)

adopted powerlooms in their workshops between 1925 and 1945. Some retired textile workers had once been wage labourers in the handloom industry. They often had entered employment in powerloom production when weaving by hand declined, sometimes finding their new forms of work better paying and less physically demanding. At the same time, they became subordinated within new kinds of capitalist structures.

Initially, I was concerned that I was gathering more material from these interviews about the origins and shape of early powerloom production than I was about the handlooms, the main focus of my archival work. Yet gradually I came to recognize that the rigid compartmentalisation maintained in government policy and in scholarship between “handloom” and “powerloom” had long been responsible for creating major blindneses about important patterns of change. Only when historians are willing to relax the limitations imposed by these categories can they begin to understand the processes involved in the construction of India’s contemporary textile industry. In effect, this study has become an examination of the origins of post-independence forms of industrial capitalism as well as an analysis of artisan production of cloth during the colonial period. Here, I can carry this study only up to about 1960; any discussion of later developments will have to be sketchy or reserved for later works.

Carrying out a project based on oral history as well as archival research has brought with it considerable personal as well as intellectual rewards. I was invited into the homes, workshops, and offices of the more than two hundred artisans, workers, merchants, industrialists, and trade-union leaders that I interviewed. They not only recounted their personal and familial histories, but also they often offered me their hospitality, sometimes in ways that seemed to exceed their means. A few workers trusted me with accounts of their pasts that might have put their jobs or reputations at some risk if these accounts had become widely known. I certainly appreciate the concerns of a couple of individuals who preferred not to talk with me under such circumstances. I cannot thank all those I interviewed by name here; indeed, doing so might create difficulties for a few of them. I do want to single out some individuals whom I can name and who provided further help well beyond the interview itself: Khalil Ansari, N. Dikonda, Atmaram Hathiwala, Datta Karve, V. R. Madoor, and M.Y. Momin. I would also like to thank several special contacts in the weaving towns who became absorbed in my project and who went out of their way to facilitate my research by locating persons I might interview: Hasmukh Talia in Surat; Mansoor Ansari, Shankar Kane, and Sanjay Lahoti in Bhiwandi; and R. G. Mhetras in Solapur.

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 Douglas E. Haynes
 Frontmatter
[More Information](#)

Preface

xiii

For each town as well, local intellectuals and scholars shared their special knowledge of their cities and pointed me in directions that I would never have otherwise considered. These include Prof. Vilas Bet, P. J. Buwa, N. T. Punde, and R. G. Kakade for Solapur; Dr. Mohiyuddin Momin and Saghir Shaikh for Bhiwandi and Malegaon; and Biswaroop Das, Kiran Desai, Lancy Lobo, S. P. Punalekar, and Ghanshyam Shah for Surat. Aroon Tikekar and Durga Bhagavat provided valuable information about changes in Maharashtrian fashion during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. I also wish to thank those who provided research assistance at various stages of my work: Uma Arora, Shailendra Bhandare, Mallesh Boddul, Vishvanath Danure, Nurussaba Garg, Vikesh Pandya, Suchita Patel, and Clare Talwalker. Often they provided advice and intellectual input that cannot be adequately acknowledged in the academic footnote. Uma Arora deserves special recognition because of the length of the period she worked for me, the diversity of her assistance, and her willingness to share her valuable insights on Surat. At Dartmouth, Peter Sutoris, Kelsey Carter, Hannah Hoyt, and Kevin Mwenda provided valuable assistance with the final stages of the manuscript, the maps, and the chart.

This project has gone through many drafts, and I have received feedback at many different stages in its development. I would like to acknowledge a number of scholars in India for help with my project and for their reactions to my ideas: Iftikhar Ahmad, Vasanti Damle, Mariam Dossal, Arvind Ganachari, Raj Kumar Hans, Neeraj Hatekar, Manjiri Kamat, Ruby Maloni, Makrand Mehta, Shirin Mehta, A. Satyanarayana, Rusheed Wadia, and Terence de Lima de Souza. Outside India, I have benefited greatly from comments and suggestions in response to seminar presentations and to drafts of the manuscript from the late Burton Stein, David Arnold, Eric Beverley, Subho Basu, C. A. Bayly, Jan Breman, Judith Byfield, Ronald Edsforth, Steve Ericson, David Hardiman, Michelle Maskiell, Ed Miller, Mattison Mines, Morris Morris, Geert de Neve, Nikhil Rao, David Roberts, David Rudner, Ajay Skaria, Leo Spitzer, Howard Spodek, Hein Streefkerk, Sanjay Subrahmanyam, and Clare Wilkinson-Weber. Subho has read the entire manuscript and provided comments; Steve has always been ready to offer comments on chapters, often on short notice, when I have needed them. I also thank many others who offered comments in seminars and conference panels.

My greatest debts are to Tirthankar Roy and the late Rajnarayan Chandavarkar, whose work, intellectual comradeship, and friendship have influenced this work in too many ways to be enumerated. Some of the discussion of migration comes out of an earlier article on migration

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 Frontmatter
[More Information](#)

I co-authored with Tirthankar. He has never hesitated to provide comments and offer his collegiality, even as sections of this study offered criticism of some of his conclusions. I have no doubt that this book would have been a much stronger one if I had had a chance to get more of Raj's feedback; his tragic death has impoverished the whole field of South Asian social and economic history. Prasannan Parthasarathi, both through the intellectual influence of his writings and through comments on the manuscript, has also had an important impact on the final shape of this book. More recently, Abigail McGowan has offered a parallel source of friendship and intellectual inspiration and has provided comments on the entire manuscript.

Funding for this project was provided by the American Institute of Indian Studies and by the Council for the International Exchange of Scholars of the Fulbright Foundation. I thank both of these organisations for their generous support. I would also like to acknowledge the directors of various archives and libraries: the British Library, the Maharashtra State Archives, the Andhra Pradesh State Archives, the Uttar Pradesh State Archives, the National Archives of India, the School of Oriental and African Studies, the University of Mumbai, Solapur City Library, Surat Municipal Library, and the Centre of South Asian Studies at University of Cambridge.

I wish to thank the Cambridge University Press team for its role in preparing the manuscript for publication. As I count, at least eight different individuals (and probably significantly more) have played a part in this process, and some of them have devoted considerable time to my project. I greatly appreciate all of the team's help, care, and seemingly inexhaustible patience.

Chapter 4 is drawn heavily from my article, "The Labour Process in the Bombay Handloom Industry," *MAS*, v. 42, no. 1, Jan. 2008, pp. 1–45. I wish to thank the journal's editors for allowing me to republish much of this article in a somewhat modified form.

I also wish to acknowledge the following publishers for allowing me to draw on sections of several other articles and essays: Oxford University Press (for *Past and Present*); Oxford University Press, Delhi; Sage Publishers (for *Indian Social and Economic History Review*); and Popular Prakashan.

Finally, I must thank my family – Tommy, Rebecca, and Nien Lin – for accompanying me to India during the early stages of my research and making the many sacrifices over many years that have been necessary for this book to reach completion. It may seem a commonplace to say this, but it is undoubtedly true that without their support, this book would not have been possible.

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Abbreviations

BEISC	Bombay Economic and Industrial Survey Committee
BPBEC	Bombay Provincial Banking Enquiry Committee
JD	Judicial Department
MSA	Maharashtra State Archives
RD	Revenue Department
RSS	Revision Survey Settlement
Selections	Selections from the Record of the Bombay Government